Chapter 2: Critical Review of Research on Families and Family Policies in Europe

Karin Wall, Mafalda Leitão & Vasco Ramos

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to describe and report on the results of the international Conference “Families and Family Policies in Europe – A Critical Review”, which took place in Lisbon, at the Institute for Social Sciences (University of Lisbon), in May 2010. This three day Conference was organised by FAMILYPLATFORM with the purpose of carrying out a critical review of existing research on families and family policies by setting up a dialogue between scientific experts, representatives of family associations, social partners and policy makers. Drawing on expert reviews of the state of the art of research, critical statements by stakeholders and policy makers, and debate on the major challenges for research and policies, the Conference was organised with a view to providing a major forum for discussing and identifying the design of future family policies and research.

Presentation of the critical review process carried out in this chapter is based on qualitative analysis of written documents (texts/suggestions/critical statements sent in by chairs, rapporteurs, stakeholders and experts before and after the Conference) as well as audio-tapes of the debates in all the working groups. Analysis of the critical review process was built up through various levels: firstly the main topics were discussed, then there were the contributions of participants, and then finally discussion of gaps in research and methodology.

Conference structure

The Conference was organised around the following types of sessions: plenary sessions with keynote speeches; focus groups on the topics of the Existential Fields (eight in all, with 15 to 20 participants each for which

1 The full version of the Conference Report based on the overall discussions (including online contributions to the process) and contributions from all participants comprising the different views, points of critique and perspectives for future research on families in Europe, including key policy issues, was published in September 2010 and is available at: http://hdl.handle.net/2003/27687.

2 All plenary sessions (keynote speeches followed by open debate; feedback and reporting from rapporteurs, followed by open debate) were videotaped and all focus groups and workshops (16 working groups) were audiotaped.
FAMILYPLATFORM produced state-of-the-art reports; workshops on *key issues for policy and family wellbeing* (eight in all, with 20 to 40 participants each); plenary sessions where rapporteurs summarised the debate/conclusions of the working groups; and a final plenary session with closing speeches and a presentation of the on-going foresight exercise. These 16 working groups were structured so they could carry out three main tasks: discuss the major trends in family change and developments in research and policies for each *Existential Field/key policy issue*; understand if these trends/issues represent important challenges for the wellbeing of families in the future; identify major gaps in research and to discuss possible new developments and future tasks for research.

**Conference participation**

The Conference brought together a total of 140 participants, more women (90) than men (50). Among the total of participants, experts on family from university/research institutions (60 experts plus 11 junior researchers) and stakeholders (58 from about 50 family-related organisations) were almost equally represented. In the selection of the participants the aim was to be as inclusive as possible of the plurality of perspectives and agendas regarding families in Europe. The main criterion for the selection was diversity, meaning different approaches to the family and to family policies, different types of organisation and different countries of origin. However it was not easy to establish a balance. Some groups and organisations were, in fact, less well represented, in particular policy makers/social partners (11), especially unions and employers associations, as well as some types of family associations (e.g. lone parent families and ageing families). On the other hand, there was a general agreement that some fields of research/disciplines were also missing, such as psychology, economics, medicine, neurobiology, urban planning.

**Dialogue between experts and civil society – bringing together different relevant actors**

Drawing on the dialogue between these relevant actors - experts and civil society - the Conference was considered by the participants as a stimulating and innovative forum of discussion, thus representing a new experience and point of departure, by bringing together specialists from different work communities who do not normally engage intensively with each other’s thoughts, understandings, agendas and work.

The review set out in this chapter therefore seeks to provide information on this forum on the basis of two perspectives: firstly, to allow for a
detailed description of the structure and main contributions which took place; secondly, to bear witness to some of the interactions and processes of the Conference, consisting of questions, arguments, and discussions, which were overall lively and mutually enriching, but also imparted diverse and sometimes contrasting perspectives on the wellbeing of families in European societies and the issues that ought to be included in the Research Agenda.

While stakeholders were more goal and policy oriented, clearly stating the objectives and claims of their organisations, experts were more focussed on mapping the state of the art and the gaps in research. The dialogue between experts and civil society reveals that stakeholders have an important role in drawing attention to the problems of specific and vulnerable families or members of families; they are more sensitive to local contexts and to the risks and problems affecting many families with children; and reminded researchers about their difficulties in communicating and exchanging with civil society. On the other hand, experts also had an important role in drawing attention to the results of research, while revealing greater sensitivity to the diversity of families and the need to confront family and gender changes in contemporary societies in order to design a viable research and policy strategy for the future; they also reminded stakeholders about the need for a balanced approach between the knowledge deriving from their field experience with families and knowledge deriving from research. All in all the Conference represented a unique opportunity to increase mutual understanding and to discuss on-going and future research.

The description which follows will give readers an idea of the current cross-roads and patchwork of thoughts, doubts and agendas concerning families and family policies which exist across Europe.

The structure of this chapter follows closely the structure of the Conference, though focusing attention mainly on the working groups. In Section 2 we present the working groups of the eight Existential Fields. For each one we present an overall summary of the organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches, the general discussion and contributions by stakeholders, and finally examine the major gaps and challenges for research identified and debated within the working group. Section 3 of the chapter looks at the working groups of the eight workshops on key policy issues along the above-mentioned lines. Section 4 presents a summary of all suggestions regarding methodological gaps and challenges which were common to all working groups. In Section 5, drawing on the discussions, statements, keynote speeches, and other documents examined in Sections 2 and 3, we have made a preliminary selection of the main concerns and research issues, as well as some suggestions for project topics for the future European Research Agenda.
2.1 Focus group sessions

2.1.1 Existential Field 1 - Family structures and family forms

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

The session began with a presentation from Elisa Marchese (University of Bamberg) on the major trends in *Family structures and family forms* in Europe. She highlighted the main results by giving an empirical overview of the following topics: fertility and childbearing; the institution of the family; new and unusual family forms. Following this presentation there was a brief discussion which was also enriched by presentations from the three keynote speakers:

1. Andreas Motel-Klingebiel (German Centre of Gerontology) emphasised some basic aspects of the report: the increasing diversity of families; the postponement of births and the decrease in fertility; the delay in marriage and the decrease in partnership stability; the lower rate of increase in births out of wedlock. He also considered the importance of adding other relevant aspects related to family life-course and dynamics: the household perspective; the parent-child unit; spatial aspects and demographic trends. He concluded that information on current trends in more or less complex family and partnership patterns is important, but stressed that what is really needed is a discussion on the goals of family policies as well as agreement on such goals, a task for society as a whole and particularly for policy makers.

2. Anália Torres (ISCTE, University Institute of Lisbon) made a presentation on “Family structure and family forms in Europe - Trends and policy issues”. She gave a general overview of the main results of the European Social Survey according to a cluster analysis using indicators and data on main trends in family. She concluded that:

- The transformations of the family in Europe follow the same patterns but but differ culturally and temporally. Each region has particular configurations and combinations between old and new patterns. It still makes sense, analytically, to differentiate between the northern and the southern European countries (although there are also internal differences within the groups of countries).
- The participation of women in the labour market is not a constraint on achieving a higher fertility rate. On the contrary, it seems that it enhances it. If both partners of a couple are in paid employment then the chances
of them making a decision to have children are increased.

- Women want to invest in both family and work. However in the majority of the countries they have to pay a price for maintaining both investments (overload, not giving up a career, feelings of guilt, unfulfilled identities); gender equality is continually at stake.
- Family is still the main sphere of personal investment for both men and women. What is changing are the models of family life, the meanings and forms of investment in the family. Although there is an increasing diversity, the (heterosexual) nuclear family is still the predominant model. The importance of feelings and emotional life is universally stressed – family, friends, leisure.
- Private matters are a subject for public and political agendas. Employment, care and gender equality should be linked together.

3. Maks Banens (MODYS, Université de Lyon) focussed on a comparative analysis of same sex unions in Western Europe. He addressed the following questions: how same sex union registration laws were adopted in Europe; what may be hidden behind the different legal status of registered unions; and how to understand the huge differences in same sex union registration.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

The experts’ presentations and the contributions from stakeholders underlined several key questions which were considered and discussed by the participants. The following topics summarise the main points of discussion:

**Comparatively pronounced changes in family forms and structures throughout recent decades**

“General trend of a decline in institutionalised relationships”; “move away from the previously dominant ‘nuclear family model’ towards a variety of different family forms”; “simultaneous growth in other family forms where research is still scarce, particularly on new and rare family forms (foster families, multi-generational households, rainbow families, commuter families, families living apart together, patchwork families)”.

**Overall postponement of family formation and childbirth for both men and women (individualisation? insecurity? wealth?). Generally downward trend in fertility rates though future developments remain in doubt. Some important issues to be examined:**
“To what extent do young people today consider that they have the prerequisite conditions for having children? Do governments and local authorities make sufficient efforts to enable young people to have children, taking working and living conditions into account?”

“Fertility intentions still exceed fertility behaviour: possible diffusion of ‘low-fertility ideal’; ‘one-child trend’?”

“Union dissolution is much less investigated than union formation (comparative research is scarce). Since partnership remains an important prerequisite for childbearing, dynamics of family formation (for example, increasing popularity of cohabitation, moving in and out of unions among young adults) and its consequences for fertility should receive more attention in the future”.

The transformations of the family in Europe follow the same patterns in spite of calendar differences and cultural variants. Each region has its particular configurations and combinations between the old and the new. Even so:

“It still makes sense, analytically, to differentiate the northern and the southern European countries; there is no uniform European trend but significant cross-national variations… De-standardisation of the family is more pronounced in Scandinavia compared to the high standardisation which characterises southern Europe”.

“Scandinavian countries have high fertility rates compared to many other European countries; at the same time Scandinavian countries also have high proportions of cohabitation, divorces and remarriage: is there a direct connection between the family formation patterns described above and fertility rates?”

Discussion on same sex families

“Same sex union registration laws were not just the outcome of local political circumstances inside each country: transforming family values and practices seems to be the main social force behind same sex union legislation. They seem to be the necessary conditions, maybe even sufficient conditions, for obtaining same sex union recognition”.
Discussion on European fertility rates. Questions raised:

“Is it good or not for Europe to have a high fertility rate?”

“Is low fertility in Europe a real problem or does low fertility also imply positive aspects and opportunities for societies (especially in a global context, where population growth will probably lead to more resource distribution conflicts in forthcoming decades); increasing fertility might create more problems; many countries cannot afford to have care facilities…there are economic consequences of high fertility rates such as unemployment (there is a high unemployment rate among young people today, a problem created by high fertility in the 1970s)”.

“Fertility is high where female activity is also high (e.g. services and childcare facilities combined with being active = higher fertility rates)”.

“Difference between aspirations and number of children… the research has to go deeper into the reasons why people did not have the number of children they wanted. What do families expect from governments and policies? What do they wish for? We only look at these issues form the point of view of the job market and the economy”.

“What is the principle according to which society should decide that having children, having families is good for society or not? This is a very fundamental question. Answers will probably differ from one country to another”.

“Policies and political changes have an effect on family changes e.g. fertility rates in Scandinavian countries, where from the sixties onwards their fertility went down and later on, from the eighties onwards, it began to rise again; France combines different policies which also have effects on the rise in fertility; for example, the southern countries had a fall in fertility from the eighties onwards, but in eastern countries the fall started in the nineties, which means that political changes had an impact on fertility and employment”.

“With respect to the arguments and ideas put forward above regarding fertility and marriage aspirations we would call for continued research and exchanges on measures that aim to support
marriage and thereby the family as the basic unit of society and on the means (financial, services and time) that help families to reconcile work and family life. Investing in these areas can be seen as an investment in our future by considering that families are the future of Europe”.

**Discussion on the inflexibility of the labour market**

“Family structures are being impacted upon by the inflexibility of labour market, which is still based on older forms; there is a lot of debate on how it is necessary to change labour market policy in order to suit the new circumstances of globalisation, but there is very little debate on how it needs to change to suit changes in the structure of the family structures and of society”.

**Discussion on methodology and data availability**

“Cross-sectional demographic indicators tend to be well covered and easily available for most of the European countries. However, data on families and family forms are more difficult to obtain via existing statistical data sources. There are several problems. For example, the definition of families/families with children varies across European countries, and data collection at the national level is not carried out systematically. Some forms of families (cohabiting unions sometimes even with children, same sex couples, and multi-generational families) may not exist in statistical data sources, as is acknowledged in the expert report”.

“In order to study fertility and family formation dynamics more thoroughly, we need longitudinal data sets and different types of indicators. Cross-sectional indicators or survey data (if not retrospective) cannot cover many important aspects of family formation. Life trajectories of the young today are more fragmentary, in terms of educational histories, working life, and family formation, than they were a few decades ago. Many of the indicators are not designed to capture the multitude of transitions during individual life”.

“Researchers and policy makers should try to identify trends but at the same time detect diversity. There is a need for more qualitative research in order to capture the diversity in terms of small groups, because these groups raise new issues”.
Major gaps and challenges for research

- Micro-level research on fertility development and its determinants is needed to understand not so much whether the couple will have children, but when they do so. Only a small group of European countries (15 in 2009) have participated in Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) so far; there is a need to understand the different reasons for fertility postponement, consequences of postponement and the magnitude of recovery.
- More research on fertility trends behind the EU average: on the differences between family forms, qualifications, social classes, regional data, housing and its costs, etc.
- A recent and probably increasingly important theme is the possibility and acceptance of medical aid for fertility and its impact on family life e.g., postponement of childbearing or single-parenthood.
- There are significant research gaps in the study of new family forms. In particular, there is a need to re-examine the relationship between homosexuality and the family of origin in the different European areas. What is the relationship between same sex unions and a) welfare systems and b) community solidarity? New registration logistics are to be studied in more detail. There is a need for differentiated and comparable data on new family and conjugal living arrangements throughout Europe.
- Another very interesting research field could be the general relationship between values and behaviour. Furthermore, very little is known about the reciprocal influence of institutions and attitudes. A better knowledge of the relationships between these areas is crucial for the future implementation of political measures, as it is still quite unclear how decision-making processes of couples and families are influenced and affected by other components (e.g. value or political systems).
- Furthermore, demographic research should concentrate on the differential effects of rising migration and mobility as well as rising life expectancy in Europe. The Existential Field report pointed out that the standard nuclear family model is on the decline in Europe and is increasingly complemented by a large variety of other family forms. Further research should consider and include these developments and also pay more attention to the resources and networks of families in Europe. In this context, change in intergenerational support is a very important topic for analysis.
- There is relatively little information on union formation and dissolution among the older population. So far, much of the research on family formation and family forms has focussed on young adults. Although cohabitation is still more common among the young, its role is also
increasing among middle-aged or older people (particularly in countries which have been forerunners in cohabitation).

2.1.2 Existential Field 2 - Development processes in the family

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

Two presentations opened the debate in this focus group. The first presentation came from Carmen Leccardi (University of Milano-Bicocca) who was responsible, together with Miriam Perego, for the report on the general topic of Existential Field 2: “Family developmental processes”. The second one came from keynote speaker Karin Jurczyk (German Youth Institute) and focused mainly on the theme of “doing family” today.

Carmen Leccardi started her presentation by explaining that in their report the meaning of development, a concept she recognises to be ambiguous, is connected with two types of transformation within the family over the last few decades: changes in family forms (growing plurality in the ways of making a family) and changes in the identities of the several family members (young, adults, elderly), both being important to trace out developments in the trajectories of families in the new century. She also referred to the role of time and its impact on social changes and life-course changes. Accordingly she highlighted four processes involved in these changes affecting European families:

1. individualisation;
2. transformation in gender relations;
3. the pluralisation of role models;
4. the ‘subjectivisation’ of norms associated with the family and the couple.

Carmen Leccardi continued her presentation by identifying four main trends emerging from developmental processes in the family:

1. The prolonged presence of young people within their family of origin (the role played within it by: the negotiation and affection-based family; the de-standardisation of the life-course; yo-yo transitions; labour market instability; the parents’ home as a shelter for fragmented transitions to adulthood).
2. Young people and parenthood – the new representations of parenthood among young people (new models of parenting, changing roles and obligations as regards gender).
3. Conjugal instability, preconditions, modalities and their social and
cultural consequences for family life, gender identities, and divorced fathers and mothers.

4. The new role of grandparents (new active biographical trajectories of grandparents involving care support of younger family members).

Following Carmen Leccardi’s presentation, Karin Jurczyk started her presentation on “Doing family – a new approach to understanding family and its developments”. Her proposal focussed on a discussion of “What does doing family mean?” The starting point for Karin Jurczyk is that there is a need for new approaches and theoretical discussions:

- The state of the art concerning the report on developmental processes in the family (Existential Field 2) “presents a lot of empirical details but lacks concepts related to social changes and what is going on in contemporary families”.
- There is a “need to frame contemporary families within the trends of late modernity and eroding traditions of so-called normal biographies and biographical regimes, as well as the erosion of structural contexts and the trend towards individualisation”.

The main point Karin Jurczyk brought to the discussion was that “Family is more than ever a practice which has to be done permanently over the whole life-course; family has no nature, no given resource and no fixed institutional framework of private life and individual biography”.

Commenting on the four major trends identified by Carmen Leccardi, Karin Jurczyk once again stressed her suggestion that a better understanding of those trends within contemporary society requires a radical turn to theories of ‘praxeology’. In her view, there is a need to know how people do their families; how they live their concrete daily lives; not so much know what their values and attitudes are, but find out what their practices are. According to Karin Jurczyk, there is a lack of knowledge on what the dimensions of daily life are – what is really going on with the practices: “we have to understand how people do family”, by differentiating unreflected practice/routine and focusing on intentional action. “The challenge is that we have to understand the daily and biographical shaping of a common life as a family, as a whole, as a group, not only the daily life of a woman, of a man and of a child, but the integration of these different perspectives into family life [...] the integration of the individual is not only the addition of different actors; there are conflicts between solidarities, intentions, demands, there are tensions between the individual ‘me’ and the ‘us’: They are not at the same level, there is gender and generations [...] this biography is interlinked with shared life
context, into family as a group [...] family is an actor in itself. For Karin Jurczyk, “another aspect which is neglected, for example, is a bodily dimension of family, family is also physical”.

Summarising Jurczyk’s perspective, ‘doing family’ today must be understood essentially not so much in the light of theoretical approaches but on the basis of a new ‘praxeology’ which sees as protagonists the individual components of the family (children, mothers and fathers, siblings, grandparents, neighbours and so on) and the relations of solidarity/conflict that they construct on a daily basis through reciprocal interaction. From the point of view of this analytical approach there are numerous phenomena involved: bodily, emotional, cognitive, media-related, social, temporal and spatial aspects. Family policies, in order to be effective, must in turn come to grips with this multiplicity.

While commenting on the four major trends identified by Carmen Leccardi, Karin Jurczyk also identified some research gaps and challenges for further research (see research gaps). She suggested a better understanding is needed of the “huge gap” that still exists between attitudes and practices regarding gender roles (not only concerning men’s roles, but also with regard to mothers’ ambivalence when they demand more participation from men in the daily life of the family yet simultaneously restrict that very participation). She also found ambivalences and contradictions in the developments of welfare regimes and stated, as an example, the case of Germany where some laws push families towards modern forms of family while, at same time, relying on traditional forms. On the other hand, she considered that the generational perspective of the family has been underestimated and that researchers speak a lot about couples but neglect the role of children as active actors. There is also the dual role of the elderly, who are both care receivers and caregivers. She also pointed out the importance of studying the family as a network, an extended perspective of the family, taking into consideration new developments of the life-course, especially those emerging from divorce (patchwork families), as well as the spatial dimension of the family in respect to ‘multilocality’ (as a cause of divorce but also of professional mobility). For Karin Jurczyk it is important to study the impact of multilocality in families due to the fact that multilocality can create virtual families and “there is a limit to possible virtuality in family life”. Finally, she emphasised the lack of knowledge on the concrete procedures for negotiating and practicing partnership and parenthood as well as on what she considers to be a big research gap: the interaction process of becoming a parent (“we have studies about men, women’s wishes, child’s wishes, but no research on how to become a parent”).
These two experts raised several key questions, which the group discussed. The following paragraphs summarise this discussion.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

Among the comments and critical ideas put forward by the participants, it became clear that Karin Jurczyk’s proposal to conceptualise the family as an actor itself, not limited to the experience of couples and committed to the idea of an interactional network with emotional and bodily (physical) aspects, was very much appreciated by all the participants in this focus group.

There was agreement that these different facets of interaction, reinforced by Karin Jurczyk’s presentation, tend to be completely forgotten in European studies. The proposal to turn to ‘praxeology’ was also very well received and considered a pertinent approach to capturing diversity, as well as an important basis for grounded policies (and as an alternative to structural policies constructed on the basis of generality).

The following topics summarise the key issues discussed in this focus group:

**What does “doing family mean”? What does it imply from the point of view of methodology and theoretical approaches?**

“First of all, this means focusing on relations between people within the family and on their practices in everyday life. In this respect, we have to be aware that family is not a given, but is a living thing, in constant change, which is done and re-done constantly [...] if we are able to raise adequate theoretical questions in investigating families, then we are also able to put forward a ‘praxeology’ in this respect. This means being able to understand the daily practices of ‘doing family’ and constructing the interactions between family members”.

“Pick up the bodily and emotional aspects in the life of the family and how the practices in everyday life can shape the family, do the family”.

“Families are constructed through interactions and also through bodily and emotional interaction, and this means that interactions have to deal with the family as a whole, and that inside the family we have different generations, different genders, we have children, adults and the elderly, and all these subjects intervene through their interactions and also through their bodily and emotional interactions”.
“The importance of studying not only the family as a whole, but the family as a series of interactions, requires us to go further with the theoretical tools that we use to obtain good empirical data. That also implies going beyond the fact that some fields of sociology are sectored: sociology of the family, of youth, of education. Then there is the need to look at reality from an interaction perspective, covering the process as a whole from the beginning: sociology usually studies the fixed time or a fixed moment and neglects how things interact and how people in the family negotiate over the long term”.

The centrality of the phenomenon of negotiation within the family: between partners, between parents and children, between grandparents and grandchildren, and so on. Questions raised:

“Is it possible in this regard to affirm that the family today is characterised by fully-fledged models of negotiation (matching the various components of the family)? If so, what is the character of these and in what way are they constructed? What effects do they produce on the life of the family and on the wellbeing of families? From this point of view what role is played by the processes of individualisation brought to light in the introductory presentations?”

“How can negotiations harmonise the level of individual and the couple’s goals, and how do macro social circumstances affect these decisions, how to match these three levels? How can we carry out empirical research on this topic?”

“We must take into account the role of education in the developmental processes of the family, e.g. the importance of education for negotiating, how to solve problems, how to communicate with children… negotiation of conflicts between the older generations who stay longer in the labour market and the needs of family to have them at home caring for children”.

Families with a large number of children, and the importance of their educational role in the current panorama of transformations in the family

“What messages do these traditional forms of family offer to the social world today, at a time when the general tendency is to limit the
number of children per family? And in what way can welfare policies take this type of family into consideration in a concrete way?"

**The role of welfare policies**

“A big challenge for family policy is to construct family policy that covers diversity; all follow one particular model of family either implicitly or explicitly. Is it necessary that family policies should always focus on one particular model, or is diversity and plurality a model that can be supported by politics? How might that work?”

“Unpaid work of women and family carers (e.g. handicapped children) is an important value for society and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (states economise a great deal) but does not appear in statistics, even though it is fundamental for families’ lives; family carers of disabled children are often not paid. Also to be researched are their conditions of life and care [...] family care should be included in GDP.”

**Possible relationship between scientific experts engaged in the study of the family and stakeholders (as well as policy makers)**

“What is the nature of this relationship today and how could it be improved? How might it contribute to helping more vulnerable families or to the rights of children within the family? More generally, how can this relationship throw light on questions that are central to the wellbeing of families and also facilitate the development of appropriate public policies?”

“The main points regarding this relationship between researchers and stakeholders are awareness by researchers and NGOs that we deal with representations of reality. If we find there are common grounds for these representations then a common voice can also be found”.

**Children’s rights and wellbeing**

The theme of the rights of children proved central to the discussion and was analysed from various points of view. In particular, attention was drawn to the issue of the consequences of divorce on the life of young children. The importance of the regularity of contact over time, and the interactions between separated fathers and mothers and their children, were highlighted as essen-
tial elements in the wellbeing both of children and their parents. More generally, emphasis was placed on the importance of maintaining a high level of awareness of the effects of developmental processes in the family on the wellbeing of children: “we should start by focusing on children as subjects and equals in the family and not just as minors or subject to a hierarchical condition”.

The need to look at divorce as a start of a new form of family

“Since the late sixties divorce has increased significantly, so a lot of people are sons or daughters of divorced parents. We do not yet know what kind of family life-course histories they have experienced. Maybe these changes and the instability of family and marriage will take us to new forms of family in the present. Too much research focuses on women’s problems and less on fathers; we also have to look at the family from the perspective of men, in particular the role of fathers after divorce”.

Same sex families can be a starting point for a new way of looking at the family

“Due to the fact that there seem to be no gender differences it is interesting to understand the way they manage their individual perspectives of family life”. “What does it mean to be a gay father or a lesbian mother in relation to the children’s future and adulthood?”

“We are facing different ways of conceiving families”.

The importance of conducting empirical research of a comparative kind in relation to European Member States

First of all, empirical research of this type is important in order to understand in a detailed way what lies behind the differences between European countries as far as the family is concerned (the timing of family life, the ways of ‘doing family’, the relationship between parents and children, the balance between family, work and personal life – in connection with the reality of the labour market and welfare policies), and the ways in which family choices (and individual choices within the family) are made and negotiated.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- The lack of knowledge on the concrete procedures for negotiating the practices of partnership and parenthood; on the interactions of becoming a parent – we have studies on men, women, and children’s
wishes, but no research on the interactions between parents and the process of how to deal with becoming a parent.

- There is a lack of studies on same sex families.
- More research on the huge gap between attitudes and practices relative to gender roles, not only from the point of view of men but also of women/mothers who tend to restrict men’s participation in family life; it is important to look at these ambivalences.
- Research must also look into the bodily and emotional aspects of the family. More specifically, attention should be drawn to the physical dimension of motherhood.
- An effort must be made to promote greater understanding of new forms of families today, including the relationship between children and parents. We refer here, for example, to ‘patchwork’ families (after divorce), to migrant couples and parenthood, or to same sex couples.
- It is important to focus on children who are experiencing or have already experienced critical events both in new and traditional families (for example, in same sex couples) and to understand what the risks are for children in high-conflict family situations, in order to develop sensitive policies to support them.
- Need for research on how education for family life, marriage, conflict handling, etc., can contribute to changes in the attitudes of young adults towards family values.
- The generational perspective has been underestimated. “We speak a lot about couples but neglect the role of children as active actors, as equals within families and not just minors”. There is a need for further research on the importance of mutual care between generational and gender groups, and cross-national comparisons on the role of grandparents in childcare.
- In summary, there is a major research gap in the linkages between daily life and development of the family, the daily and biographical processes of doing family as an interaction.

### 2.1.3 Existential Field 3 - State family policies

**Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches**

Sonja Blum (University of Münster) opened the session with a presentation on the results of the Existential Field report on *State family policies*, which she authored together with Christiane Rille-Pfeiffer (University of Vienna). According to Sonja Blum, state family policies in Europe have gained tremendous importance in recent years due to major challenges European
Wellbeing of Families in Future Europe - Challenges for Research and Policy

societies are facing today such as ageing, growing diversity of families and the reconciliation of work and family life. These challenges have made family policy one of the few expanding areas of welfare. However, in comparison with other social policy fields, family policy is characterised by a low degree of institutionalisation, even though it cuts across other policies related to employment, education, housing and urban development that impact on families.

Family policies across EU Member States are characterised by great diversity. Sonja Blum focussed on major trends in family policy in Europe in relation to regulatory frameworks, leave policies, care services, and cash and tax benefits. Her approach was based on a geographical typology of family policies, which she adopted as a temporary solution (Nordic, Continental, Anglo-American, Mediterranean and Post-Socialist countries); on the family policy database of the Council of Europe; on the information made available by the annual review of the International Network on Leave Policy and Research; and on the data emerging from a small questionnaire her work team sent to welfare state researchers in all EU27 countries.

In her conclusion, Sonja Blum identified some European trends in terms of either re-familialisation or defamilialisation. While family policy in Nordic countries seems to keep the sense of re-familialisation and Mediterranean countries keep their orientation toward defamilialisation, conservative and Anglo-American countries both show moves towards defamilialisation, while Post-Socialist countries are very heterogeneous, between defamilialisation and re-familialisation.

A second presentation came from Kathrin Linz (Institute of Social Work and Social Education, Frankfurt) entitled “Hurdles to overcome in comparative research on family policy”, focusing on what she experienced as obstacles while doing comparative research on family policy in Europe. In her presentation she mentioned two comparative studies, both conducted in 2009: one on the “reporting on policies for families in the EU Member States”, the other on “policies for families in times of the economic crisis – reactions of the EU Member States”.

Family support systems are being shaped and developed independently in each country. National policy measures are developed in a context of differences in cultural conceptions, socio-political targets, welfare state configurations and financing possibilities. Therefore Kathrin Linz considers that when doing cross-national research on family policies in European countries “we need to take into account the different traditions of dealing with policies for the wellbeing of families as well as the development of institutions in this field”, namely the political structures dealing with families in different states. Is the overall support system for families stronger in countries where
family policy is explicit, and where there is a designated ministry for family affairs? “In some Member States it was not easy to find the right person to talk to because by the time we conducted the study there were only nine ministries in the Member States which had ‘family’ in their title”.

When conducting comparative studies on family policy “we need to know more about how family policy is culturally and institutionally embedded in each country”. Why is the word “family” part of the ministry name in some countries? How can we explain differences in the development of explicit family policies in some Member States?

Kathrin Linz mentioned a study (by Franz Rothenbacher, University of Mannheim) which shows that there is a strong connection between state expenditure on families, the standing of family policy in society and the development of institutions. The study also concluded that the development of explicit family policies is to be expected to a higher degree in countries where Catholic values correlate with high socio-economic development. In countries where Catholic values correlate with weak socio-economic performance there is often an effect on the development of institutional structures in family policy.

According to Kathrin Linz, when comparing major trends in current debates on family policies in European countries it seems that changes in policies are increasingly focussed on facing up to demographic challenges, for example the expansion of childcare facilities in Germany. Policy makers and stakeholders are also worried about the impact of financial cuts on families. What impact has the economic crisis had on national family policy measures in Europe? Research results showed that the impact of the economic crisis on public finances was particularly significant in relation to measures and programmes for families, which means that funding strongly shapes policies for families. However, responses to the economic crisis varied widely. There are also contradictions in the changes introduced by countries, with some changes resulting in a higher level of support for families, and others going in the opposite direction. Kathrin Linz considered that changes in family policy as a response to the economic crisis are a fertile ground for further research, and stated that “we should also look at changes in family policy resources over time”. As national family policies are subject to constant change, it is important to understand which changes have a positive and which changes have a negative impact on families. More longitudinal comparative research would be useful to increase knowledge of developments and outcomes of family-oriented policies.

A third presentation came from Jorma Sipilä (University of Tampere), and focussed on cash for care: “Cash for childcare: an exquisitely debated subject”, an issue which he recognised to be a small but crucial detail in the whole
process of family policy. He regarded it as an interesting detail because it is related to emotions as well as being a controversial subject: “most social researchers as well as policy makers, especially those involved in the economic field, have either not been interested in this topic or are against it”.

The major question is: “should the state pay parents for taking care of their children at home?” According to Jorma Sipilä, there are two alternative ways of doing this: one is the American method, where parents are given cash to purchase care as they wish (parents may pay for care or provide care themselves). The alternative is the Nordic method, which is “about giving cash instead of day care”, meaning that if parents do not use subsidised day-care they are eligible to receive cash for care. Jorma Sipilä focussed on this latter measure, which is more common among Nordic countries, where there has been a broader use of day-care and high expenditure on families. However, there is no mainstream model in Scandinavia, but a variety of different principles, particularly at the local level.

Jorma Sipilä put forward a set of arguments for and against these extensively debated home care allowances. Among the arguments against are the following: the risks to career development for women; poverty and female unemployment (the state is spending money to reduce female unemployment while every political program demands the opposite); the extra costs it represents for the state; increasing marginalisation among mothers as well as greater risks for children. It is also seen as an advantage for mothers but not for children; it is particularly poor and under-educated parents who prefer this cash care solution; it might be problematic for immigrant children, who will be raised separately from other children; there is no guarantee of quality because the state cannot intervene and examine what is going on; and it creates problems in terms of gender equality with respect to formal and informal work.

Among the arguments in favour, Jorma Sipilä named the following: the benefit allows people to protest against the lack of reconciliation between work and family life (very popular among young people), and increases family time (also a very popular argument reflecting the growing value of maternal care and children). In fact, about 90 per cent of people in Finland have used cash for care for some length of time. From the perspective of research, explanations for this are related to the following: insecurity in the transition to the labour market; family care capital at times when unemployment is on the rise; parents are less and less able to afford to stay at home without benefits; privatisation and non-formalisation of care as a cause of economic crisis; neoliberal emphasis on individual choice; motherhood and gender differences are somehow glorified by the entertainment industry; the existence of this kind of benefit legitimises its use (social policy benefits
function as normative recommendations, intensifying the social obligation to make time for care); advantages of day-care and family care according to medicine and child psychiatry.

In conclusion, considering the importance this benefit still has for families and taking into account the current controversial debate over home care allowances, Jorma Sipilä made some recommendations for improving the benefit. One is that parents should not stay exclusively at home i.e. the benefit should not promote exclusion from the labour market, but should encourage a combination of part-time work and part-time childcare; parents should not be encouraged to reject the labour market; the benefit should be shared between parents, as care leaves also tend to be shared; the introduction of father’s quotas in cash for care would also improve gender equality. A point stressed by Jorma Sipilä was that the right to the cash benefit should never exclude the right to day-care, as happens today in Finland (though not in Norway); children’s participation in group activities should be a condition for the cash benefit, in order to prevent children growing up in closed families.

A final presentation came from Jonas Himmelstrand (HARO, Sweden) who focussed on Swedish family policies with a presentation entitled “Are the Swedish state family policies delivering?” His main point was to challenge Sweden’s perfect image regarding family policy, i.e. as having the best state welfare model in international benchmarking. According to Jonas Himmelstrand, Sweden today has a culture and a form of political commitment which considers state-provided professional childcare as the most suitable form of care for the child’s development, while family care is regarded as a lesser choice. Gender equality is a core issue in the debates on childcare.

Overall Sweden is known for having great statistics in respect of low infant mortality, very high life expectancy, relatively high birth rate, low child poverty, high spending on education, equality and gender equality, and the best parental leave. However, Jonas Himmelstrand argues that quality must be also balanced with quantity: “are we actually producing a next generation which has the psychological maturity and ability to handle stress, and manage the challenges of future life?”

Sweden is known as having one of the best parental leave schemes. However, one of the main ideas Jonas Himmelstrand wanted to stress is that after the 16 months of well-paid parental leave (13 months at 80 per cent of salary plus another three months at a lower level) the ‘door closes’. He also pointed out that cash for care depends on municipalities, and only one-third of them are providing it. On the other hand, the high Swedish tax rates are designed for dual-earner households; family policy emphasises a work policy saying that “everybody should work after parental leave”; parental
leave is expected to be split in equal shares between men and women. Therefore the overall family policy model is becoming “children in day-care and parents working”.

In relation to this family policy model of childcare, Jonas Himmelstrand brought up some “uncomfortable statistics”, namely: the severe decrease in psychological health among youth; the very high rates of sick leave among women; day-care staff at the top of the sick leave statistics; rapidly decreasing quality in Swedish schools; plummeting educational results in Swedish schools; severe discipline problems in Swedish classrooms; deteriorating parental abilities, even in the middle classes; a highly segregated labour market. Among the main possible causes, based on current knowledge, Jonas Himmelstrand reinforced the negative impact of early separation of children and parents as well as of early exposure of children to large groups of peers.

Jonas Himmelstrand concluded that “Swedish state family policies are not emotionally sustainable and thus not sustainable in terms of health, psychological maturation or learning [...] Swedish State family policies may not even be democratically sustainable, as there are definitive difficulties in even discussing these policies”.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

**Childcare and cash for care. Questions raised:**

“Should cash for care also be introduced for elderly persons and regardless of income? Home care allowances have been introduced as a trend in childcare expansion. Is it feasible to have this for older persons? (It is surprising that faced with an ageing population care services for older persons have gained less attention)”.

“There are many indicators on the quantity aspects of childcare but there is a lack of indicators on quality. There are often two indicators, which are also covered by OECD family database: child staff ratio and educational levels of childcare employees, but these are very poor indicators for comparative research, and even for these indicators we still do not have reliable and comparative data (e.g. childcare expenditures and outcomes)”.

“Family care/maternal care or childcare/non-maternal care? We need research for the long term. There is a lot of political talk but very little research on what is best for children, particularly smaller children under the age of one. It is important to carry out early childcare longitudinal studies in different countries”.
“It is also important to look at the effects of early childcare on parenthood. How does it affect being a parent, their health, their psychological maturation?”

“There is a lack of information on tax systems. In Austria there is a proposal to guarantee a minimum income for families no matter how many children they have. It is important to give families financial security and to compare tax systems in Europe”.

“We have to support families’ freedom of choice in relation to care arrangements: there is significant investment in day-care, but what do we give to the families that look after the children themselves? Families do not have equal opportunities to fulfil their wishes as long as family policies support certain forms of family and neglect others. We have to focus on the wishes of families, and they are very different”.

“Lone parent families and blended families seem to be more highly valued, they are regarded as modern families, and married young couples are looked at as traditional families”.

**The inevitable and increasingly important link between family policies and employment policies**

“One of the most important aspects of family policy in the future is flexible working conditions in the labour market. It is utopian to expect that all children will be cared for at home by families. Families are also needed in the employment market. So the question is: can we be there and also take care of our children and of our parents when they grow old? It is crucial to focus on the simultaneous combination of employment and care [...] nowadays family policies go along with the situation of the labour market”.

“Flexibility might also mean less job security [...] flexible working conditions should take account of employee points of view as well as employers”.

**Employers’ points of view**

“Small and medium-sized employer firms find it harder to replace people taking leave. When talking about leaves we often underestimate the employer side, we tend to emphasise the state’s point of
view or the child’s point of view or the parents’ and families’ point of view, but these situations also affect employers. Employers must be involved in the discussion of these policies”.

Wider focus when looking at state family policy

“...The focus on state family policies and on central level or even federal state structures might lead us to miss some substantial developments and aspects of family policies. One of the major developments is that there is an increase in actors and stakeholders who are discussing and debating family policies. The implementation of family policy measures is increasingly carried out at the regional and local levels, so it is a huge challenge to try to capture any comparison between all Member States of the Union, for example through case studies”.

“Are there differences between national and local levels of policies (and also between countries) regarding which type of families they are addressing? There is a need to address all types of families in terms of an approach to social justice, and sometimes that can be more evident at the local level”.

The crucial role of time management in family policies

“Family policies are usually looked at as a tool kit of three policies – benefits in cash, benefits in kind (different types of childcare services), and time and time management. Increasingly public authorities try to convince employers to do more about time management (flexible working hours), because they have their whole agenda of employment levels, getting people into employment, and keeping people in employment (specially women and mothers), so time management is also a trend and should be of greater interest for the immediate future”.

“Love is the main reason for founding a family. The main reason we have so many divorces and separations is that there is no time to cultivate this love, so the love disappears and then the partnership is dissolved. So love, time, money and resources are the main reasons for families to work or not to work”.
Mainstreaming family

“Gender mainstreaming is on the agenda everywhere, so perhaps it would be interesting to introduce family mainstreaming as a new attitude for family policy makers and family science experts. A family impact report should be a standard starting point for the policy decision-making process”.

“The lack of consensus on a definition of family is one of the reasons why there is no platform for action for family as there is for youth, for old people or for people with disabilities, for example. From an international perspective, if it is not possible to reach a common definition on family, at least there should be an agreement on what family functions are, because the definitions of those functions could help to design good policies for families [...] and establishing a regional framework of family rights”.

“It is important not to define the family and look at all sorts of family models because children do not choose the type of family they are born into”.

Framing family policies over the life-course and from an intergenerational perspective

“In most countries, family policies relate to pregnancy, birth and early childhood and then when school starts family policies seem to be out of sight [...] they could be important again in connection with parents’ supporting adolescents [...] it is crucial to try to see policies over the life-course and according to relevant family transitions in order to support and try to contribute to the wellbeing of families. Time management should also take into account the ‘sandwich generation’, those who have to take care of both children and old parents”.

Policy evaluation and its consequences in the long term

“It is important to evaluate policies that are not explicit family policies but nevertheless impact and influence family outcomes. It is also important to understand the impact of evidence-based policy-making [...] What are the consequences for families of policy measures?”
“Consultation on family policies: it would be interesting to see how family policies are made and how they are being implemented. Is there a consultation process on what families actually expect from government and on their different needs for reconciling family and work life?”

**How to evaluate family policies?**

“How to evaluate family policies? Without knowing the aims of the policies how can we evaluate them? For evaluation we would need information on what the goals of special family policies are. Politicians do not usually state the aims of these policies explicitly. We would also need to know how much money was invested as well as with what results. This kind of effectiveness is difficult to evaluate.”

“The aim of any family policy is social justice; standards of living between families in democratic societies require more equality; family policies are prevention policies against poverty and social exclusion, so maybe this can be a form of benchmarking and policy evaluation: social justice between different forms of families”.

**Typologies/classifications**

“We need to improve typologies and we need specific typologies for post-socialist countries”. “Is it possible to consider the diversity of family-oriented policies in a single ‘pot’? Typologies do not always help, at least from the perspective of family organisations”.

**Family policies - should we all have family policies?**

“Family must be nurtured from the inside. There might be too much family policy and too much control from the State. How do we foster that inner motivation for family? Are family policies a good thing in that context?”

**Major gaps and challenges for research**

- There is a need to broaden the focus of analysis, going behind state family policies (e.g. more research on government-NGO relations, occupational family policies, regional and local family policies, in order
to capture differences between all Member States of the Union, for example through case studies).

- We need to know more about the effects of policies which are not explicit family policies, but which impact on families (for example employment policies).
- We need to know more about the belief systems and the policy ideas of family policy makers (and the differences across countries).
- More data is needed on the total expenditure on family policy in order to assess the impact of policy changes on overall support for families.
- There is insufficient data on intergenerational transfers within families, and the overall contribution of older persons to the wellbeing of their families.
- Effects of early childcare on parenthood and adult maturation: research is needed on the impact of maternal and non-maternal care (e.g. effects on child-parent relations).
- More research is needed on family policies and men’s role in the family (e.g. why they take less parental leave).
- It is important to examine the impact of certain leave schemes on employers and according to company size. Small and medium-sized employers find it harder to replace people taking leave.

2.1.4 Existential Field 4 - Family, living environments and local policies

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

The focus group began with an introductory presentation from Leeni Hansson (University of Tallinn) on the subject: "Family life and living environment: different ways of development". She started with a theoretical approach to the concept of living environment according to the Urie Bronfenbrenner’s perspective, which defines four social environmental systems affecting family life:

1. Micro-system: immediate environments and settings (e.g. home, school, informal networks, etc.).
2. Meso-system: a system comprising connections between immediate environments (i.e. home and a child’s school).
3. Exo-system: external environmental settings which indirectly affect family life (e.g. parents’ workplace settings).
4. Macro-system: large cultural and social contexts (economy and labour market, legislation, educational system, etc.).
Focusing on the macro-system, and drawing attention to poverty rates, Leeni Hansson stated that today’s EU is characterised by similarities and contrasts between countries. For example, according to the Eurobarometer, two adults without children face a lower risk of poverty than the average of the total population. Families with three children are at greater risk of poverty. Single parents with dependent children, single elderly people, and especially single elderly female are the household types with the highest risk of poverty. These general poverty trends are similar in the majority of the Member States, and differences between countries are not so significant. However, when comparing poverty rates of the total population with poverty rates of two adults with three or more children, there are huge differences between and within countries. Families with three or more children are far more exposed to poverty than the total population in some countries, while in other countries poverty rates between the total population and large families are more even. According to Leeni Hansson, the countries where there are no significant differences in poverty rates between total population and large families are those where social security benefits are well organised to support families. Ending her presentation, she focussed on research gaps as well as on what is needed in order to measure living environments and to carry out cross-country comparisons of family life and living environments.

After Leeni Hansson’s presentation, there were some brief comments, and a further two presentations followed. Epp Reiska and Ellu Saar (both from University of Tallinn and authors of the Existential Field report on Family and living environments…) summarised major trends and research gaps according to six sub-topics of the general topic of this focus group: economic situation, employment, education, environmental conditions, housing and local politics. The last presentation, before the debate, came from Francesco Belletti (Forum delle Associazioni Familiari) who focussed on Local politics - programmes and best practice models, a sub-topic of Existential Field 4.

All presentations were commented on by participants. Several key questions and issues were raised and discussed as follows.

Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

The role of family policy; family policy mainstreaming

Leeni Hansson’s presentation generated a discussion on the role of social and family policy and the need to monitor its effects on families’ wellbeing according to more subjective and comparable indicators.
It was also pointed out by participants that many countries do not have a specific department for family policy, while in others family policy is integrated or diluted in social policy. There is accordingly a need for creating specific departments for family policy and to bring family policy into the mainstream: “in many European documents we find the concept of cohesion, social, economic, political; the first model of cohesion is the family; we cannot speak about cohesion if there is no cohesion in families; this approach stressing the integration of policies might be interesting for the future of mainstream family policy [...] family at the heart of several policies. It is precisely in cohesion policy that we find local development, regional development, sustainability [...] we should try to mainstream family in many European policies”.

The need to monitor policies and their effects on family wellbeing was also a major point in the discussion: “One of the statements of the Lisbon Strategy 2000 was that poverty should be diminished by 10 per cent in 2010, but actually poverty increased by 15 per cent. So what advances have been made? Poverty and social exclusion still exists [...] in order to achieve some success we should be monitoring policy advancement and how the policy of Member States reflects on family welfare and family wellbeing. Where is family in European strategies?”

How to measure living environment? How to define the ‘friendly-family environment’ concept?

Another key issue in the debate was the question of how to measure a “living environment”. Living environment was presented by Leeni Hansson as a multi-dimensional concept with different key elements. She suggested some indicators for measuring what a good living environment consists of: functional housing environments, adequate work places in appropriate locations, adequate educational and child care facilities, adequate services in appropriate locations, a wide range of parks and recreational areas, functional transport networks, a functional municipal infrastructure, and an unpolluted, noise-free environment.

It was pointed out that there is a lot of data on the performance of economies and that GDP is the most widely-used measure of economic activity. However, it was recognised that it measures only market production and not economic wellbeing. Material living standards are more closely associated with measures of real income and consumption but do not tell us anything significant in terms of families’ wellbeing. There was agreement that what is missing is a perspective that goes beyond GDP: the household perspective as well as a family perspective, e.g.
consumer patterns and their unequal distribution according to households and family types.

The importance of parents and families as agents influencing and designing their living environment was also emphasised (their role in defining indicators to measure their wellbeing): “family wellbeing cannot only be measured by economic indicators such as GDP; the pertinence of the capability approach (access to basic rights, education, being able to care for the people we like… in this context). Research should go to the community and to the local specificities, and involve people and their own definitions of their well-being […] we need to construct more subjective indicators related to household and family perspectives”.

Do we have a family-friendly environment? Work versus family, or balance?

“One important impact of the FAMILYPLATFORM project should be to change policies and create more friendly environments for families… flexible working time does not exist in reality, employers prefer to not employ women with children under five or women who plan to have children […] For European citizens it is not so important to have strategies, road maps, white papers, or green papers, but rather to understand how the policy of Member States reflects on their own life and on more friendly environments for the family”. The issue of family-friendly enterprises was also raised in the discussion. The need for a unified definition was stressed: “what does it actually mean for a company to be family-friendly?” Examples such as childcare facilities and the role in caring for retired employees were mentioned as characteristics that could be included in the definition.

The crucial importance of a dual approach when studying family and environment

This Existential Field was considered essential for capturing macro changes and carrying out macro-level analysis of how family changes affect the environment and how environment influences families. There was general agreement on the lack of data on the impact of families on the environment:

“In the report there is some information on the environment, but it does not go further on sustainability indexes and on the linkages between household behaviour and family behaviour and sustain-
ability. What do internal family changes mean for sustainability and related policies? [...] It is very important to try to link internal family changes and decision-making within families and to establish what their impact is on the sustainability of the environment.

Sustainability was considered to be a key challenge. It was recognised that it is important to identify what the changing patterns are in families in Europe (fewer marriages, more single parents), and what they mean from the point of view of sustainability. In this respect families are very important and “specially mothers because they make the daily decisions on, for example, purchasing, using energy, etc.; so they have a huge impact on daily activities which impact environmental management [...] it is important to try to link internal family changes and decision-making processes with their impact on the sustainability of the environment”.

“There are changes within the family – how are these changes impacting outside? There are changes in the relationships inside the family: what are they bringing to the overall changes in society and the environment?”

The gender perspective was also discussed: there is a need to consider new forms of fatherhood and the increasing movement towards gender equality within families, and to understand how the improvement of work and family life balance connects with environments. A question was raised concerning the gendered configuration of public spaces: the most frequent example given by fathers who are interviewed is the difficulty of caring in public spaces, which are often designed just for women (e.g. nappy-changing facilities in women’s toilets).

How to do family policy at local level? How to harmonise the different responsibilities of managing the municipality as a public actor?

Francesco Belletti’s presentation stressed the importance of family policy at a local level, as well as the need to spread best practices models. According to him, the local level is acquiring more and more relevance because at local level actions can be targeted to specific needs and problems can be tackled in a more “rounded and responsive way”.

Focusing on the local level also means stressing the family as an important actor and therefore the importance of family associations, Volunteers and NGOs were also mentioned: “If we want to know families we have to know their local representatives; it is a way to get into national families; that is why NGOs are so important in the family platform”.

149
The main point highlighted with respect to local family policies was that there is a need for more research on local welfare in order to carry out comparative approaches on the good or best practices models. It was recognised, however, that the collection of good practices needs to be more systematic, to allow for comparisons and an evaluation of the results achieved.

Emphasis was put on the importance of defining a research agenda and developing a monitoring system for local family policies. There was general agreement on the crucial importance of qualitative approaches, which seem to be more productive in detecting the complex and interactive mechanisms of local networks and finding which actors determine a local policy’s effectiveness: stakeholders, institutions, etc. There was also general agreement on the need to conduct further research into the portability and reproducibility of good practices.

Discussion on methodological approaches; the limitations of existing statistical data

Specific statistical data is mostly available at the macro or country level. There are, however, no specific family-focussed data (for example, by different family types). There are also difficulties in interpreting data, as different concepts are not always well defined (e.g. “if we have to compare families with children: in some countries this refers to families under 16, in some countries 16 is included, in others it is children under 8, in Italy children under the age of 25, when they live with their parents… What are we comparing?”)

“There are surveys which have questions on satisfaction with life, family life, housing, leisure time… but who is satisfied? Is the answer only from the person who is answering the questionnaire or is it shared by the partner or other family members as well? We do not know, we do not have the family perspective”.

“How is poverty measured? Is it really a poverty line? What is the meaning of poverty? Income is a good measure, but it is not enough to measure poverty in rural areas – it does not reflect reality. There is a need for qualitative designs; averages do not help us in telling who needs what. What kind of families are having difficulties? What kind of classification do we need in order to disaggregate data? There are different types of classifications which need to be developed further”.

The importance of longitudinal data was also stressed, and the example of the life cycle was quoted, to reflect the fact that responsibilities change over time.
Major gaps and challenges for research

Economic situation:

- There is a need to include a household and family perspective. More information is required on how families obtain and use resources such as money, material resources, available services, time, etc. There is a lack of information on incomes and consumer patterns and their distribution across family types. Overall there is a lack of subjective measures of economic wellbeing; and even when available, data are not comparable across countries.

Education:

- The absence of data on access to education (e.g. access to primary education in rural areas and access to lifelong learning opportunities), percentage of children attending crèches and pre-school (rural and urban areas, according to age), school drop-out and comparable surveys exploring the connections between education and other outcomes related to family wellbeing.
- The need for more research on the role of family in primary socialisation as a component of education, on parents’ involvement in children’s schools, and on parents’ skills and parenting support. There is a lack of studies on education and schools for minority groups.
- Difficulties finding data on rural families and differences in relation to urban areas.
- A lack of data on flexible working time arrangements by household and family type; lack of data on cross-border employment.
- The need to monitor family-friendly policies at local, regional, national and cross-country levels (e.g. companies with childcare and elderly care facilities).

Environmental conditions:

- There is a need for an agreement between researchers on what elements constitute a ‘family-friendly environment’.
- There is a lack of environmental indicators when considering the families’ point of view: for example, there is no data on the amount of people or special groups of people exposed to different contaminants in the environment. There is also a lack of comparable data on the existence and quality of green areas in European cities.
- There is also the need to carry out research on the gendering of public spaces.
• There is a need for double-sided research on how changes in families affect environmental conditions and how environmental conditions affect families.

Housing:

• Existing data needs to be updated and made relevant and comparable, as there are some subjectivities in conceptual definitions (for example, the number of rooms is used as an indicator for living conditions of families in countries with different stages of development, and affordable decent housing is still an ambiguous concept without a common definition).

2.1.5 Existential Field 5 - Family management

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

The focus group started with a presentation from Marietta Pongrácz (Hungarian Demographic Research Institute and leader of this Existential Field) who highlighted the main results of the working report on the general topic “Patterns and trends of family management in the European Union”. The presentation covered three aspects of family management: allocation of tasks and gender roles; parenting and childrearing; family and work. After this presentation, a brief discussion took place between all participants.

A second presentation was made by Michael Meuser (Technical University of Dortmund), focusing on the changing culture of fatherhood and on how fathers put fatherhood into practice. During his presentation on “Fathers and family management - expectations, pretensions and social practice”, Michael Meuser identified several research challenges in the field and also contributed to an interesting discussion on the “new cultural idea of the new father” and its connections with labour market structure and the role fathers play in family management.

A third and final presentation came from Gordon Neufeld (University of British Columbia) on “Working mothers and the wellbeing of children”. Gordon Neufeld is a developmental psychologist, and his presentation gave the focus group a psychologist’s perspective on child wellbeing and child development: the spotlight of this final presentation was the concept of child attachment.

Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

The presentation from Marietta Pongrácz, Hungarian Demographic Research Institute, was the starting point for a first brief discussion on the outcomes of the report. Participants made some general suggestions:
The report reflects the overemphasis of research on the division of work among heterosexual couple families and gives insufficient attention to other family types, therefore failing to reflect the variability and changing nature of family management patterns in European families. For example, single parent families, foster families and families caring for disabled persons must not be completely left out.

Another suggestion was that marginal groups such as migrant families and minorities should be included (participants considered that there is little information on family management among migrant families and raised the question of whether they tend to have traditional orientations and values).

The role of children in family management was also mentioned, given the fact that in some European families children are an important element in family management, such as being responsible for some household duties as well as for the care of young siblings. There was also a discussion on the age children should start to participate in domestic work at home. The importance of early socialisation regarding the (gender-biased) division of domestic work was pointed out.

Discussants also pointed out that existing research at the national level is not always in the English language. Comparative cross-national research needs to be reviewed and continued on a regular basis.

The overall debate within this focus group was very much centred on family management for families with children (heterosexual couples) and particularly their daily life after having children. The most relevant subjects discussed included the challenges of caring during the life-course - childrearing but also teenagers’ and grandparents’ care - negotiation relationships within the family (including all family members as well as the role of children in family management) and the connections between paid and unpaid work. With regard to childcare the debate covered the points of view of parents, mothers, fathers and children, the labour market perspective, and issues of gender equality. It became evident that these perspectives are different and not always reconcilable; while they may sometimes be complementary, at other times they conflict. The following points summarise this discussion.

**Childcare, mother’s or parents’ care in the early years of a child’s life? The child’s perspective**

The early years of a child’s life were considered extremely important for the development of the future individual. Therefore, there was a discussion on the best arrangements for the care of children during this stage of life. On the one hand, the importance of giving more value to parental leave was underlined, not just in terms of increasing parental leave time but essentially...
to promote parental leave for mothers in order to motivate them to stay at home with their children as long as possible. However, this perspective discourages mothers from going back to work after childbirth. In general, mothers are viewed as being the crucial actors in developing and strengthening the emotional bonds with the child and the child’s balanced development as a person.

As a psychologist of development Gordon Neufeld reinforced this perspective by bringing in the concept of the child’s attachment. Although considering that gender is neutral in relation to children’s attachment, Gordon Neufeld argued that after birth a child tends to be more attached to its mother than to its father. He raised the controversial issue of whether the focus on child wellbeing and development implies that child attachment is more important than gender equality, “mothers are potentially more effective rearing children […] children care nothing about gender equality”. According to his view, the discussion on childcare in the early years of a child’s life must start from the child’s perspective, from the centrality of the concept of child attachment: it is crucially important who the child is attached to, and that working attachment needs to be fully developed. Accordingly, day-care providers and teachers are considered to be a handicap, because children are not as attached to them as they are to parents. Parental separation affects children profoundly in their future development as adolescents and later as adults. On the other hand, the deeper the child attaches, the easier it is to be physically apart. Therefore Gordon Neufeld questions the model of early separation, believing that the child should be given more time in order to enable the full development of attachment.

In the ensuing discussion, other participants felt that the so-called child’s perspective was strongly mother-centred (the stay at home mother), in contrast with other perspectives highlighting the social construction of biological bonds, the gender equality issue, the increasing participation of women in the labour market and the positive impact of high-quality childcare on parents and children’s fulfilment. It was also stressed that there are studies showing that high-quality institutional care has no negative outcomes in terms of child wellbeing. The main challenges for research that resulted from this discussion are that research should address this issue of children’s attachment and that more research is needed on the impact of early childcare on children’s wellbeing.

For Gordon Neufeld one of most critical issues is that “today we cannot go back to the parent in a home situation”. Therefore, and given that maternal employment is likely to increase, “one of the most important questions we need to face today is how can mothers work outside the home and still cultivate the attachment required to raise their children; how can we best cultivate
From a policy point of view the question is: what policy measures do we need to keep child attachment intact?

**Men’s/fathers’ perspectives**

The main discussion of this subject followed Michael Meuser’s presentation. There was general agreement on the fact that during the last two or three decades a new cultural idea of fatherhood has developed in western European countries, centred around the notions of the ‘new father’, the ‘active father’, or the ‘involved father’. However, there is no widely held consensus on what this means, and we still have little research on what this new ideal of the ‘involved father’ means in terms of duties and participation in family management. “Our knowledge on how fathers put fatherhood into practice is still limited and incomplete; we know more about the changing culture of fatherhood, on what is expected from fathers and how fathers themselves think about fatherhood, but concerning the conduct of fatherhood, the practice of fatherhood, we must be satisfied with some spotlights, and the little data we can rely on is not consistent”.

**What role do men play in family management?**

Father’s participation in family management differs from Member State to Member State. Employment patterns show that men are not the sole breadwinners (both parents often work full-time), but men and women do not contribute in the same way; also patterns of employment (both parents working full-time) do not match the patterns of domestic work (women still do the majority of domestic work), and this relationship requires better understanding. The main point stressed by Michael Meuser was that “there is a huge gap between the culture of fatherhood (that focuses on fathers’ involvement in family management) and the conduct of fatherhood that is still affected by traditional patterns of the male breadwinner. If on the one hand men wish to participate more in family life, as some surveys indicate, on the other hand they only fulfil these wishes to a low degree”.

There was a discussion on the need to carry out further research on this gap, namely the need to link family research and gender research. According to Michael Meuser, “until now fathers have been studied as a uniform group by comparing fathers’ practices and attitudes with mothers’ practices and attitudes, but we need more data on specific groups of fathers, more data on class, ethnicity, and educational background of fathers; working-class fathers usually
do not participate in the discourse of involved fatherhood as educated middle-class fathers do. However working-class fathers are involved in family management on a very pragmatic basis, they do it but they do not talk about it; middle-class fathers regularly talk about it but seldom do it; therefore research should focus more on practices than on discourse”.

Quality time concept of fathers’ caring does not necessarily create the father’s sharing

According to Michael Meuser, several images of fathers coexist: the traditional breadwinner; the modern breadwinner; the holistic father. Qualitative and quantitative studies show that the modern breadwinner father is the most common pattern among contemporary men (the father sees himself as the main breadwinner, while the mother is responsible for domestic work, childcare and family life, but the division of work is not very strict); the modern breadwinner assists his wife in domestic work; identity is both work and family-centred; his presence within the family is relatively high during pregnancy and after childbirth, but decreases afterwards.

Another point stressed by Michael Meuser is that we cannot talk about a father’s contribution to family management without talking about the structure of the labour market. Changes in family management and getting fathers more involved are not only caused by changing attitudes towards fatherhood but can also be caused by structural changes in the labour market and working conditions. These take place independently of fathers’ decisions and intentions: “in understanding changes of family life we must go outside the family and take the workplace more into account”. The major question is: how is it possible to combine paternal engagement and family management with an occupational career?

The family perspective. Are there qualitative studies on the subjective perspective of family members?

The main idea stressed in this discussion was that the wellbeing of families is related to families’ choices. “How do they create and plan their family life? What are families’ real needs today?” “What do they think about gender gaps in family management, task allocation and work-family balance?” Participants agreed that although there are some studies at the national level, there is a gap in comparable cross-national studies, both qualitative and longitudinal.
Family management and the life-course perspective

It was often mentioned that when studying family management there is a need to consider the transitions in the life-course (to parenthood, children entering school, children leaving home, caring for elderly), and in particular the aspect of caring during the life-course: for children, teenagers, grandparents. It was also stressed that it is important to include in research the role children play in the allocation of tasks.

There was also a discussion on how economic pressures in a time of economic crisis impact on family management and affect family decisions (one participant mentioned the case of mothers in Romania who take parental leave even though they leave their children with family relatives and go to work due to financial constraints).

Gender equality perspective and family management of unpaid work

The idea of a gap between men and women’s discourses and their daily family management was again raised. It was recognised that there are some quantitative studies which show that men want to participate more in family life, but it is important to research further why there is still a huge gap between rhetoric and practice. The importance of a qualitative approach to this issue was stressed, in order to have a better understanding of gender interactions within families. Regulation was underlined as a key concept for understanding this type of negotiation.

“The patterns and trends of family management in the European Union show that female participation in the labour market is increasing across the EU in each Member State. The male breadwinner model is being replaced by alternative models, with variations between and within countries. Characteristics of welfare policy have been found to be responsible for cross-country variations. Good quality childcare services with a generous parental leave system can be major tools in reshaping female employment patterns. Yet, women still spend less time in the labour market, are more likely to take part-time jobs, and have more career breaks than men do. At the same time they are still primarily responsible for housework, as well as for child rearing, spending on average twice as many hours on these activities as men do. Very little qualitative research has been carried out to assess this phenomenon.”
Another issue raised is that family management is completely different whether there is a child or not. After the birth of the first child both parents increase family time, but there is a growing discrepancy over time: men increase their working hours and women increase the amount of time spent with the family. It was suggested that it would be interesting to compare the division of domestic work in childless couples, who tend to share household tasks, but less so after the birth of a child.

The possible long-term effects of policies on gender equality was also mentioned, given the example of Swedish men, who seem to participate more in family management, with greater gender equality: “to what extent is there a kind of long-term policy impact on the development of such participation?”

How to value unpaid work? Are there policies that value unpaid work? How to value parental leave more? What would happen in Europe without all this unpaid work?

The issue of the value of unpaid work was raised. Two possible ways of valuing parenting work were mentioned: recognition and remuneration. Participants agreed that there are different psychological effects of paid and unpaid work on the individual; “if you get paid for work you feel you get appreciation, unpaid work is valued in a different way”. A suggestion was made to include unpaid work related to childrearing in pension calculations as well as in GDP.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- More research is needed on the interactions/negotiations between parents regarding the division of paid and unpaid work (their practices, perceptions, justifications, preferences, factors that influence work sharing). Looking at everyday aspects of family management and negotiation processes between father and mother.
- More research on best practices for valuing unpaid work should be carried out.
- More comparative research on the subjective perspective of family members: what they really want, what their needs are.
- More research on the impact of structural constraints, cultural factors and welfare policies on family management.
- It is important to include children’s contribution to domestic/paid labour in research, to study family management according to children’s age, and to take into consideration children’s views and opinions regarding their wishes in family management.
• Linking family research and research on the labour market (particularly regarding choices in family management and structural constraints set by the labour market and career orientation).
• The impact of the economic crisis on family decisions and family policies should be better researched.
• There is a huge need to include the male perspective on family management since there is a lack of quantitative and qualitative comparable studies on men’s practices and perspectives of family management.
• There is a lack of research on the images of fatherhood, the conditions and obstacles for realising these models, and little attention has been given to the constraints on family change caused by labour market demands.
• More research on how new adolescence patterns, substance abuse, violence and insecurity affect family allocation of task management and involvement in the work force; the importance of studies dealing with work/family conflict among employed mothers of adolescents with high risk factors for substance use.
• More research on families with high stress levels (also identifying the major stress factors, what promotes stress and what diminishes it).
• Research should take into account the family management of marginal groups (minorities, migrants, families with disabled persons, families affected by poverty, etc.).
• Research should take into account the diversity of families (heterosexual, same sex, blended, single parents, families living together apart), in family management.
• The need for more research on quality time parents spend with children (primary/secondary childcare time) in order to get to know the best type of educational attitudes parents have towards children, with regard to setting limits, teaching, listening skills, educational security, sharing a good time together, etc.
• More research on best practices in work-family balance, which allow children to develop a secure attachment to their parents and reduce stress within the family during the early years of a child.
• Impact of early high quality childcare on child’s wellbeing and development; long-term effects of early life experiences of maternal deprivation; the benefits of parental leave from the perspective of the child’s wellbeing; impact of affordable high quality childcare on women’s participation in the labour market; understanding the conditions which are required to preserve a child’s attachment to parents/mothers when they work outside home; understanding the family-friendly actions that employers can take to preserve attachments
between children and parents (collection of best practices in order to promote and defend attachment).

2.1.6 Existential Field 6 - Social care and social services

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

The focus group started with a presentation by Marjo Kuronen (University of Jyväskylä, Finland), who together with Kimmo Jokinen and Teppo Kröger authored the report “Existential Field 6: Social care and social services”. Marjo gave a summary of the main findings of this report, which reviewed most of European comparative research carried out since the mid-1990s on social care and social services. Marjo’s presentation was followed by a keynote speech by Anneli Anttonen (University of Tampere, Finland) on “Care policies in transition”.

Anneli Anttonen commented on the report by discussing issues and questions which are currently at the heart of comparative research on social care. She stated that social care is of growing importance due to ageing and the related increase of care needs, but also due to the adult worker model which requires both parents of young children to work and which has gained popularity within EU employment policies. According to her, a key question is what happens to informal care – because it is currently the major source of care and will remain so in the future. For example, the tendency to expect workers to extend their careers in paid work (working longer hours and working longer over the life-course) can represent a kind of a threat to care and informal care, as it can create difficulties for spousal and other carers and therefore give rise to new tensions between paid and unpaid work. She stated that in the context of labour market relations and changes in employment we need to look at care as real work, because care is work and an activity somebody has to do: “care is a labour-intensive activity”.

There is a continuous need for more and better care resulting from the expectations of the ageing middle classes: this is a big challenge for care services and policies. Good quality care is particularly important for the future, as people develop more consciousness of social care. On the other hand, there are major inequalities (care and social capital are needed to manage and negotiate complex systems of social policies); and there are significant differences between groups of people in terms of access to care services and informal resources. Anneli Anttonen identified an international tendency to move from services-in-kind to monetary benefits and the emergence of new hybrid forms of work and care. She also commented
on the concept of defamilialisation. This is a problematic concept because it decreases the role of families as a source of care. However, she believes people still invest morally in families and informal care and that family responsibilities remain strong everywhere: “the moral commitment to informal care is very strong”. Defamilialisation may be related to social policy, and although there are more public policies, this does not mean that the idea of family is getting weaker. Even if people are moving into paid work, they still have a strong commitment to family members closest to them.

Anneli Anttonen also mentioned that transnational care is an emerging field that is becoming central in international care research. She was referring not only to immigrants as care workers or care workers in private houses but also to the different strategies migrant families have to develop in order to care for relatives living in another country or continent, and the importance of transnational relations of care and how care is organised. Finally, she raised the question of why the European Union has a European Employment Strategy but does not have a European Care Strategy: “if the European Union wants to promote employment for everyone it must take into account care, what happens to care, they go hand in hand […] if the European Union needs an employment strategy it also needs a care strategy”.

A discussion followed the two keynote speeches, and four stakeholders presented statements. After the statements, the remaining time of the focus group was used for a general discussion about major gaps within comparative social care and social service research. The following paragraphs summarise the general discussion that took place in this focus group.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

Some stakeholders highlighted the need for more research on dynamics within families, particularly on unequal gendered power relations within the family and gender hierarchies that spread over different spheres of life. It was stated that without understanding changing gender inequalities within the family, it is not possible to reach gender equality in society. Attention should in particular be paid to domestic violence: it should be seen as gender-based and as a public concern, not as a private family affair. According to stakeholders, attaining gender equality requires a reform in values and gender role stereotypes as well as in the general social organisation of society. It was also stressed that although there are many prevention and protection programmes for victims of domestic violence all over the Europe, within the EU there are still no common standards on domestic violence. Social policies are considered to be crucial for promoting co-ordination between all the actors involved in the process of implementing the
law. Public awareness campaigns, psychological support services and specific protection measures such as shelters were also mentioned as important policy measures in order to approach and protect victims of domestic violence.

Other stakeholders focussed on the wellbeing of children and young people, arguing that there have been dramatic increases in inequality across the EU, bringing greater marginalisation and pockets of disadvantaged communities, while the current economic crisis is plunging more families into poverty, governments are slashing budgets, and preventive and support services are under threat. As a consequence, a major problem is that of children and young people ending up in child protection and criminal justice systems. According to these stakeholders, governments should instead invest in high quality prevention, early intervention, and secure access to adequate services, including child and health-care (affordable services with universal access), and increase training and professional recognition of people working in the service and care sector.

Another point stressed by stakeholders was that families should be able to make choices in relation to what kind of education they want to give their children, and whether to choose if they want to care for their family members regardless of age. The example of Spain was given, where maternity leave is very short (only four months) and childcare services are limited. Due to the lack of childcare, some parents are forced to stay at home. In comparison, Nordic-style childcare services make it easier to achieve a balance, and the French system offers many opportunities as well. All in all, more flexibility and choice are needed within both childcare and eldercare services.

Stakeholders pointed out the growing demand for family support services (cleaning, cooking, etc.) due to ageing. Families’ choice of social care arrangements depends on several factors such as existing formal care services, social networks and organisational cultures (employer perspective). In Europe there are huge national differences in the use of these services and too little comparative analysis: one of the barriers is the financial resources of families. Moreover, stakeholders stated that the links between migration and care are one of the main future challenges in the domain of social services. As a consequence, issues such as the qualifications and working conditions of migrant care workers ought to be studied. Additionally, the barriers that older people with a migrant background and/or with the Alzheimer’s disease face in accessing care services also require more research attention.

**Defamilialisation and familialisation of care**

How can we address social work/social care and public services in order to strengthen families and keep them together? Who is giving the care is the
crucial question for European countries: “there is still a dual system of care: either family members are cared for within the family at home by the mother or by a middle-aged female who has given up her professional work for almost nothing in terms of financial compensation, or the care is done in an institution where the family cannot be; however there is a third option which is missing: a kind of intermediate care arrangement, a home care worker, or an institution for some hours of the day or some days of the week”.

It was pointed out that there should be more research on this mixed solution: “the perspective of the care receiver, e.g. being an adult or a child is important, because whose voice is actually heard? For example, when we promote national care policies, whose voice is heard? Is it empowerment of users or is it empowerment of professionals and care workers?”

What will happen to informal care in the near future? To what extent should informal care be regulated by the state?

It was stated that informal care is the major source of care and that informal care is one of the central questions in the field of care policies. One crucial question raised in the discussion was “what happens to informal care? Will there be less informal care in the future?” The discussion also pointed out that if, on the one hand, informal care is important because it allows families to stay together, on the other hand we do not know to what extent these families have the knowledge and skills to care. It was also stated that “the best care is given within the family but also the worst”, thereby raising the question of how to control what happens in informal care within the family, in particular in the case of abuse in care relations: how to intervene?

Policies do impact on families

“If we look at public expenditure on families and children as a proportion of GDP we see that some countries have invested more money in childcare than others. If the government invests a lot of money in children and families (as the Nordic countries did in the 60s and 70s through child allowances and different types of benefits paid to families) this will have a positive outcome in the long term: child poverty, for example, is very low in Nordic countries. In the long run care policies and special childcare policies impact on the wellbeing of families and children. How to study this? By doing longitudinal comparisons between countries?”
How to monitor and compare the quality of childcare services across European countries?

The availability of services is important but their quality is equally so. However, there is little data in European databases: “if you want to do a critical comparison of childcare and look at differences and outcomes across European countries what you get out of EU databases is coverage rates and maybe how many people are working per child. This data is too limited: there is a need for more detailed data in order to compare quality of childcare and to identify the reasons for the different outcomes”.

What is the impact of access to and use of social services on reducing poverty and inequality? To what extent are available services reaching out to the most vulnerable groups?

Participants pointed out that there are new types of inequalities. There are vulnerable groups, vulnerable consumers and vulnerable managers of the complex policy care system, not only because of the lack of money or due to the traditional criteria associated with social class but also due to “lack of knowledge or lack of language skills, specially when there are a lot of people suffering from memory diseases”. The importance of understanding the links between care and social capital was also emphasised.

A question was raised in connection with the social value of childcare provision. According to this view childcare services might have a role in “achieving social cohesion and fundamental social democratic goals – making gender equality opportunities a reality, eliminating poverty, maximising life chances of all children irrespective of the parent’s socio-economic background, reflecting the importance of high quality access and affordability of childcare services”. The contribution that early childcare services might make to breaking cycles of family deprivation, reducing inequalities and combating discrimination was also stressed. Ethnic minority children were also mentioned, particularly the fact that “those whose native language is not the home country’s benefit enormously from early childcare since they can get a start in language learning and improve their chances of integrating later on at school and within their communities”.

Families’ perspective on care

“It is very important to look at care from the point of view of families and households”. The discussion focussed on the issue of providing families with all the necessary conditions for making choices, considering not only those who
are in the labour market but also those outside it. Are families free to choose between full-time and part-time employment as well as between types of care services? And do they wish to use formal childcare? “What does the shift from welfare government to welfare governance mean?” and “what is the role of the family in this shift?”

Children’s perspective

In the debate it was pointed out that there is an urgent need for research to focus more on children’s perspectives and therefore also on their psychological and educational needs. It was also stated that the needs/interests of children are sometimes different from their parents’ interests: “what the children are saying and what the adults are saying is not the same, good services may not be what children want”.

Employers

The attitudes of employers were considered to be vital: if they are against female/maternal employment, then public policy measures like childcare and parental leave provisions are not sufficient to bring about change. Employers’ interests influence flexible working arrangements, and there is a need today to promote more worker-friendly/family-friendly flexibility: “Why should employers invest in family-friendly measures? The social responsibility of employers and private businesses needs to be restored, but there is also clear research evidence that proves that family-friendliness brings employers different economic benefits”.

Connections between childcare and eldercare

Linkages between elderly care and childcare policies, and between these and research, are often missing, because they are administered separately from each other. A life-course perspective is needed in policy and research. Participants felt that there are almost no reconciliation measures/studies on the family carers of older people. There are tensions and contradictions between the informal and formal economy/work as well as between childcare and eldercare, and research needs to highlight these: “childcare seems to have a different status to elderly care”; “there are no special Europe-wide leave arrangements for the care of older people as there are in the area of parental leave”.
Migration and care

“Migration and transnational care will be crucial for policy and research in the future”. “Policy should take into account the differing needs of different migrant groups”. “Children who are left behind in the country of origin are in a very difficult situation: reunification of families is also an issue for care policy”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- More comparative research on care leave arrangements, on state policies in this field and on company-level policies at a European level. There is more information on family-friendly company measures related to childcare but not so much information on those related to elderly care.
- More studies on informal care, including spousal care, mother and father care, different types of care in family relations.
- More research on organisational cultures and the employers’ perspective on care (example of the project “Working Better”5).
- Research on how men are discriminated against in the labour market if they have to care for dependent relatives (elderly but also children).
- More comparative research on what the future generations are expecting from public care services to support the last stage of their life cycle in the long term. In what ways do they plan to resort to social services?
- Research on young people’s opinions on the elderly.
- More research is needed on inequalities related to social care infrastructure, by looking at developments at global and regional levels, and the impact of accessing and using social services on inequalities in society. How do social services help to reduce poverty?
- The importance of incorporating the views of beneficiaries in research on care: the perspective of people in need of care/care receivers is still mainly missing (including children’s perspective). Qualitative comparative research, the best way of understanding people’s points of view and to explore how people experience care, is very useful here.
- There is a need for studies on new forms of dialogue between the generations (especially in families without grandparents).
- More research on the internationalisation of care and the different forms it takes (relations between care, gender and migration issues; global care chains and transnational care; different strategies for

5 See http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/working-better/.
caring for relatives living in other countries or continents; caring as an international business; care needs of migrant families; migrants as ‘grey labour’ in home-based care and formal care services).

- More research is needed on the dynamics (tensions and contradictions) of the changing relationship between formal and informal (family-based) care, and on changes in public policies over time (in-depth analysis of policy formation and the delivery process).
- There is a lack of knowledge and not enough data on care workers in private houses.
- There is very little research on children who receive institutional/foster care imposed by the government (experiences of different countries, different solutions).
- There is a need for more research on international adoption.
- There is a lack of research on children whose parents are no longer taking care of them, for example those whose parents are in prison or mentally ill. Likewise research is scarce on children who have previously been in institutional care and return home, as well as on the skills parents may require in order to take them back.
- Research on the best childcare solutions from the point of view of the child’s interests and wellbeing: what are the best care arrangements to fit children’s needs?
- Research is still scarce on the use of technology both in formal and informal care.
- Existing research concentrates on care for children and older people: care needs of other adult family members (e.g. people with disabilities) is missing.
- Quality (and not only quantity and availability) of formal care services should be studied in greater depth.

2.1.7 Existential Field 7 - Social inequality and diversity of families

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

The session began with a presentation by Karin Wall (Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon and leader of Existential Field 7), of the report which summarises the state of the art of research on “Social inequality and diversity of families”. Her presentation highlighted the main results in terms of major trends and research gaps in the four fields of analysis included in the general topic of “Social inequalities and diversity of families”: migration, poverty, family violence and social inequalities of families. Following this presentation there was a brief discussion which was enhanced by two other
presentations from experts as well as by the statements of stakeholders who took part in this session⁶.

Claudine Attias-Donfut (Caisse Nationale d’Assurance Vieillesse) made a keynote speech on “The social destiny of children of immigrant families – unchaining generations”. She based her presentation on the results of research on intergenerational relations among immigrants. This study covered several aspects (family structures, living conditions, cultural norms, solidarities and conflicts) and examined a number of two-way relationships (between parents and their children; and between parents and their own parents). She addressed three main questions: 1 - Are inequalities in educational performance mainly determined by the socio-economic circumstances of the families in the country of immigration? 2 - Is there any influence of the social milieu of origin (in the country of birth)? 3 - Do ethnic origins (birth country) play a role? She mainly concluded that: family socio-economic circumstances and neighbourhood are stronger determinants than country of origin; the parents’ social milieu of origin is more important than ‘ethnicity’ or country of origin; immigrants’ daughters perform better and have fewer problems; only a small minority of immigrants have serious problems; the majority of children are on a path to success.

Maria das Dores Guerreiro (ISCTE – University Institute of Lisbon) made a presentation on “Social inequalities and employment patterns”. She highlighted the results of two surveys, Quality of life in a changing Europe⁷ and International European Values Survey⁸ which contain comparisons between European countries relating to people’s overall work and life satisfaction. She concentrated on variations across countries, activity sectors, occupations, social class and gender. For example, in countries with very long hours in paid work, men and women are less satisfied with work and family. On the other hand, countries where people have a higher feeling of job insecurity also show lower degrees of life satisfaction.

The main idea stressed by Maria das Dores is that there are several factors determining family/work stress, such as: sex, marital status, age, having children at home, number of hours in paid and in unpaid work, sense of workload, occupation, cultural values, etc. It is important to take all these factors into account when trying to understand how families combine family and work and how they feel about it. She also emphasised that inequality in terms of families’ wellbeing may be caused by families’ internal configurations, such as: the age of family members, their care needs, and the way paid and unpaid work

⁶ Collette Fagan was unable to be present, though she sent us her presentation and notes.
⁷ See http://www.projectquality.org/.
⁸ See http://www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu/.
is organised. According to Maria das Dores Guerreiro, there are specific groups which are still understudied: unemployed families, families affected by health problems (physical or mental disabilities), families whose children have been taken into foster care: “all these families are known as dysfunctional families, but very little is known about their configurations, work-life balance, support networks, children’s socialisation process”. A major question is: how are policies supporting families not only with respect to financial resources but also in terms of skills and the empowerment they need?

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

The experts’ presentations and the contributions by stakeholders underlined several key questions which were discussed by the group. The following topics summarise the debate within this focus group.

**Topic 1 - Social inequalities and families**

*How unequal are European societies? How does this impact on families?*

Participants agreed that social inequalities deriving from the unequal distribution of economic, social, educational, and cultural resources continue to impact strongly on family forms and dynamics, affecting families’ opportunities and economic wellbeing. It was recognised that there is a lack of studies connecting social inequalities and family life at the national and particularly the cross-national levels; in the major databases - the European Social Survey, the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) - a large amount of data has been examined in terms of gender equality across European societies, but social inequality and the linkages between social inequality and families have not.

*How is social inequality produced and reproduced in families? Are policy and research only looking at the effects of social inequality or are they also trying to deal with the origins of social inequality?*

“Researchers have moved away from the issue of social inequality and family life during the last few decades, and the focus has been much more on paradigms highlighting the concepts of agency, individualisation, choice and individual diversity [...] class analysis seems to be not so useful anymore [...] in democratic and individualised societies individuals and families have more options, they construct their families and their biographies with greater freedom and more opportunities; but social inequalities have been
increasing in European societies, and their impact on family life must be taken into account. In this context the concept of class is probably still useful, even if it implies rethinking theoretical approaches based on these concepts”.

The coexistence of old and new patterns of social inequalities in families. Research points in two different directions:

“On the one hand, social inequalities in family life seem to follow old and more traditional patterns of social inequality. On the other hand, these old patterns can coexist with the emergence of new patterns which need further research: for example: a) social inequalities linked to new types of conjugal homogamy; b) inequalities linked to differences between dual earner couples and male breadwinner couples; c) new forms of inequality which are emerging between upper and lower-class families: we are quite used to the trend according to which upper-class families spend more time helping their children with homework while lower-class families spend less time, but in fact what recent research seems to show is that both lower-class and upper-class parents spend the same amount of time helping their children with homework. Nevertheless, upper-class families provide other types of support to children. This is not being properly researched at present”.

Cumulative aspects of social inequalities

“There are signs that there are cumulative processes occurring in families and individual lives, e.g. disabled people are more likely to be victims of rape; migrants have a higher probability of belonging to a lower class; the fact of belonging to a disadvantaged group might in turn be related to the likelihood of being disadvantaged in other aspects of life later on”.

How to re-examine social inequality in Europe? Are there sufficient and effective indicators in international databases for measuring social inequalities?

“International databases have focussed on classical indicators. We need to go beyond them. If we only have indicators showing that European societies are unequal from the point of view of income (GDP), we do not really know how social inequality is being
produced, so we need to take various cultural, material and economic indicators into account”.

The analysis of inequalities is still centred on certain types of families

“A subject like this - social inequalities and diversity of families - should include a broader spectrum of families: for example, family reunion is more difficult or even impossible for joint children of homosexual families. Same sex families are also discriminated against. The gender pay gap is higher in female-female families”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

• There is very little research on new patterns of social inequality in families and on new forms of producing inequality. Some family forms and dynamics are very strongly related to class and others are not. It is important to carry out more national and cross-national research on social inequalities and how they impact on a variety of family indicators (e.g. living arrangements, interactions, division of labour, family formation and dissolution, patterns of fatherhood and motherhood, family networks, resource flows). It is also crucial to understand the process whereby families produce and reproduce material/social/cultural advantage and disadvantage (e.g. the role of intergenerational resource flows); case studies are needed to analyse how families are transmitting and reproducing inequality and how they manage to improve their children’s life chances.

• There is a need to know more about the cumulative aspects of social inequalities in order to understand the processes of cumulative disadvantage that affect specific categories of families and people (e.g. the disabled, immigrants, minorities). More comparable data is required on families outside the labour market, the unemployed, the retired, the sick; families affected by health problems, physical or mental disability or some kind of addiction; families whose children have been taken into institutional care, families labelled as “families at risk”. Very little is known in terms of cross-national studies on their configuration, age of family members, forms of interaction, organisation of paid work and unpaid work, support networks, children’s socialisation, the way they balance different spheres of life.

• Research does not sufficiently cover the diversity of families with regard to lesbian and gay families’ experiences. More research is needed on the gender pay gap in lesbian families as well as on other aspects of family life usually studied for families in general.
**Topic 2 - Migration**

Migration is a major challenge for European families, research, and policies: “Migrant flows to Europe (as well as inside Europe) continue to be significant, with dual opportunities in the labour market (skilled and unskilled) as well as more diversity in family migration. Feminisation of migration and new types of family migration are emerging (e.g. women first migration). The number of foreign-born and mixed-born children (of couples of different nationalities) will increase over the coming years, thus representing a major challenge for families (for example, the need for families to negotiate cultural differences within schools and in local communities) as well for policies (e.g. the educational system) and for research. Not enough research has been carried out on how European societies are going to deal with this”.

**Policies and attitudes to family reunion are becoming more restrictive: how is this going to affect immigrant families and their integration in the different European countries?**

“In a context of restrictions on family reunion, and considering the emergence of new patterns of family migration (e.g. the feminisation of migration and mixed marriages): what happens if we have more and more couples who come to Europe and leave their children behind, in South America, in Africa? What does this mean from the point of view of parenting and from the point of view of integration in the host society?”

**The increasing importance of the concept of ‘mobile families’ – the need to consider all types of mobility. Analysing mobility and how it impacts on the reconciliation between work and family life**

“Mobile families are likely to experience social isolation from kinship (as Jean Kellerhals said in his presentation in the plenary session); mobile families might have significant problems reconciling work and family life: caring for young children in the host country while caring at distance for children and other older relatives who were left behind in the sending country. How does this affect integration?”
Mobile families and transnational care

“An issue that has recently made its way onto the research agenda (and is related to the feminisation of migration for the care sector) is the complexity of caring relationships and the ‘transnationalisation’ of care – the difficulties of taking care of children and (for example) other relatives who are left behind in the home country”.

Mobility as a sense of Europe

“The concept of mobile families illustrates a kind of a European sense of family”.

Mobility and the gender equality perspective

“The link between the concept of ‘mobile families’ and internal mobility within the European Union from a gender perspective: mobile families impact not only on working-class families but also on middle and upper-class families, particularly those who have highly skilled occupations, for example people involved in science careers. Women and men in highly skilled occupations have high expectations of mobility, but the ability to go abroad for a longer period is also largely related to men’s and women’s differing ability to cope with the demands of career progression”.

Mobility and the life-course perspective

“It would be interesting to include the life-course perspective when studying mobility, because mobility seems to occur in specific life stages and may have different consequences for individuals and families according to whether it happens before or after having children”.

What is the social destiny of children of immigrant families? Migrants from countries outside the EU face a greater risk of poverty, low integration and social mobility

“The importance of neighbour and family networks: this is a major challenge from the point of view of the integration of second and third generation immigrants”.

173
“There is a need for more research on social mobility and the educational success of children of immigrant families who have attended crèches and pre-school [...] are they doing better than previous generations?”

Major gaps and challenges for research

- European case-studies of international family migration tend to assume traditional paradigms of family organisation - the nuclear family above all - and have not fully explored the variety of family and household types which derive from home-country settings. There is a need to rethink the concept of families (male breadwinner versus many different types and forms of migrant families).
- It is also important to focus on changes within the family resulting from immigration: new types of family forms and organisation of gender roles (e.g. conflicts over women’s roles, possible changes in the construction of masculinity which may affect both immigrant and non-immigrant populations).
- Further research on transnational families: the impact of national and cultural combinations on relationships, men's, women's and children's lives, host countries' attitudes; EU citizens travelling, studying and working abroad, etc.).
- Studies on students' migration are very recent and growing fast (examining social status, mobility and immigration policies).
- Need for research on mobile families according to a broader view of several types of mobility (see discussion).
- More research on the social mobility of children of migrant families. There is no data comparing cohorts of migrant children attending childcare in order to evaluate their social mobility.
- Little is known about undocumented immigrants or asylum seekers, those who are ‘below the radar’. There is a need to improve the ways of reaching out to this group, to obtain data on illegal immigration, and to conduct further studies on aspects of health and social insurance for these immigrants, as well as on the impact of illegal immigrants’ circumstances on their children’s life chances.
- Studies on retirement migration of healthy north-western Europeans to southern Europe; but also within each European country, because more immigrant people will get older in the host countries, and there are no studies on this.
- There is still little knowledge on how cultural differences are being negotiated. How are host societies (and families in the host societies) responding to increased levels of immigration? What is going on in the schools?
Chapter 2: Critical Review of Research on Families and Family Policies in Europe

- The effects of (limited) political participation on immigrants’ integration and a deeper analysis of the reasons why naturalisation and dual citizenship are used (or not) by immigrants and their offspring.
- It is crucial to explore the positive aspects of immigration for families and individuals. More research is needed on ‘success stories’: for example, a better understanding of immigrants’ entrepreneurship and related ethnic aspects of the economic benefit deriving from ethnic and social networks and transnational ties.
- More research on immigrants’ fertility behaviour; very little is known about the differences between groups, or countries, if they are due to ethnic, cultural, socio-economic or political factors.

**Topic 3 - Poverty**

**The persistence of poverty in European societies**

“How far in each country is there a persistence of poverty over the life-course of individuals, of men and women? In 2007 17 per cent of Europeans were considered to be at risk of poverty. The unemployed, immigrants from outside the EU, children in single parent households, those with low educational attainment levels, and elderly women are regarded as high risk in this context, as are the following types of household: single parents, large families, single persons”.

**Discussion on the narrow focus of the economic perspective of poverty which uses income as an indicator (Luxembourg Income Survey (LIS), European Community Household Panel (ECHP), European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC))**

“Studies on poverty are based on low income, but indicators other than income should be used. Income is very rarely linked to other types of indicators, for example living conditions”.

**Limitations of the statistical approach: how can we achieve comparability in statistics on poverty in different countries?**

“Same statistics on poverty mean different things in different countries due to different definitions of concepts and their ‘operationalisation’. Hence the importance of looking at households and not only at categories of people, and of combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches.”
**Poverty over the life-course**

“The routes into poverty include accident, ill-health, unemployment, divorce, pregnancy, and lack of social and family networks. There is a need for more data on people who manage to get out of poverty, according to different life stages, and on social policy and its outcomes: the role of social policy as an incentive and as an opportunity for reducing the poverty gap. How are childcare facilities related to the prevention of poverty?”

**Major gaps and challenges for research**

- More research on the life trajectories of poor people and routes into poverty, but with an emphasis on how to escape poverty;
- There are very few broader studies (both quantitative and qualitative) on the experience of poverty as well on the social patterns of poverty: there is a need to move beyond income indicators;
- Need for more data on the poverty of people who are caring or are cared for by family members;
- More studies on poor people/households in different urban and rural contexts.

**Topic 4 - Family violence**

**Domestic violence continues to be significant**

- Several types of family violence were identified: psychological, economic, physical, sexual. It is still largely gender-based (conjugal partners), but also occurs between parents and children, adults and elderly parents, boyfriend and girlfriend.

**Domestic violence policies and legislation are still relatively new in many countries (1990s)**

At present it is considered a public crime in several national legislations, on a par with other criminal offences.

**Specific groups at risk**

Low income households, those in which individuals have low educational attainment levels, children in large families and in families with alcohol problems, women
with higher educational levels than their spouse, unemployed women with an employed partner, women in the process of separation, pregnant women, immigrant women of uncertain legal status, young women seeking abortion.

“Violence is not only about women. Most of the studies fail to take into account the fact that men are also victims of violence. Only 20-50 per cent of all the different forms of intimate partner violence are reported to the police, fewer relate to violence against men. Men seem to be more reluctant to report this violence”.

The problem of violence against disabled persons and elderly persons

“About 10 -13 per cent of women with disabilities reported having experienced abuse, a rate similar to that of women without disabilities. For all women, the abuser is often a partner or family member, but women with disabilities are more likely to be abused by health care providers or caretakers”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- Very recent and little research looking in depth at families and violence, particularly variables and situations that encourage violence; lack of analysis using specific target samples of social categories of families to understand other forms of domestic violence.
- It is important to move beyond the gender unidirectional paradigm predominantly focussed on violence against women and to include violence against men.
- There is practically no research on what factors help people to break out of the cycle of violence.

2.1.8 Existential Field 8 - Family, media, family education and participation

Organisation of the focus group and keynote speeches

Sonia Livingston (London School of Economics) opened the focus group by presenting a brief overview of the main findings of the report on Existential Field 8 - Family, media, family and education, which is co-authored by herself and Ranjana Das (also London School of Economics). After this first presentation, the three keynote speakers provided their critical responses regarding the main research gaps and made some suggestions for the future Research Agenda.
Ann Phoenix (Institute of Education, University of London), made a presentation mainly focussed on implications for the family. She began by emphasising the importance of objective (economic factors) and subjective indicators when speaking about and measuring families' wellbeing: “how people feel about their lives and how they are doing is key [...] subjective wellbeing is the key to understanding social policy terms on wellbeing”. She continued by reinforcing her belief in the importance and pertinence of the major trends and findings of the report authored by Sonia Livingstone and Ranjana Das and went on to focus on the major gaps in existing research on this field (see Major gaps and challenges for research).

José A. Simões (New University of Lisbon) made a critical response focussed on youth cultures research, media and family. He raised some questions: are youth cultures a product of media or is it the other way around? Are youth cultures homogenised or are they diversified? One ambiguous and complex relationship which needs further research, he believes, is how media plays a part in the construction of youth itself, in the way youth sees itself and in the way young people identify with what emerges from the media. He also stressed that there is a tension between two tendencies: individualisation (e.g. bedroom cultures, mobile phones) and mobility inside the home (media appropriation is in a complex relationship to space) on the one hand, and togetherness (family socialisation within the media) on the other. An important question for him is: what part does the family still play in media socialisation and socialisation in general?

Naureen Khan (Commission for Racial Equality, London) focused on stakeholders’ perspectives on the future potential of this research, specifically regarding EU policy and legislation. Her focus was on the internet, mobile phones and associated technology as well as on the impact that the personalisation of media has on children and in the ‘bedroom culture’. She pointed to the need for more research on the positive side of children’s internet usage. Research usually focussed on the risks of children’s exposure. She felt it would be interesting to know more about what goes on in the bedroom not only in terms of risks but also in terms of empowering children and their rights to privacy. Based on the report’s findings, she stated that there is a significant children’s usage of the internet: it would be interesting to know more about patterns of internet, mobile phone and other technologies’ usage by children aged between six and eleven. She also mentioned the subject of parental mediation: there are various patterns in terms of mediation, but is parents’ mediation effective? Is that the right angle to focus on in terms of children’s usage? Shouldn’t we know more in terms of children?

On the future Research Agenda she believes there are still gaps and challenges in understanding the importance of social networks. She gave the
example of Facebook (for example, having thousands of friends on Facebook) and asked, “What does that mean for friendship and relationships? What does it mean for that generation? What impact does it have on the development of family?” Another interesting issue is the next generation parents who will be more confident and more aware of technology and how that will impact on their relationship with their children. She ended by emphasising that “it is important to move away from that risk perspective and to be more proactive in working towards a more positive agenda”. The EU Institutions’ approach to internet safety and media and technology is always “a look in terms of risk perspective and too reactive”. In addition, although there are several EU strategies for media and use of technology, the impact of family research is very poorly covered in these strategies. Finally she pointed out that it is important to persuade decision-makers to carry out more comparative research on all 27 Member States, and not just on a few countries.

Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

The discussion around the themes of safe use of internet, children’s exposure to risks, their internet usage and parents’ regulation of children’s media usage (particularly internet and TV) dominated the overall debate. The following points summarise the discussion within this focus group:

Risks of children’s exposure to the internet

“New technologies such as the internet, mobile phones and video games have enormous potential in a positive as well as negative sense, and therefore we face new risks and opportunities that need to be identified and studied, for example how can parents be helped to develop their educational role at home by knowing both how their children use technology and learning to share that use with them, without abdicating their role. Is there any research on the effectiveness of different kinds of education that children can receive at school about how to be safe, how to participate online, how children connect their views and have a voice in participating?” “The challenge is to retain the notion of the child as an agent, but to recognise structure-constrained agency at the same time”.

Media and parenting

“How can we reach out to parents? How are parents reaching each other? What are parents saying to each other? Where are parents
going for advice when they need advice about parenting? They also use the internet (better-educated parents do so more frequently). How much research is there on this? How can the internet help parents’ networks and how are they using it for parenting? Peer support, state support, online support – which works best? Social and economic differences do make a difference within families… we cannot have a general discourse”.

The importance of media in sustaining and shaping ethnic identities and transnational links - the example of global care chains - ‘emotional transnationalism’

The example given referred to Philippine mothers who go to North America to work in households and cannot bring their children but still care for them at a distance using information and communication technologies as tools, like speaking and seeing through Skype and MSN (they see them every day, ask them for homework).

The impact of media on the subjective ideal of wellbeing

“There is a need for more research on the effects of media, not just the internet but also the effect that TV and the print media, including advertising, can have on shaping adults’ values in consumer societies, the ideal family type, life-courses, ideal relations with children and within the family, ownership of property versus poverty and inequality; leisure life-styles, homogenised cultures versus individualism itself. Adults are also affected by media, and this can have an influence on their children. What do we get from ICT in terms of projection of identities and desires?”

The media as a cause of all social ills versus the potential of media in very different areas of life

“Important that the media are seen as neither good nor bad, but rather as a space, or as a resource which shapes all else; shift away from media effects and moral panic towards understanding the ways in which the media shapes identity, how everyday lives are mediated. For example, how can the media shape societal change towards more sustainable consumption?”
How can we use new technologies to support family relationships?

“A lot of research is oriented to the individual. It is difficult to find specific family-oriented impact research. What are the media doing in terms of family relations? Are they supporting or harming family relationships? These questions are not yet being researched. The example of online family mediation, courses on parenting, marriage preparation courses, education within schools in order to enhance family relations [...] there are lots of ways communication technologies can impact positively on family life, e.g. inter-generational interchanges and grandparenting through ICT”.

The impact information and communication technologies (ICT) technologies can have on reconciling work and family life

“Major impact on time management: the use of media to achieve harmonised management of time and family relations – is this sufficiently researched? Are we doing enough proactive work and trying to find the best solutions to help families reconcile work and family life? Existing research shows that technologies promise better adjustment of the work-life balance, but in fact their use tends to be directed by the workplace”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- Focus on different types of families: there is a need to examine similarities and differences within and between households. Households are the site of reproduction of differences in ICT use by age, but also other variables. More research is needed on specific groups of families such as those with either disabled or dependent persons.
- More research on the process of how knowledge is transferred from the younger generations (who are better able to pick up new things) to the older generation in the household.
- There is very little research on the way ICT is used in mediating transnational family lives. Studies on mediated transnational, ‘glocal’ and hybrid identities need further development. In what ways are ICT the key to new modes of mothering and parenting for immigrant people, e.g. through ‘global care chains’ and ‘emotional transnationalism’.
- The impact of new technologies on health, access to health, information on health; the linkages between the media, ageing and health support services.
- Research to support decision-making and monitoring of the amount of information (multiple messages) people receive; on how the same
message might be received differently by different members of the family.

- It is important to research the impact of media-transmitted biased messages on behaviour economics, both within and between households, and between the generations (some types of bias influence children more than the elderly).
- More research on media evaluation programmes – the evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes aimed at improving media competence and media literacy (in childcare, pre-schools and schools in general).
- Research is needed on how the media can shape families’ attitudes towards more sustainable consumption (how one member influences the whole behaviour of the family e.g. mothers’ purchasing decisions).
- More research on the bedroom culture and social networks of children, particularly internet usage among children aged between six and eleven.
- Need to refocus research on individuals’ media use in terms of implications for family relationships, e.g. how ICT is used to mediate the making and breaking of relationships; the contribution of ICT to helping or hindering work-life balance e.g., via working from home – ‘teleworking’.
- More research on how media can be a tool to assist parenthood, on social networks for parents; how are parents using the internet and talking to each other? How are they using the internet to help them in parenting? How they do advise each other? Support advice for parents in educating their children, etc.; research on parents’ feelings that they have information needs: which parents, in which contexts, which information needs?
- Research on the impact of media in financial education, specially connected with the crisis, and the ability people actually have to manage the household budget.

**Gaps in research and methodology. Three priorities for a future agenda**

**The media as content**

More research is needed on how media content (on ‘old’ and ‘new’ platforms) supports or undermines family life, childhood and identities, and this should be available to guide parents, based on recognition of the fact there is a huge information need among parents (the ‘sandwich generation’).
The media as a tool

Diverse media platforms can be and are being used as tools to reach families and provide information, guidance and advice on various issues. Evaluation is needed to identify which approaches (messages, platforms, and contexts) are effective.

The media as infrastructure

Almost every aspect of family life - relationships, identities, health, education, values, work-life balance - is dependent in some way on media and information technologies. These bring opportunities and risks, and demand new critical and digital skills. Recognising this ‘environmental’ or ‘infrastructural’ aspect of media requires that media be considered a vital part of research projects on diverse aspects of family life.

2.2 Workshops on key policy issues

2.2.1 Workshop 1 - Transitions to adulthood

Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches

The workshop began with an introductory report by Barbara Stauber (University of Tübingen) focusing on “Transitions into parenthood, lessons from the expertise for the Family Platform”.

According to Barbara Stauber, young people’s entry into parenthood is tied in with other aspects of the complex process of transition, in particular the very important transition from school to work. After illustrating the concept of ‘biographical transition’, she focussed on the new problems that this process might involve for young people, drawing attention to changes over the last few decades (transitions that are fragmented and de-standardised, reversible and subject to risk and, above all, individualised). Within this framework, the adoption of public policies in support of young parenthood takes on particular importance, together with the deployment of policies aimed at facilitating the entry of young people into adult life. From a more theoretical perspective, Barbara Stauber stressed the importance of two phenomena with reciprocal tensions: the agency of young people, and the concept of capabilities.

The first term refers to “the socially contextualised and temporally embedded ability to decide upon and perform the practices of everyday life”; the second to “the availability of opportunities – it is not enough to formally remove inequalities in resources. It is also necessary to actively
facilitate access to them, creating real opportunities for (young) people to perceive their rights and transform them into claims”. In summary, the crucial question Barbara Stauber addressed is the importance of highlighting both the capacity of young people to act as protagonists in the processes of change that are taking place today as well as the constraints they have to cope with. From this perspective, the tensions between these two poles constitute the framework in which entry paths into adult life and parenthood unfold. Barbara Stauber concluded her presentation by identifying gaps that still persist in research (see “Major gaps and challenges for research”).

After Barbara Stauber’s presentation, the discussion was opened to all participants including stakeholders’ statements. The following paragraphs summarise the debate and discussion which took place.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

The debate was polarised. Some of the participants shared the sociological perspective that considers transition to adulthood (and to parenthood) as a social construction – and as such, a phenomenon subject to variations at the historical and social level, influenced by political regimes, welfare contexts and so forth. Others, by contrast, expressed an individual (in the sense of extra-social) vision of the transition, relating it in an exclusive manner to the will of the individual/young person to confront his/her entry into the adult world. This latter perspective was focussed more on the concept of responsibility and “taking responsibilities” as an act on the part of individuals and the crucial marker of transition into adult life. In response to this position it was underlined that the way in which young people create their own cultures and give form to their own ways of life (and worlds) occurs within given social contexts and on the basis of specific (and unequal) economic, social, cultural and family resources: “transition to adulthood is a social process which means it does not depend on the individual as a kind of non-social human-being”.

**There are many paths for entering adulthood**

The first issue that was emphasised in connection with the transition to adult life was the pluralisation of its forms and the growing social vulnerability that characterises them. More generally, the social and economic climate today, marked by a high level of uncertainty, has a negative effect both on the transition to adult life and the transition to parenthood. Here, the family of origin and the welfare policies in place play major roles in supporting young people. The role of the media in terms of recent available technologies was also
mentioned as an important tool young people have for building their own expression and autonomy.

*At what age, in the 21st Century, should we consider a person to be an adult?*

A second issue that was discussed was age. How should we view age? Should it be considered as an exclusively biological phenomenon or does the meaning of age change in accordance with historical and social contexts? The age at which women have their first child, for example - today in the whole of Europe women have their first child at an increasingly advanced age - constitutes a clear indicator of social factors overriding biological ones (also related to the lengthening of the educational process which affects both young people and women). In the course of the debate, attention was also drawn to the importance of gender norms tied to age.

A question was raised concerning the consequences of these prolonged processes of becoming an adult - the fact that having children, a permanent partner, and a permanent job, and moving out from the parents’ home are all taking place later in life - all contextual factors that are becoming more common in shaping the experience of being or not being an adult.

*“Definition of adulthood is responsibility”, “Responsibility is also potentially a political issue and a social issue”*

A third important issue that emerged in the debate was that of responsibility, and as mentioned above debate was polarised on this issue. A number of participants insisted that it was vitally important to consider the assumption of responsibility - conceived as an act on the part of individuals - as the essential marker of entry into adult life. From this point of view the social conditions under which the transition takes place would appear to be of limited importance: “becoming adult is becoming responsible for one’s choices; the choice people have to make independently of economic and social circumstances”.

In response there emerged another point of view, shared by other participants, according to which the assumption of responsibility itself - the possibility of conceiving of oneself as a responsible subject - possesses a social and political character. In other words, responsibility too has to be analysed in terms of a social framework and not as a simple act of individual liberty: “decisions are taken according to resources that people have in their daily life, there are constraints and opportunities”.

185
What would be the appropriate policies for enabling these transitions into adulthood? Should the state intervene in the process of transitions to adulthood by giving support to personal choices?

There were different views on the role of policies supporting personal choices aimed at achieving financial independence. A group of participants expressed doubts on the need to promote policies supporting transitions into adulthood. In their view public policies could even turn out to be counterproductive, acting in practice as a substitute for the free exercise of personal responsibility in the face of the tasks involved in transition.

Another group of participants agreed that facilitating transitions is a highly political issue and that all family policy is about these transitions. Two examples were given: one regarding a specific policy in Finland that promotes some autonomy of young people in terms of economic standards: “staying in the parents’ house until age 35 (as in Italy and some other countries) or at 22 (as in Finland) is related to policy decisions. In Finland every person who moves out of his/her parents home to study is given a housing allowance, which means they move out very early, at the age of 18; this gives them a sense of responsibility for being on their own”.

The second example refers to the lack of autonomy women might have in relation to maternity benefits, which are still linked to and dependent on employment and salary: “policies support moving out from the parents’ home but do not support becoming a parent until the person has a permanent job and salary-related benefits [...] a person has to be employed in order to get maternity benefits”. In general all the participants in the working group were in agreement in underlining the need for a strategic policy towards eligibility to maternity benefit regardless of the economic background of the mother.

Finally it was also underlined by many participants that while social policies “can support transitions (to adulthood), they cannot design them”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

There is a need for comparative studies at the European level regarding transitions into parenthood. In particular:

- At the micro level: in what way do young people, women and men, negotiate their roles as mothers and fathers and try to reconcile them with their experiences as young people engaged in the transition to adult life.
- At the meso level: what social resources (institutional and informal) are available to support them in this trajectory, and what are the corresponding constraints?
At the macro level: it is necessary to take into consideration the different transition regimes at the European level and the different degrees of sensitivity towards the tasks associated with parenthood and, more generally, towards the gender differences involved in the experience of parenthood.

It is important to carry out further research on the strategies of young parents with reference to gender (gendering and de-gendering strategies): for example, a return to the traditional gender-based division of labour in the couple or, instead, a restructuring of gender roles after becoming parents for the first time.

Expectations and young people’s needs - “subjective expectations and experiences of youth and adulthood - were considered a key question for research, since it was stressed that young people today expect different things from life/society compared to what their parents expected before them”.

Also important and needing further research are transitions towards parenthood on the part of young migrants (and, in general, understanding this process in terms of transnational labour markets and the demand for labour).

There is a need to explore the process of transition to parenthood in conditions of poverty and in the presence of housing problems.

It was also suggested that it is important to explore dependency interactions between young and older generations as well as their impact on the autonomy of young people; research should also take into account cultural differences between and within countries.

2.2.2 Workshop 2 - Motherhood and fatherhood in Europe

Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches

Margaret O’Brien (University of East Anglia) opened the session of this focus group with a presentation on “Fathers in Europe: the negotiation of caring and earning?” According to Margaret O’Brien, although there is a long legacy of research on father’s work and family reconciliation in the European Union, fatherhood has not been a central issue in family policy developments in Europe. She addressed two questions: 1 - To what extent are European fathers becoming more involved in family life? 2 - How can we engage fathers in the work and care solutions of the future?

Starting with the first question, Margaret O’Brien presented some quantitative longitudinal data and concluded that European fathers are becoming more involved in family life. In fact, not only they are doing more and sharing
more household tasks with their partners, but, and most noteworthy, they are increasingly involved in primary and active caring for small children, promoting (since the mid-1980s) the model of a ‘new father’ - in other words, a father who, besides being the main provider, is also a hands-on and loving one. However, there are considerable differences not only between European countries (with Nordic fathers spending more time in caring), but also within countries, when macro-social variables such as educational attainment levels, working hours, or even full-time/part-time activity of mothers are taken into account.

She also stressed that there are significant and diverse family contexts for becoming a father in contemporary Europe. In fact, fewer men are having children (voluntarily or involuntarily) and when they do, they do it later in life, in a wide range of family formations and sharing the financial responsibility with their partners. This leads us to the second question: how can fathers (as well mothers) work, care for their children and achieve personal wellbeing? According to Margaret O’Brien, the models of contemporary fathers, such as the active, the caring, or the nurturing father, which have corresponding images on television and advertising, seem to be in contradiction with the father of everyday life in terms of the availability of time to care and to involve oneself in family life: “this mismatch may be a problem […] particularly now that we are living times of economic insecurity and instability […] the active father might be contested, men may feel less security in arguing for more time with their children in their working environment”. As an example of these contradictions between father cultures and the conduct/behaviour of fatherhood she mentioned the fact that in the UK men who are employed for less than 26 weeks in the same workplace are not eligible to take the paternity leave of 15 days which has been available since 2003.

Given the fact that infant and child care is no longer a private ‘mother only’ family matter and that governments are becoming more involved in developing policies towards work and family reconciliation, Margaret O’Brien emphasised what she considers as a key policy issue: policies that promote choices and give parents freedom to choose between the available leave arrangements; if the parental leave is not well-paid or difficult to take, it does not become a real option.

In conclusion, Margaret O’Brien’s presentation emphasised that there should be a connection between policies, labour market perspectives (employers) and fathers’ and mothers’ wishes, in order to find creative ways that include fathers and not only mothers in the care of children.
Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

The discussion was very lively and focused on the subject of politicising fatherhood and motherhood. Participants’ positions were polarised around two different perspectives of two major recent trends in the EU: the regulation of early childhood through childcare services and leave policies directly tied to gender equality. In fact, inclusion in the political agenda of tools seeking to bring men more closely into childcare was seen by some participants as essential in order to accomplish gender equality in work life and family life; for others, it was regarded as dangerous social engineering which challenges the natural bonds and expertise within the family. However, it is important to note that both perspectives underlined the wellbeing of children as the major reference point.

Gender inequalities in childcare persist

“As economic providers, mothers and fathers are becoming more equal; in childcare, inequality remains pronounced. How to ‘equalise’ the social and economic rights of women and men as parents (bearing in mind the interests of the child)?” This question is considered to be a challenge for welfare states: “fathers should be encouraged to do more housework and care and mothers should also be encouraged to let fathers do so”.

What are the political drivers (both at local or national level) that might have an influence on the changing roles of fathers and mothers?

Concerning the drivers for more engagement of fathers in childcare, major research trends reveal that there are several macro and micro variables that might promote more involvement of fathers in caring for their children, namely educational attainment levels (“highly educated men are more likely to spend more time with their kids”); employment patterns, for example, full-time employment of mothers (“there is a link between mothers’ employment and men’s care time”) and men’s working hours (“the more paid work men do, the less time they spend with their children”; “although men’s working hours are declining in Europe, fathers work more hours in comparison to men without children”); level of payment when taking paternity and parental leave: “men take leave when there is a high level of replacement”.

However, the importance of getting to know more about men’s wishes regarding the reconciliation of work and family life was also mentioned: “we know about the amount of time men and women spend with their chil-
dren (fathers’ involvement in unpaid work - childcare, core domestic and non-routine domestic work - has increased) but we know less about what they feel about that time, their satisfaction, and the negotiations that take place in the home”

How much ‘social engineering’ do we accept in order to achieve gender equality? Nature and biology versus polices of social engineering

Some participants expressed the view that policies may seek to implement a kind of ‘social engineering’ which aims to promote the same amount of equality for both men and women in connection with childcare. This was considered as ‘de-maternalising childhood’; it was considered that achieving complete gender equality might not always be in the best interest of the child. The example of breast-feeding was mentioned: “you cannot replace the mother by the father if you are breast-feeding your child”. It was also argued that there are natural bonds between mothers and their children, and fathers are not as needed in the first years of a child’s life as mothers are: “mothers feel the needs of a child better than fathers”.

Another example that was very much discussed was a proposal which seems to be currently under discussion in Sweden concerning the division of the 16 months of well-paid parental leave into equal and non-transferable shares for each parent: “what is in question is the right of mothers to take a long leave or the right of fathers to share part of that leave”.

Polarisation became evident once again, because for some participants to take away parents’ right to choose who uses the parental leave and to make fathers take half would be devastating for breast-feeding as well as for the child’s wellbeing; while for others fathers’ involvement in childcare is a precondition for a fair balance between work and family life in dual-earner families, as well as being extremely important from the perspective of the child who experiences parental involvement and not only the mother’s commitment. However, given the fact that time spent on unpaid work is significantly higher for women/mothers than for men/fathers, it was also suggested that a good model of gender equality should remunerate the unpaid childcare work which is mostly done by women/mothers.

Policy does not allow for free choice between genders

On the other hand, another group of participants stressed the fundamental role of policies in creating conditions for parents to choose. In this group it was considered that children benefit most when both parents are engaged in the
first years of a child’s life. It was stressed that it is neither the mother nor the father, it is ‘both’ mother and father. The example of Iceland was given, where high levels of breast-feeding seem to be combined with high take-up rates of parental leave by fathers. Several aspects were underlined in relation to the role of policies regarding men’s involvement in childcare and household tasks.

**Policies to promote parenting – role of the media**

There was also a concern regarding policies which promote parenting not only among men but also amongst women. Given divorce rates, the decline of fertility (fewer children) and new fertility patterns such as the postponement of childbirth, some participants raised the question of promoting parenting as a benefit for people’s lives by emphasising “the joy versus the burden, a signal of commitment, family togetherness and personal identity for younger cohorts” in order to encourage them to become mothers and fathers. The important role the media may play in promoting the notion of parenting as an exciting and positive aspect of life was also mentioned, because role models are also supported by the media.

**Research and policies do not reflect diversity in families, with particular reference to same sex families**

Another point raised in the debate was that both laws and research have been homophobic regarding same sex families, which are still invisible in the statistics. “For example, the gender pay gap affects women, but how does this affect lesbian couples? Are these women having a double pay gap? What impact does this have on the children? On the other hand, men earn more, but how is it in gay couples? What about gay or lesbian parenting?” The need for further research on these subjects was pointed out.

Another discussion relating to motherhood and fatherhood in same sex families focussed on the possibility of same sex families adopting a child. Some participants felt that there is a huge gap at policy level in relation to adoption and fertility treatments in lesbian or gay families. Even when national laws recognise marriage between same sex partners, they exclude fertility and adoption. Laws also do not recognise rights and ties between gay stepfathers and lesbian stepmothers towards their step-children, for example when a biological father or mother dies. For some participants, representations of fatherhood and motherhood should have nothing to do with sexual orientation, and this independence should be carried over to the political level (“unlink sexual orientation from being a mother or a father”); however for others children’s rights come before parents’ rights.
Do we need a unique parental system throughout the EU?

There was general agreement that some basic rights should be required for all Member States and regulated under EU Directives. As an example, it was mentioned that there is no regulation on entitlement to paternity leave at the European level, and that many countries still do not provide it. Participants agreed that a global European Directive is needed to regulate either father’s entitlements or the reconciliation of work and family life; breastfeeding regulations were also mentioned but considered to be included in the Directive on Maternal Employment Protection.

The role of employers in promoting parenthood and family wellbeing

Finally, all participants agreed that employers must be brought into the discussion; there is a crucial need to engage employers in future conferences since they also have a fundamental role to play in promoting parenting and family wellbeing. “State family policy can regulate some part of family life, but it is very much the work life that influences families, we have to build bridges between companies and families in family policy”.

Promoting parental leave over the family life-course

There was a proposal to include parental leave into life-course policies so that it is not just centred on the short period after birth; the possibility of taking parental leave at other stages of the family life-course such as, for example, when children become adolescents. This proposal was also seen as an alternative to the father’s involvement in childcare: “paternal discussion is very important, but we have to develop a parental leave over the life-course in other stages of children’s life when they most value the presence of the father [...] how can we encourage fathers to take parental leave or time off when the children are much older, for example, when they are teenagers?”

It was suggested there might be a family leave focussed on family care and not just children’s care. For example, a family leave to care for other dependent relatives and not just centred on mothers or sisters as the main carers (as usually happens) but on other family members (such as fathers and brothers), who should be motivated to care during the family cycle of caring.
Major gaps and challenges for research

There was general agreement that research and policies have focussed on women as mothers and that fathering and fatherhood is mostly perceived from women's and children's points of view. Therefore research gaps are mostly related to the lack of reliable data on men's attitudes towards becoming/being a father. The following summarises the major research suggestions from participants:

- Need for research on the drivers that can influence fathers to be more involved in family life, particularly childcare and unpaid work in general.
- Further research on why men delay or miss out on fatherhood or want fewer children than their partners.
- Data is also needed on (potential) parents/young adults’ feelings (of security or insecurity) about becoming a parent and raising and educating a child.
- Further research on parenting in same sex families in order to make these groups visible and mainstreaming the research.

2.2.3 Workshop 3 - Ageing, families and social policy

Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches

In this workshop there were two keynote speakers: Claude Martin (CNRS/EHESP University of Rennes), and Claudine Attias-Donfut (CNAV, France).

Claude Martin’s presentation focussed on the impact of ageing at the EU level in relation to how care needs are evolving, as well as future care arrangements. Long-term care policies and welfare regimes were also mentioned, as well as the impact of those care arrangements on the family, introducing the subjective dimension of pressure and also the necessity of thinking more in terms of reconciling work and care for elderly persons. According to Claude Martin, “ageing is one of the main challenges that most of our European countries are facing over coming decades”. He felt, however, that there had been (in some European countries) a kind of a split between family policy and social policy (particularly elderly care policies) as they are related to different interest groups, different research and decision-making fields with different administrative organisations. Considering that “family does not stop with the ageing process”, there is a need to join together these two fields of research and policy - family and the vulnerable elderly - in care policies. Although the balance between state, market and family has changed dramatically since the eighties, with developments in welfare regimes as well as developments related to local authorities and collective
insurances, “the major part of caring responsibility and burden is still on the shoulders of family care-givers - spouses, daughters, daughters in law and of course some sons and male spouses, but this is a gender issue for all of our countries”.

Claude Martin stressed three main challenges for coming decades: ageing and the decrease in the EU population; the financial equilibrium of pension schemes; and the care deficit hypothesis as expressed in the reduction of the availability of “free of charge services of women in the household”. According to him, the main future question for social care is not so much welfare state regimes and the differences between countries but how the reforms are to be carried out: “we are all confronted with the same challenges and solutions: the combination of paid and unpaid, formal and informal care solutions”. Among the main future trends and needs, he highlighted the need for more flexible solutions developed at the local level (the regulation of care management on a local basis); the challenge of combining health care and social care; and the reinforcement of home-based care. He also stressed the importance of knowing more about care-givers’ feelings and the meanings of pressure. As we will be confronted in the future with increasing numbers of people in the labour market combining elderly care and work (we usually think of work and family reconciliation in terms of childcare and not so much in terms of elderly care), a key policy question is how to manage the constraints of time, on the one hand, and the way people are feeling pressure or not, on the other: “it is not only a question of the need for time, but also of the need to reduce pressure for these people”.

The second keynote address, by Claudine Attias-Donfut, focussed on family support, and outlined some results of the SHARE study (large European comparative longitudinal survey “Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe”): how family support is influenced by numerous factors (from the financial situation to the health status of the care-givers) and how, even though there are differences between countries, this support is mainly occasional, activated and present in situations of emergency and crisis, with the family then playing an insurance role. In fact, as already mentioned for childcare, family informal support and formal support (professional help) are complementary rather than in competition.

Summarising the research results, she stressed the important contribution elderly people make to family life, family solidarity and the economy, with the elderly being one of the most consistent providers of support to several family members, including other elderly persons. There are also significant

---

9 See http://www.share-project.org/.
inequalities among families: “the more social and financial resources, the more help is given”; as well as significant gender inequalities, because men (when they are the main care-givers) are more likely to rely on professional support.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

The following paragraphs summarise some of the main points of discussion:

**Elderly care is mainly provided by family**

“About 80 per cent of hours of care are provided by unpaid carers, mostly family carers; these carers have important sets of relationships, for example, the relationship between care and formal providers; their relationships with other family members; relationships with governments, but also increasingly relationships with policy areas”.

**Implications of demographic trends for the future of care**

The decrease in fertility rates also implies that in the future often a single child will have to care for his/her parents alone, and this means an increased burden. On the other hand, growing numbers of elderly persons imply (potentially) increasing caring needs. However, in the context of a parallel decrease in the number of young people, the question of a potential ‘care deficit’ arises – that is, a decline in the availability of unpaid/informal carers, at the same time as needs are increasing.

**Intergenerational solidarity as a key issue**

In connection with elderly persons, it was stressed that they are not only care receivers, but also care-givers who provide care for their grandchildren and also make transfers of money. Similarly, elderly persons should not only be regarded as a potential burden, but also as a resource – for family and for society. The importance of active ageing was also mentioned, in relation to their role in society: “grandparents provide practical, emotional and financial support for their grandchildren [...] the birth of a first grandchild is often the moment when parents and grandparents find each other again [...] intergenerational solidarity can play a key role in developing fairer and more sustainable responses to the major economic and social challenges that the EU is facing today [...] public authorities should develop holistic and sustainable policies supporting all generations, and foster exchange of good practice and mutual learning between different generations”.

195
How are elderly people represented within society?

“How are they represented in terms of institutions and non-governemental organisations at national and European level? How can they let society know what their needs and their situation are?”

Family care is less and less considered as natural but rather as a choice

“There is increasing social demand for a full recognition of informal carers, women and men, who freely choose to dedicate themselves to their dependent family members [...] this will also have consequences for public support in the context of the links between formal and informal care, the supply of which should be locally provided and flexible, institutional but also home-based, and both affordable”.

Sustainability of family care

Another element mentioned was the question of the sustainability of family care. The risk of a burden on carers was also mentioned, as well as the consequences in terms of wellbeing (feelings of pressure); the need for various forms of support, and for respite care was stressed (with provision of services such as day-care centres that would take care of dependent persons during the holiday season, so that carers may have a holiday as well).

A form of ‘elderly sitting’ was mentioned (that is the possibility of asking somebody to come to the home and stay with the elderly person during the day or in the evening, while the carer goes out).

The linkages between two major demographic trends: ageing and migration

Several questions were raised in connection with this topic: “is migration slowing down the process of ageing? Is ageing changing the forms of migration, since the increasing needs of the elderly are attracting new types of care workers? Is there a new care sector mainly occupied by female migrants? Migrants themselves are getting old and have specific needs that have not yet been studied”.

The perverse effects of some of the most flexible care solutions (“Badanti” in Italy, almost exclusively Romanian women), which might be leading to the development of a black market in migrant care workers, should be understood and researched.
Major gaps and challenges for research

- Lack of research on the subjective aspects of care arrangements (how is the caring arrangement experienced by carers?); the impact of this care on the carers’ wellbeing, namely on the subjective feeling of pressure; research on some obvious key causes of problems for carers: managing incontinence; managing and living with someone who combines dependency with mental illness or depression.
- More information on sustainable family care: how and why people begin, maintain and decide to stop providing care (carer perspective). What works for carers in relation to training, respite, cash benefits, social security, and services support?
- It is important to focus on the contribution of spouses, who often do not consider what they are doing to be the provision of care and might be underestimated in the statistics on carers and caring.
- More information on what works in terms of building capacity – what kind of support really works for carers? When does information and training work best, how is it best provided, and who should provide it? Research should also look at good practices and how to provide a far better exchange of information on good practices in the domain of support to carers.
- There is also a lack of information on the challenges involved in reconciling work and care from the perspective of elderly care; more research should be carried out on the policy measures developed for those carers.
- More research is needed on the economic aspects of being a carer. What have the consequences of the current financial crisis been for carers? What happens to the carers who give up their jobs? What is going to happen to carers’ pensions in later life?
- A lack of research on migrant care workers was also mentioned, including the effects of global distance caring chains for family members left behind in the country of origin; the specific needs of ageing and returning migrants.

2.2.4 Workshop 4 - Changes in conjugal life

Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches

There were two presentations in this policy workshop. The first, by Eric Widmer (University of Geneva) was on “The future of partnerships and family configurations”, and the second, by Brian Heaphy (University of Manchester),
was on “Developments in conjugal life: same sex partnerships and lesbian and gay families”.

It is very important to understand what happens within conjugal ties, and Eric Widmer’s presentation was focussed on how these conjugal ties are embedded in a larger set of relationships. What Eric Widmer emphasised was that family configurations (that is the larger structure of family ties, which might include grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, colleagues, etc.) plays an important role in partnerships in late modernity, meaning that there is a variety of ties that can function as a backup to conjugal relationships. According to this family configuration, it is impossible to understand the conjugal relationship without referring to these larger sets of ties that support couples: “no couple is an island; no couple can be understood in itself”.

In order to illustrate the importance of these ties beyond the husband and wife partnerships, Eric Widmer presented some results of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP)\(^\text{10}\) on the measurement of social networks, namely the persons relied upon when in need. Results revealed that partnerships are of major importance; the cohabiting partner is the first person called upon for support. However, there are a large number of alternative ties that play an important role in supporting partnership - the mother, the daughter, the sister, the brothers in law, etc., “if you take the sum of them into account, it becomes clear that conjugal life is not the only form of support within families in late modernity, particularly when considering the second person to be called upon for emotional support. Mothers in particular, but daughters too, play a major role in providing support to individuals across all countries within Europe”.

Accordingly, Eric Widmer suggested three patterns of relatedness: 1 - ‘multiple ties-oriented’ (less emphasis on partnerships and more on mother, father, sister); 2 - ‘emphasis on conjugal relationships’; 3 - ‘children-oriented’ (more emphasis on son and daughter). He raised two questions: “do family configurations matter for partnerships?” and “can we establish a link between the way configurations are structured and the wellbeing of couples?”. He put forward two hypotheses: 1 - firstly, that “family matters beyond partnerships and nuclear families, there are ties between adults and parents and siblings that are really important for individual development and for conjugal life but also for the education of children”; 2 - secondly, that “configurations and partnerships are interrelated; couples with more support interdependencies with relatives and friends will report higher conjugal quality than those with less supportive interdependencies”. An important point highlighted by research is that family resources exist beyond partnerships and nuclear families and

\(^{10}\) See http://www.issp.org/.
that they can be used as social capital, “something that individuals can use in order to advance in their own life, both in their intimate life, professionally, and in the education of their children”.

For this reason, Eric Widmer concluded that policy-makers should not only focus on marriage and nuclear families, “because families are much richer than that”, but should take into account this diversity of ties beyond the nuclear family; “this will help us to promote partnerships without being entrenched in normative models of families which probably will be less and less present in the near future”.

Brian Heaphy’s presentation was entitled “Developments in conjugal life: same sex partnerships and lesbian and gay families”. He focussed on “what is exceptional in same sex relationships and what is very ordinary?” According to him, we are dealing with a population which is partially invisible in statistics and research: “same sex, lesbian and gay families are a hard to reach population, particularly if looking for formalised couples”. Research on same sex relationships as well as on the changing legal contexts in which these families must be understood, tends to be based on small and ad hoc qualitative studies. Therefore, one of the main points stressed by Brian Heaphy is the absolute need for a more systematic review of the existing research on ‘legitimate’ and ‘illegitimate’ (not yet legally formalised) same sex partner relationships, in order to give feedback to research as well as to law and policies.

Implications of policy and legal developments regarding same sex couples were considered by Brian Heaphy as a key policy issue. According to him, talking about same sex families means talking about uneven developments: “on the one hand it seems we are moving towards a broader legal recognition of partnerships, but those legal developments are uneven, they range from what might be seen as more formal marriage to what some people call ‘marriage light’”. He also stated that there are not only uneven developments in terms of law and recognition of partnerships but there are also uneven developments in terms of the implications of those recognitions, for example, on the level of service provision: “social policy is often underpinned by gender assumptions, by gender care, and gender responsibilities that don’t fully account for same sex relationships [...] is it possible to conceive gender-neutral policies?”

Another point stressed by Brian Heaphy was the challenges that same sex partners face in illegitimate contexts in terms of marginalisation and hostility, due to the way heterosexual norms are imposed or supported or actively pursued. Research suggests that the risks and threats that can emerge from this include violence, harassment, depleted social capital and social isolation. All these have implications in terms of a couple’s wellbeing and resilience. On the other hand, recent research also points to the fact that
same sex partners also feel unprepared to ask for family-supported services when things go wrong, for example in case of abusive relations and dissolution of the couple. In response to these illegitimate contexts (where same sex couples might experience highly stressful situations) ‘families of choice’ appear as creative responses to marginalisation. Families of choice include same sex relationships but tend not to be biological or legally formalised; it is not the biological relationship that matters, it is more the social relationship: “Can policy capture these kinds of more dynamic relationships?”

An interesting fact needing further research is that cultural guidelines, particularly on gender, are no longer applicable to same sex families, which tend to have highly negotiated relationships and also tend to be more equal because they are based on gender sameness; this area could benefit from further research. On the other hand, research should also focus on the gender pay gap that might be reinforced in same sex lesbian couples compared with same sex gay couples.

Complexity increases with the presence of children. Although there are new choices to become parents in same sex families (access to technology, informal parents’ agreements, adoption, children from previous heterosexual relationships, etc.), a general perception still persists that children are more exposed to risks when living in same sex families, that the wellbeing of a child might be compromised by the nature of the same sex relationship. Brian Heaphy emphasises, however, that a key finding from research is that there is no discernible long-term impact on children’s wellbeing within same sex relations compared to heterosexual ones. He also refers to his recent work on relationships among young couples in civil partnerships (which became legally possible in the UK in 2005), where he found notable continuities and similarities to young heterosexual marriages such as the focus on love, commitment, security, a tendency towards monogamous couple commitments, connections with family and cultural traditions, and secure and stable environments for children.

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

**Wellbeing of families is associated with the existence of extended ties outside the nuclear family**

“Women with bi-centric families feel much better curtailing their careers than women who do have not this kind of network; networks help to cope with the consequences of decreasing work participation”.

200
“Young adults who are in transition have a huge amount of friends cited as family members; the same happens with later-years families with small children, especially in families where there is no divorce; on the other hand, vulnerable individuals (those with psychiatric problems and incapacities) seem to have a very small family configuration based on blood ties, but might also include professionals as their family members”.

What are the criteria for defining bi-centric families?

“Need to consider a series of indicators: frequency of interactions with friends, support provided by friends and family members, financial and emotional support, frequency of interactions with family members”.

Why are there differences between countries in international comparison?

“Conjugal ties-oriented countries are to be found in countries with strong welfare systems; and multiple ties-oriented countries are more to be found in liberal non-interventionist family policy; this is not very clear, however, and needs further research”.

Is there any relation between types of conjugal interactions and network configurations related to network ties?

“Types of conjugal interactions and configurations will be further researched. However, studies on recomposed families, step families and blended families reveal that there are very interesting signs that the two aspects - types of conjugal interaction and configurations - are very much interconnected”.

Social policy and new forms of family

“Policies are addressing this issue mainly by recognising same sex marriages or same sex partnerships, but they are not dealing with other issues, namely social parenting in the context of same sex couples or blended families; there is a strong movement in Europe towards the recognition of same sex marriages, but there is little discussion of the real challenges for same sex families, which include how they are going to care and parent, including recognition of parental rights which are essential for the wellbeing of children”.

201
“There is a need for more research on the gaps in policies dealing with new family situations. For example, in post-divorce families, who receives family benefits? It is usually the mother, even where there is joint custody of children; some couples negotiate, but there is no regulation on it”.

Conflicting tendencies

“If you are living in a same sex partnership and do not live in a context of recognition there are implications for daily life and emotional roles, and this can also have an impact on children’s wellbeing”.

“There are political assumptions in care, service provision and family support services that support gender inequalities”.

Children’s wellbeing in same sex couples

Recent research shows that children do not suffer from having same sex parents: “they suffer most from conflicting negotiations arising from their parents’ divorce; however, they can experience discrimination at school. A child’s wellbeing depends more on the environment than on the same sex nature of the couple”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- More cross-national research on the internal dynamics of families across European societies is required, together with further research on types of conjugal interaction and their linkages with family configurations.
- Longitudinal studies on couples and conjugal life across the life-course: how do they build their relationship? When do they decide to get married and when do they decide to have children? Transitions to conjugal life and transitions into parenthood: how do couples manage transitions, and what are the factors that make some couples succeed and continue with their relationship? What factors influence couples to give up their relationship and divorce? More comparative work on routes into and out of partnerships; routes into parenting and post-dissolution arrangements.
- Further research on definition of the family, looking at how the notion of family is being built up across Europe.
- Look more at minority families such as immigrant, Roma families.
- Increasing cohabitation and decrease of marriage: reasons why young people are choosing to cohabit rather than get married (common trend
in people already married before, never married and new relationship where never married).

- Research possible linkages between marriage and participation in society (voluntary, political, etc.).
- More systematic review of the existing research on same sex families: how same sex partnerships in lesbian and gay families are (re)configured in different contexts of ‘legitimacy’ and marginalisation; in what ways are they and the challenges they face more or less ordinary and exceptional? Gender roles; parenting; child’s wellbeing; gender gap, etc.; how are these families structured through their practices and also what are their problems? Do same sex couples have new choices in becoming parents? Who is the biological parent?

### 2.2.5 Workshop 5 - Family relationships and wellbeing

**Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches**

The workshop consisted of one keynote presentation and four statements, followed by a brief discussion on main research points and key policy issues.

As a developmental psychologist, the keynote speaker Gordon Neufeld (University of British Columbia) focussed on “Family relationships and the wellbeing of the children both as today’s children and as tomorrow’s adults”. According to Gordon Neufeld, when the literature on this subject is reviewed, one theme stands out from the others: the effect of separation on children. Often the conclusion is “that separation from parents - whether physical and emotional - adversely impacts a child more than any other single experience. The impact of separation can be far reaching: behaviour, development and personality”.

One major research question which therefore arises, in Gordon Neufeld’s view, is: “how do we take children from their families to care for them and educate them, yet provide sufficient connection so that they do not experience the deleterious effect of separation?” One central concept is attachment as well as maturation: “if deep attachment enables a child to preserve a sense of connection, then we should be looking at the conditions that are required to cultivate this kind of attachment [...] maturation, not schooling or socialising, is the primary process rendering children fit for adult society”. In other words: the more a child is attached, the more he will be able to adapt to society, be resilient and be emotionally fit for society. If parents and various institutions are aware of and sensitive to this attachment, both will find solutions which minimise the impact of separation. The solution must be focussed on “the development of a child’s capacity for relationship and the resulting ability to preserve a sense of connection even when physically separated”. Therefore
a final message is that "the wellbeing of today’s children, tomorrow’s adults, and our future society, will depend upon our ability to support the family as the womb of psychological maturation"; “how can we support families to cultivate the kind of attachments that will give birth to the realisation of human potential?”

**Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders**

Among the stakeholders’ contributions was a statement outlining the conclusions of several recent international studies that agree on the negative effects that marital breakdown has on the happiness of children and parents involved, and on national economies as well. These conclusions have been summarised in the “2009 The Family Watch Annual Report – The Sustainable Family”. In the light of these findings, this statement reinforced the idea that some prerequisites exist that enable a family to be ‘sustainable’, according to the definition coined by the Brundtland Report\(^ {11} \) in 1987.

Another statement stressed the importance of positive parenting and empowering parents in their educational role. It was argued that the fight against child poverty in Europe has become a top political priority and that a strong focus has been placed on promoting the quality of life and the well-being of children. A ‘strength-based approach’ should be taken: an approach which values parents’ empowerment. To create a good environment for children, there is a need to support families in their parental role. Actions that remove barriers to positive parenting should be further promoted, raising awareness and increasing recognition of the social value of parental roles.

A recent survey among ethnic minority groups in Bulgaria was quoted in order to reinforce the idea of solidarity between generations as one very important aspect of family wellbeing in those groups.

In the general discussion there was some controversy about the attachment theory presented by Gordon Neufeld. The main reactions highlighted the fact that there is a professional debate on this topic, in which there is disagreement with the model presented, and that existing empirical research shows there are other more important threats to the child’s wellbeing and future development as adults, such as violence and emotional threats. There are other possible alternatives in terms of attachment to parents: adoption was presented as an example of the possible re-attachment of children.

---

\(^{11}\) See [http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm](http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm).
Quality of life and wellbeing of children

“It is strongly determined by their family situation and the quality and accessibility of services; more attention should be paid to ensure families’ access to appropriate material resources but also psychological and social support for parents’ empowerment”

Reconciling employment and family life: links to child poverty and wellbeing

“A good work/life balance for parents is critical to the wellbeing of children and society, as both income poverty and time poverty can harm child development. Children whose parents are not in paid work are more likely to be poor, while mothers who have interrupted their careers to care for their children are at higher risk of poverty in later life”.

Fathers’ involvement

“Solo caretaking by fathers is associated with their continued caretaking of older children and grandchildren. Research shows that early active involvement of fathers can lead to a range of positive outcomes for children and young people. These include better peer relationships, fewer behavioural problems, lower criminality and substance abuse, higher educational and occupational mobility relative to their parents’ employment, and higher self-esteem. Conversely, low involvement of fathers is linked to negative outcomes for children, and the links tend to be stronger for vulnerable children”.

Family structures and the psychological aspects of a family

“A bridge was established between family structures and the psychological aspects of a family. The Lisbon Conference has focussed very much on family structures and on how to adapt society to new family structures from a sociological point of view. Of course this perspective is very important, but we think it would also be most interesting to establish bridges with a psychological perspective: to take into account the impact of structural changes on individuals, on their personal development and wellbeing”.
Family wellbeing, cohesion and care

“Since many of us work in the EU institutional environment, we realise that most of the fundamental EU policy texts refer to social cohesion (alongside economic and territorial cohesion) as a way out of the crisis and as an instrument of dynamic growth (see for instance “Commission Work Paper 2010”). Family is the initial model of wellbeing. It is the first laboratory for social models, for social cohesion. We wonder how we can implement cohesion and wellbeing in society if citizens do not have that cultural model implanted in them by education and experience developed from a family context”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- Research that helps to understand what leads to stable families (sociology in connection with the psychological perspective).
- Research that helps to understand how better to educate and train parents on parenting and couple life.
- Research that helps to understand what families (father, mother, children) actually want.
- Research on how policies can support families in cultivating the kind of attachments that ensure the development of human potential.
- Research on the impact of joint custody (which is becoming more frequent after divorce) on fathers’ and mothers’ professional careers, for example in the case of qualified parents, the main obstacles which arise, and also negotiations within couples.
- It is also important to research the impact of joint custody on children’s wellbeing in comparison to other forms of custody.

2.2.6 Workshop 6 - Gender equality and families

Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches

In this session there were two keynote speeches, one by Ilona Ostner (University of Göttingen) and the other by Shirley Dex (University of London). Both presented a number of important aspects to map the ‘state of the art’ on issues related to gender equality in contemporary Europe whilst pointing out major problems and gaps in both research and policy making.

Monitoring gender equality (at the EU level) led to the production of statistics producing a high level of linkage between policies and the
production of gender indicators that have enabled measurement of gender developments. In her presentation on “Gender equality and families”, Shirley Dex presented an overview of major trends on gender equality in a number of key areas. For example, there has been increasing equality in employment, particularly among younger women. However, the same cannot be said for older women and women with small children. Departing from a cross-national perspective it is possible to track major trends in models of family and work balance, which show that Europe is not homogeneous and that policies at supra-national level have not led all Member States to the same gender policy solutions. According to Shirley Dex, it is crucial to establish a new framework for thinking about gender equality issues in families, in order to make comparisons between European countries. Clear differences emerge between countries when examining part-time labour, pay issues and part-time pay penalty, pay gaps between men and women, and women’s education.

Major questions concerning gender equality and families relate to: “how to solve the simultaneous need for money/labour and caring time?” and “Are there conflicts between gender equality objectives and needs of families?” Shirley Dex concluded that there is a need to rethink the importance and role of flexibility, childcare services, division of labour between mother and father and unpaid work, as well as potential time off. Flexibility has been seen as a solution, but might also have ambivalent outcomes, since men and women have different problems dealing with new flexible forms of employment; on the other hand, although part-time work is increasing in EU countries, it is found in low-paid and gender-segregated jobs, while skilled jobs are not adaptable to part-time arrangements; this increases employment inequalities between men and women. Shirley Dex also stressed that childcare coverage rates are quite uneven across the EU. Public coverage for children below the age of three is still lacking, and this creates problems in reconciling work and family. Regarding the division of labour between mother and father and unpaid work, although the overall amount of hours of paid and unpaid work has become more equal between genders, the distribution of time is still unequal, women do more, and this must be taken into account. However, it is important to recognise that overall gender segregation has improved, which is an important conclusion when looking at key data on gender.

From a policy-making perspective, Ilona Ostner focussed on the degree of success attained at the EU level in terms of gender equality policies. The starting point for her presentation on “the success and surprise story of EU gender policies” was the following question: “why have gender policies been successful to a certain extent?” According to Ilona Ostner, if we start out from a
historical perspective, the success of gender policies in the EU is not yet fully understood. In order to address this question we need to take into account the real ways in which gender equality policies are built up, so as to further understand the complex causalities underlying the somewhat surprising pathways of gender equality policies in the EU. Therefore we need not only to map what policies exist today, but to be aware of the specific agenda that lies behind policy-making.

A main reason for focusing on these complex causalities, from a political standpoint, is related to what Ilona Ostner considers to be the element of surprise. Why have gender policies been so successful? The fact is that EU Member States had not anticipated gender policies and the inroads they made. The EU can be considered a weak state, its institutions are weak, but nonetheless influence policies undertaken at the national level. However, this process of ‘Europeanisation’ has often resulted in the forced or unwilling compliance with gender equality policies that were not priorities at the national level. There is, however, some ‘success’, which is partly due to the feminist debates which have marked the political agenda since the 1990s. Why is this happening? How do political analysts explain change? According to Ilona Ostner there are complex factors and causalities that rest on societal and political explanations. For instance, political analysts would emphasise political explanation and institutional constraints. In this perspective, gender policies are developed through the appearance of some windows of opportunity and then “you need actors who speak and act in terms that can be sold to those who make the public decisions” (in this sense the role of epistemic communities is of the utmost importance).

Gender policies need a window of opportunity, e.g. the EU and OCDE building coalitions that bring together transnational and national actors (the top bureaucrats); and the selective inclusion of experts (in this case certain leading feminists, amongst other epistemic communities). In every single Member State the idea and the perception of what is important may be different. But these perceptions at the hands of leading epistemic communities open avenues for the rise of lobbying groups, who have a role in deciding how gender equality should be addressed. Nevertheless, any gender-related policies at the EU level must pass through two ‘eyes of the needle’ in order to be discussed, adopted, and implemented: first at the level of the Union, with its narrow conception of equal opportunities in terms of equal treatment and its stringent requirement for consensus in the Council; and secondly in the variable implementation of EU legislation in the ‘gender order’ of each individual Member State.

These processes can be viewed in two ways. Gender policies are a result of negative integration, starting from the problems that have arisen as a result of the need for the free movement of workers in Europe. It was not
expected that these policies would also promote positive integration. The most important surprise factor is the success of gender policies at the supranational level, with a historical movement from concerns with “equal pay and equal opportunities for men and women” to a more generalised focus on general anti-discrimination legislation (with a whole set of targets which were brought in with the Treaty of Amsterdam and other measures particularly related to mothers’ employability and child care targets), which led to enhancement of regulation on matters of gender equality. The process has, however, been one of vertical integration linked to supra-national forms of regulation. Some regulatory inconsistencies are unresolved, stemming from what appears to be a “ping-pong game” between the national and European levels of regulation.

For Ilona Ostner what is important is to see how the process of institutionalisation of gender equality has evolved and resulted in positive integration. There is new ‘constitutionalised’ legislation that has extended the meaning of gender equality, as a key part of the whole process of developing anti-discrimination targets and policy measures. However this important trend is also an ambivalent one, in spite of its success in regulating gender equality and constructing the whole debate around gender issues as an equivalent of gender equality: on the one hand, employment has been a very important catalyst, but on the other, fertility policies are also of major importance for arguments in favour of gender equality policies.

Why and how has this happened? From the 1990s onwards new social risks have had to be dealt with. Declining fertility is important because we have labour shortages. It is not the number of children but the quality of children that matters (a functionalist argument). In conclusion, European gender policies are successful, yet:

- Today they are not the most important, if considered per se.
- Gender policies have never been an issue per se, but rather are linked to other issues (labour shortages, demographic ageing, for instance).
- Gender policies have been highly dependent on the building up of coalitions. This is how politics actually works, and it is a problem that has to be further addressed and monitored in the future.

Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

Reconciliation of work and family life

There was general agreement that one of the most important subjects for debate in terms of policies and policy-making was the problem of reconciling work and family life.
Gender equality policies are not a neutral subject, as they presuppose ideological conceptions of the ideal family with a ‘gender contract’. The ‘ideal arrangement’ generated heated debate and some disagreement.

**Private choice versus public regulation of gender and families**

For some participants, gender models belong to the private sphere and must be freely chosen and not imposed by public regulation. The state should not impose the adult worker model upon women, but rather respect men’s, women’s and couples’ freedom of choice. This is an important debate, in which there are opposing views of gender relations, reflected in differing visions of what gender policies should be.

It was also stated that although the focus on individual choice must be taken into account when considering gender equality, it has to be addressed in different terms. As Shirley Dex noted, mothers and fathers do not have to work full-time. Part-time can be seen as a solution, but only if it is considered in equal terms for both men and women. There is, however, a pay differential that has to be taken into account. Gender equality targets do not recognise the potential variability of choice, e.g. part-time work is undervalued, and the rights of part-time workers remain a problematic issue.

**New solutions to reconcile family and work should be put forward. What is the financial value of housework and childcare? What role should the state have in transferring money to families in order to keep mothers/child-rearers at home?**

It was also argued that new solutions to reconcile family and work should be put forward (e.g. pension credits for homemakers, whether female or male). One suggested solution was women’s self-employment as baby-sitters for their own children. This leads to a key question: should care arrangements be paid for by the government? This was also considered an important gap in research.

**Care**

Another issue raised in the discussion was care. It was argued that the right to participate in care has to be implemented for men and for women, and that the model of the adult full-time worker has to be rethought from the point of view of gender equality and family life. However, two major problems arise here: 1 - How to pay for care and how to implement policies that support care arrangements? This was considered to be the main challenge for the future policy agenda. 2 - The problem of fertility as a
backdrop for gender equality policies must be taken into consideration in this context.

**Labour market. How might the changing structure of the labour market affect gender equality policies and gender arrangements in family life?**

It was recognised that people today face new risks (job insecurity) and that “we cannot recommend the breadwinner model because of the risks it involves”. New policies are needed to deal with new individualised risks (divorce, unemployment, etc.). There is also an economic issue in connection with sustainability: “without contributions, the state is unable to pay”; “as some researchers have shown, the more insecure jobs are, the more hours people work”.

**Integrating gender and family policies**

Another important issue discussed by participants is the need to integrate family and gender equality policies. Family policies are less advanced at the EU level than gender equality policies.

**Major gaps and challenges for research**

- Rethinking the models for equality and linking them with the demands of the labour market.
- More research on how to regulate care arrangements and gender equality.
- More research on the consequences of different care arrangements for gender equality.
- The need to research men and fatherhood (e.g. statement on paternity leave).
- Lack of data on gender equality in couples and on parents as a couple and on family forms in general.

**2.2.7 Workshop 7 - Reconciling work and care for young children: parental leaves**

**Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches**

There were two keynote speeches in this session. The first keynote speech was by Fred Deven (Kenniscentrum WVG, Belgium) who made a presentation on parental leave policies across Europe.

Parental leave across Europe is a kind of umbrella concept covering an increasingly complex reality of policies and practices. There are two critical
factors related to parental leave. The first is replacement payment, which ranges from an earnings-related payment, up to a maximum of 100 per cent (some countries put a ceiling on this), to a flat-rate payment or even no payment at all. There are many countries which can be very generous in the length of leave but do not provide replacement payment. The second factor is eligibility, which has been “disregarded a little bit”. What Fred Deven wanted to emphasise was that eligibility is not as widespread as some people might think it is, even in those countries which are known to be the most generous in terms of paid parental leave arrangements (like Sweden, for example).

Eligibility is employment-related in most countries (including Sweden). Therefore there are several categories of employed persons who are not eligible, for example those who are self-employed, those who have temporary contracts, or those who work in small companies. There are also significant differences between public sector organisations and private sector companies. On the other hand, if a person is eligible, the replacement payment might be “very conditional on your prior working history, so if you have built up rights you may be eligible for the generous earnings-related payment, but if you have just started or entered the country you receive a flat-rate payment”. Hence the importance of framing leave policies in the context of the issues of inequality and also democracy.

Among the main ideas presented by Fred Deven three proposals stand out. One is the need to contextualise research as well as policy leave arrangements within a broader context in order to understand them properly. Leave policies are only one instrument for European public authorities to facilitate the reconciliation of work and care for young children. There are other tools such as early childhood and education services, cash benefits, and flexible working conditions. When trying to understand leave policies it is important to bear in mind the different perspectives of the diverse actors involved: families, public authorities, stakeholders (social partners, NGO), and the media (in terms of their images of what is good parenting, for example). It is also important to take into account that there might differences of opinion between family members because of potentially conflicting interests, for example over the length of the leave period from the child’s perspective, which may be different from the interest of the working parents.

Another idea stressed by Fred Deven is the importance of having a research approach to the collection of data on parental leave take-up rates. Data is still collected by the administrative departments responsible for the payment. He mentioned two sources of information on comparative data on leave policies in European countries: one is the data in the annual review

12 See http://www.leavenetwork.org/.
of the *International Network on Leave Policy and Research*¹² (which includes about 30 countries, most of them European and some transatlantic). The other is the data collected through the recent Council of Europe questionnaire on family policies (of which a significant part was on leave policies) involving 40 countries, and which resulted in a database on European family policy¹³. Fred Deven made some final suggestions for further reflection: how to frame parental leave and leave policies within broader issues, and how to conceptualise and how to implement types of leave in terms of care for dependent persons in a broader perspective which looks at the family life-course. He emphasised the need to frame leave policies within broader issues such as the different stages of the life-course and gave the example of Belgium’s ‘time credit system’.

Daniel Erler (Familienservice GmbH) focussed on the German parental leave system and highlighted what he considers an important issue, “freedom of choice”, which has dominated (West) German family policy discourse for a long time. His presentation highlighted the impact of leave policies on childcare-related family behaviour and going back to work after leave, which also has an impact on the increased numbers of women in the labour market (as in the case of recent leave policy change in Germany).

In 1986, when parental leave was introduced in Germany, the whole political debate centred on enabling parents to “freely choose” to stay at home and care for their children, because the main concern was the well-being of children and their emotional development. Between 1986 and 1992 parental leave in Germany gradually increased to three years, two of which were paid (not very well), while at same time female employment decreased. The main point Daniel Erler wanted to stress is that talking about “free choice” means offering a number of alternatives, thus also including childcare facilities in the scenario of options for parents: “if you look at a leave scheme and it offers no childcare services, then there is no free choice”. In the case of Germany there was an incentive to leave the labour market but there was not really a choice for families because there were almost no childcare services for children between the ages of zero and three. Only recently, in the late nineties, was there a discussion on the relevance of such long leave periods for mothers (leave was also for fathers, but fathers’ take-up rates were very low, at around two to five per cent), because prolonged labour market absences were also seen as having negative repercussions on future career prospects for women. There was a political discussion on the need for adapting parental leave, giving parents greater freedom, and engaging

fathers in childcare. A new law in 2007 represented a radical shift away from the previous basic idea that enabled parents to stay at home during the first three years after birth. The new law reduced the parental leave period, though it increased the payment with the introduction of 12 months’ parental leave paid at 66 per cent (33 per cent for 24 months) of prior income plus two months of ‘fathers only’ leave, not transferable to mothers. The new law is based on two principles: one is to increase women’s participation in the labour market (mothers’ returning to work after one year of well-paid parental leave); the other is to motivate fathers towards more participation in childcare. Overall the intention is to reduce parents’ absence from the labour market.

Daniel Erler also stressed the importance of involving fathers in parental leave time without penalising parental leave time for mothers. The principle of extending leave on the condition that leave is shared was conceived in order not to penalise parental leave time. Instead of reducing the 12 months’ leave to ten months’ leave if fathers did not take the two additional months, policy makers decided to keep the 12 months and give two months additional paid parental leave in the case of fathers/other spouse sharing. This policy led to an increase in fathers’ take-up of leave (20 per cent of fathers take the two months leave) and to a decrease in mothers’ period of leave. A group of highly skilled women increased their leave period, however, by taking the whole one-year paid leave (previously they would return to the labour market after a short period of leave). At the same time, childcare services are being developed. This will eventually give so-called freedom of choice to those parents who want to combine work and childcare services. Employers have been receptive to the fact that women tend to stay out of labour market for one year instead of three years.

Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

Successful work-family reconciliation strategies (including father’s involvement in parental leave) require an integrated approach/multi-dimensionality of reconciliation between work and family

From the workshop presentations and discussions it became clear that parental leave schemes are only one aspect of successful work-family reconciliation strategies, which require a multi-dimensional and integrated approach to the issues of time, care and money if they are effectively to enable mothers and fathers to combine their work and family life. What has been emerging quite clearly from research on parental leave schemes across Europe is that fathers will only start to use leave entitlements if they
are well-paid and at least partly non-transferable. However, the effects of leave schemes are also strongly mediated by interactions with other social policy aspects, e.g. childcare services, child allowances, and pension entitlements. Hence a comprehensive understanding of leave policy effects needs to control for numerous intervening factors, necessitating a holistic research and policy approach: “parental leave is the end result of policy considerations in the following areas: maternal health, health of the fœtus, fertility policy, labour market policies, gender equality, children’s rights, family policies, etc.”.

**Diversity and complexity of national leave schemes**

“While European Union directives and regulations have led to some tentative convergence, leave schemes across Europe remain highly diverse, reflecting different historical policy legacies as well as cultural preferences. It is important to respect and allow for differences because one cannot simply impose one system on countries with very different socio-economic contexts”.

“It is especially difficult to conduct comparative research, because there is very little comparable data available, and data is mostly collected directly by the institutions responsible for administering leave benefits. These institutions are not necessarily concerned with the collection of comparable data”.

**Parental leave schemes and parents’ freedom of choice**

All workshop participants seemed to agree that one of the crucial questions regarding parental leave schemes is parents’ freedom of choice, i.e. enabling parents to choose between staying at home to care for their children, for a longer or shorter period of time. However, it also emerged very clearly that parental leave schemes only foster true freedom of choice if they are complemented by a sufficient supply of external childcare solutions, offering affordable quality services.

“Benefits need to be income-related. For if they are not, many parents, but particularly fathers, who usually contribute more to the family income, will not be able to take up their entitlements, because the related income loss is unsustainable”.

“Yet real freedom of choice also necessitates flexible working options for parents as well as a family-friendly working culture within companies. If working parents are not offered flexibility that
suits the needs of their family, or if they fear that taking leave will compromise their future earnings and career prospects, they are unlikely to use their entitlements”.

_Parental leave and involvement of fathers_

Current proposals to include fathers in parental leave by means of ‘father only’ (compulsory) leave (meaning that time it is not transferable to mothers) were also discussed: “Fathers’ involvement in parental leave, and the gender sharing of parental leave, is closely related to well-paid individual entitlement to parental leave. At present this entitlement exists in only a few European countries, which means that fathers’ involvement in parental leave is not being encouraged, and is not high on the political agenda”.

_Parental leave and social inequalities_

“Income has an impact on the take-up of parental leave. Earnings-related parental benefits have advantages in relation to parental leave producing social inequalities; for example, in countries where salaries are very low, people still do not have the free option of staying at home or returning to work, so they must work. On the other hand, highly skilled and better paid persons are more likely to take parental leave, and this also applies to fathers’ take-up rates”.

_Employers’ perspectives_

Unsurprisingly, all workshop participants agreed that employers need to participate in the consultation processes on future family policy strategies, because they are crucial stakeholders, and without their collaboration all policy initiatives are likely to have only limited effects.

As employer perspectives and attitudes appear to be crucial, it might be useful to gain some deeper cross-national insights into their positions. It may therefore be useful to commission a cross-national survey on employer attitudes, for example, to the perceived costs and benefits of leave or care policies. Some insights in this respect can be gleaned from existing survey data, e.g. the European Working Conditions Survey\textsuperscript{14} or the European Company Survey\textsuperscript{15}. However, none of these allow for an in-depth investigation of employer attitudes to the very specific issues of work-family reconciliation policies.


Parental leave policies and parental leave take-up in contexts of economic crisis

“On the one hand it is known that the effects of leave entitlements are strongly influenced by the economic performance of a country, because in times of uncertainty people tend be more careful in taking leave. On the other hand it is known that various countries are reviewing the costs of leave schemes and are considering cutbacks in this area. If benefit levels are reduced, this is likely to have repercussions on leave take-up patterns. There is an acute need for more cross-national, comparative research on the impact of leave policies, especially with regard to the labour market behaviour of mothers and fathers”.

Parental leave policies over the life-course

“A major question is how to conceptualise and how to implement types of leave in terms of care for dependent persons in a broader perspective over the family life-course”.

A good example is the ‘career break system’/’time credit system’ (Belgium) “which goes beyond the narrow part of the first three months or the first year. The idea is that over the life-course of all your professional career you can drop out for a time, to provide care, certainly, but you do not have to be specific about your reasons. You retain your rights to go back to your job”.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- Grasping the complexity of leaves and options and also understanding this in the context of class, gender, companies for which people work, regional differences, and different cultures.
- Improve research on mothers’ and fathers’ take-up rates (there is a lack of information not only on take-up rates but also on the educational and socio-economic backgrounds of parents who take leave). There is also a significant lack of information on total or partially unpaid leave arrangements. Statistics are driven by the administrative department responsible for the payment, which does not have a research approach to data collection).
- More research on young women’s and men’s family planning, namely their prospects for the transition to parenthood and their expectations regarding available leave arrangements and childcare facilities and labour market participation.
• Further research on the impact of 20 weeks’ maternal entitlement to job protection, on longer breast-feeding periods, and children’s immunisation rates.

• Further research on the connection between long-term parental leave at low rates of pay and the decline in female participation in the labour market, and some negative effects on female career prospects (also taking into account different levels of women’s education and qualifications).

• Commission a cross-national survey on employer attitudes, for example to the perceived costs and benefits of leave or care policies. In-depth investigation of employer attitudes to the very specific issues of work-family reconciliation policies.

• It would be also important to explore how fathering and work are seen by society (what does it mean for a man who wants to care not just for one week or one month, but really wants to care in the long-term?).

2.2.8 Workshop 8 - Reaching out to families: the role of family associations and other institutions

Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches

This session consisted mainly of statements (both prepared and informal) made by family associations present at the FAMILYPLATFORM Conference. There was also a brief discussion on common points. However, there were unfortunately no representatives of research or policy stakeholder groups. Because most of the session was devoted to statements, this topic “Organisation of the workshop and keynote speeches” provides a synopsis of the different kinds of family associations which took part in the workshop.

Gezinsbond (Flanders, Belgium)

The first statement was presented by Luk de Smet (Director General of the Gezinsbond). Gezinsbond has one guiding principle: care for the material and immaterial quality of family life and the principle of solidarity and justice where the family and its members are concerned. It has three aims: 1) to promote solidarity between families; 2) to protect the interests of all families, with special concern for large families; 3) to work towards a family and child-friendly climate.

Gezinsbond was formed in 1921 as the League of Large Families of Belgium shortly after the First World War. At that time it was not unusual for families to have ten or more children. It did not originate from previously existing family associations but instead was formed by a small group of
people who launched the idea of a family association which would call upon local people to recruit families as members. It went on to be a co-founder of the International Union of Family Associations (the IUFO – now the World Family Organisation) in 1948. Following adoption of the Treaty of Rome (1958), the European Region IUFO entered into a dialogue with the newly-founded European institutions and, as a result of this discussion and the new treaty, helped to form COFACE. Today, Gezinsbond is a large non-profit making association with 280,000 members in Flanders and Brussels, all of whom are individual families. Members are primarily middle-class, but Gezinsbond is reaching out to families with ‘an ethnic or culturally diverse background’, and to those in poverty.

Eric de Wasch (Member of the Administrative Council of Gezinsbond) added a short statement on a number of additional areas. The first was the ‘Family Impact Report’, which examines the impact of all policies on different aspects of family life: these reports, Gezinsbond argues, should be entrusted to the person(s) in charge of family policy and monitor all policy formation. The second was family modulation, which is direct government support to families. The third was good practice in consultation between employees and employers so as to tackle the challenge of reconciling work and family life.

**Associations Familiales Catholiques (France)**

The National Confederation of Catholic Family Associations (CNAFC) was founded in 1905 and currently has 35,000 member families throughout France. They have been a member of COFACE since 1958, and they founded the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) together with Familienbund der Katholiken 20 years ago.

Their representative at the Conference, Françoise Meauze, argued that family associations are only effective when they are representative and when their members are volunteers. Family associations should put forward ideas that correspond to families’ needs, and react to legal and political developments that have an impact on families. They are also important for their political lobbying work, and in promoting family mainstreaming. We were reminded that Article 16 of the Lisbon Treaty enhances dialogue with civil society, and that family associations should search for increased recognition. Mention was made of COFACE, FAFCE, and the World Movement of Mothers as organisations promoting families, as well as the Family Intergroup within the European Parliament, and the Commission on Social Issues, Health and Family of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. These actors rely on instruments such as the Universal Declaration
on Human Rights (Articles 3 and 16), the European Social Charter, and the European Treaties. In conclusion, Françoise Meauze stated that family associations should be afforded legal recognition in all European countries, so as to enhance family mainstreaming. An emphasis was put on subsidiarity and also on the difference between family policy (which is preventive) and social policy (which is reparatory).

**UNAF (Union Nationale des Associations Familiales, France)**

In France, the government has created a state body for family associations, UNAF. UNAF receives funding from the state and consists of around 8,000 associations, representing 800,000 family members. It has four missions: 1) to provide public authorities with opinions on family-related issues and put forward measures in all aspects of family policy; 2) to be the official representative of all families in dealings with public authorities; 3) to deliver family services entrusted to it by the State; 4) to uphold the material and moral interests of families in accordance with the law.

**Forum Europeén des Femmes (Brussels, Belgium)**

A much younger organisation, though no less active, is the Forum Europeén des Femmes. It has been in existence for six years and is based in Brussels. Most of its members are expatriate professionals in Brussels. It is active in reconciling work, family and private life and aims to promote a more healthy work-life balance, in the belief that strong families are the beginning of a cohesive society and that wellbeing and families start with care in the family. They say it is impossible to work for a cohesive society without the presence of strong families.

**Cana Movement (Malta)**

Cana Movement developed in a strongly Catholic country, providing services to members. In a country of only 400,000 people, it has 1,000 volunteers who help organise activities and sustain the movement. They organise marriage preparation courses and counselling services that the Maltese Government now relies on Cana Movement to provide.
The Ombudsman for Parents’ Rights (Poland)

In Poland, one of the main institutions mentioned in the constitution is the family, but there is almost no family policy. Government’s experience of the family is predominantly negative, its only form of contact with families being through social services (who may face problems such as alcoholism or domestic violence). The Ombudsman for Parents Rights’ in Poland, only recently established, is looking to change this perception and to call for parents to be involved in dialogue with government on family issues. Run with minimal resources and 100 active volunteers, it is nevertheless able to organise street demonstrations of more than 30,000 people on the internet.

Main topics discussed and contributions from stakeholders

Family organisations in the new Member States are facing particularly harsh times. Families were previously supported by the communist regimes, but have since had such support withdrawn. Families in the new Member States have only had a few years to build up family associations to represent them, and the current crisis and the relatively undeveloped civil society places them in additional need of support. In Latvia, for example, the Family Ministry was closed and family support was cut.

Leonids Mucenieks, of the Union of Latvian Large Family Associations, called for the following kinds of support: a) financial support from national governments and the EU to provide stronger support to families during this time of crisis; b) to see greater progress at the EU level in the field of practical consolidation of family rights and family-friendly policies; c) development of European grant programmes, which could help family associations to organise activities without co-payments.

Family organisations from the older Member States are well placed to offer some support to younger family organisations in terms of information sharing and capacity building, but increased support may be needed at an EU level. The point was also made in discussion and during the plenary session that family organisations can exert pressure on national, regional, or local governments by taking concerted action at an EU level. This can push national governments to take action. The European Alliance of Families helps promote EU level co-operation and should be strengthened.

Major gaps and challenges for research

- Evaluation of effective practices for reaching out to different families (development and interchange of good practices).
• Research on the constituencies of family associations: which groups are represented in family associations (by age, ethnicity, religion, geographical region, etc.) and which groups are not.
• The role of family organisations in influencing policy.
• More research on the role of local government in monitoring quality of education and teaching, and on connections between schools, family, local government and neighbourhood.
• The introduction of a family impact report/assessment. With this family impact report it might be possible to assess the impact of certain policy measures on opportunities for families.
• Analysis of consultation processes with family organisations. Understanding consultation processes between employees and management may be the key to addressing the challenges of reconciling work and family.

2.3 Methodological issues identified in focus groups and workshop sessions

With respect to the main methodological gaps and challenges which were common to all 16 working groups, participants debated and identified the following issues:

The perspective of national statistical offices and most of the data collection approaches as well as the interpretations of existing data were regarded as highly problematic, emphasising the need for valid and synchronised definitions and concepts used in research (concepts and sources differ widely between Member States). There was particular concern over the need to harmonise at a comparative level variables and categories describing family life, providing valid information on all kinds of family forms (e.g. patchwork families, same sex couples, percentages of separated couples, civil partnerships, number of consecutive marriages), including the (biological and social) status of children. It was also mentioned that official statistics of the European Member States still take the nuclear family as their reference model. Hence, they no longer reflect the variety of family life and relationships today, as family life is understood and lived differentially (e.g. family of choice, family as a network, etc.). Thus, data addressing relationships and kinship in more detail are needed. It was also mentioned that national statistics should include data on the number of men and women caring for their dependent family members at home.

The importance of including under-researched countries, especially the new Member States, covering all 27 members and/or those which do not belong to the OECD, was also mentioned by participants. The need for
current data on regional and local levels was also emphasised, because differences within countries are also significant.

The comparability of European family databases with other important topical areas such as national labour markets and educational systems was also seen as an important methodological approach.

There was a particular concern with the harmonisation of concepts and indicators defining and measuring several fields of family research. Some examples refer to domestic violence, childcare, housework, parental leave entitlements and take-up, ‘substantial childcare’ (when measuring father’s involvement in childcare). Participants also underlined the need for more and new comparable indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) in connection with the study of social inequality and poverty, in particular indicators which go beyond income. The dominant focus on income poverty provides a very specific outlook centred on the notion of “poor people” rather than on the experience of poverty and how this affects family life and individuals within families. Few (both quantitative and qualitative) studies, at least with a comparative focus, highlight the experience and social patterns of poverty and families in poverty. These include loss of dignity, choice, and control, limited access to social capital and to assets of other kinds, poor health, few opportunities and an uncertain future. Social analysis of families and poverty would also benefit from a reinforcement of the household/family as a significant unit of analysis.

The need for new and more comparable indicators (both qualitative and quantitative) also applies to further research on family wellbeing, satisfaction with living environments, involvement of fathers in family life, quality of childcare and elderly care, and the daily and biographical processes of doing family. Vital information on ethnicity was mentioned as still not being available in European-level studies. The harmonisation of migration statistics was also considered to be of great importance.

There was general agreement on the lack of cross-national comparative research, both quantitative and qualitative, as well on the importance of the life-course approach and the longitudinal survey design as well as panel research in order to get a deeper insight into the development of family forms, structures and development over time. There is a need to study family management and decision-making processes, taking into account the life-course perspective, which examines different periods of transition in the family life-course (early childcare, child entering school, adolescence, children leaving home, elderly care, divorce, remarriage); best arrangements in terms of work and family life balance and the needs of fathers and mothers to have more time to spend with their children; family values and ideals, their behaviour and attitudes; gaps between the theory
and practice of gender roles; development of family policy in order to assess the impact of policy changes on overall support for families and on the outcomes of family-oriented policies. It was mentioned that there is a need to **evaluate longitudinal data sets and designs across the EU**, namely existing data sets and their design and content, in order to draw conclusions on their suitability/usefulness for current research questions as well as on their potential for future cross-national research.

Most studies and research projects are based on aggregate national data instead of setting the focus on variations between the different social, cultural and regional backgrounds of families within the different states. **Cross-national comparisons would provide a better understanding** of the differences and similarities between families with different social, cultural and regional backgrounds.

**More qualitative insights** are required on men’s attitudes to having children (for example their reproductive behaviour, with information on the number of children they fathered or expect to father), on men’s experiences as fathers, on partners’ attitudes and interactions, and on their feelings and wishes in relation to their role in reconciliation. There is also a need for more **qualitative research on care arrangements**, in particular on the time devoted to care tasks and the constraints on them, but also on what carers feel about the time they spend on caring, their feelings of pressure, and the meaning of pressure.

**The lack of data on specific cohorts of people was also underlined**, for example, the importance of special data sets for the study of migrant populations and their spatial concentration as well as comparative data on migration across Europe which would provide a European perspective; there is a lack of in-depth analysis using specific targeted samples of social categories/families in order to understand diverse forms of domestic violence; new family forms (same sex families, LAT, patchwork families); and designing research for specific groups of families: some groups of families are unlikely to get into sampling frames and/or are by nature more fluctuating.

**The importance of a family/family member perspective**: ensuring that several and not only one representative of the family answers the questionnaire and speaks on behalf of the whole family.

In discussion on **the importance of focusing on impact analysis studies**, it was stressed that there should be more cross-national (qualitative and quantitative) comparative research on the impact of family policies within countries (regional differences, for example) as well as between countries. Participants emphasised the need for more in-depth, qualitative comparisons to understand and explain family policy reforms across countries, with a need for a better and up-to-date typology of “family policy
systems” which takes into account national variety, developments in institutional forms, changes over time and available financial resources.

**The importance of developing a multi-method approach** by supplementing quantitative and statistical approaches with qualitative approaches and case studies. It would be important to have greater financial investment in methodological advances linking qualitative and quantitative studies.

Finally, it was considered important to ensure that **sociological research establishes bridges with a psychological approach**, in order to take into account the impact of structural changes on individuals’ personal development and wellbeing. The lack of integration between different fields (intersectionality) was also mentioned.

### 2.4 Final comments: selected elements on the research and policy agenda

Drawing on the discussions, statements, keynote speeches, and other written documents and notes produced or reviewed during the Conference, our aim in this final section is to pinpoint some of the main research topics/themes and issues which were suggested or argued for by participants in the three-day Conference in Lisbon. Given the wide range and number of suggestions, the main objective here is to record and summarise these proposals, with a view to future debate, rather than to set out overall recommendations. The selected elements are based on the overlaps and broad emphases which emerge from the Conference and the previous sections of this chapter.

**Selected topics and issues for the European Research Agenda**

Topics and issues identified as important for the future Research Agenda include the following:

1. **Contemporary parenthood, motherhood and fatherhood.** The need for a deeper understanding of parenthood and parenting is a topic which emerges repeatedly as a key issue for future research. *The future of parenthood among young people in Europe and across the new plurality of families is seen as a major interest for both research and policy.* This implies focusing on a wide range of themes and issues, such as: examining the new models of motherhood and fatherhood (including legal aspects and their implications as well as the values and practices of parenting types); understanding how young people plan and envisage parenthood; seeing how the new models relate to gender and social
inequalities, as well as to different family forms and conjugal divisions of paid and unpaid work; analysing the social processes that promote or hinder fathers’ involvement in parenting practices; understanding how parents deal with illness and disability in children; seeing how media can be a tool to help parents in parenthood and how they incorporate media into their daily lives; analysing dissemination of these models across Europe and capturing the roles played by different family polices in promoting these changes/models.

Suggestions for Project Topics:

**Negotiating parenthood**: understanding the decision-making processes of the transition to parenthood (first or second child). Example of study design: in depth interviews with 20-30 couples with young children, covering different social and economic backgrounds. Case comparisons across EU countries.

**Fathers taking leave and working flexibility**: understanding family experiences of fathers on leave and their use of flexible work. Example of study design: qualitative household level study; 20-30 dual earner couples with young children, with fathers in a variety of leave and employment situations; in-depth interviews to understand how fathers (and/or mothers) manage tension between time, money, services and care. Case comparisons across EU countries.

Strongly connected to the topic of contemporary childhood and family well-being, the necessary research on contemporary parenthood is also closely intertwined with the need for a greater understanding of how children’s lives and outcomes are currently affected by both motherhood and fatherhood forms and how these have changed (see Topic 2).

2. **Children’s experiences, trajectories and outcomes**. Another major trend in the discussion on the gaps and challenges for future research focussed on children in families, in particular on the need for a better understanding of the experiences of children and of how their lives and outcomes are affected by different elements of their family lives (e.g. the effects on children of living in different family structures or within diverse parental and educational models); the effects on children living with parents who either both work full-time, or where one works full-time and one part-time, or only one
works; or with parents with atypical timetables; the experiences of parent’s partnership breakdown; the experience of living in poverty for short or long periods in institutional settings and in families with different educational, financial and social resources; the effects of experiencing different types of childcare – at different ages and with different amounts or hours of care; understanding how media, in particular internet usage (but also other kinds of media, such as television, advertising, etc.) are shaping children’s lives.

Moreover, the broad issue of children’s lives and outcomes came across frequently as a cross-cutting pathway into research on family life, in particular since it could encourage:

a. research projects tying together different fields and aspects of family life: parenthood, working couples/mothers, schooling, child development and outcomes, social inequality and poverty, the impact of new technologies and changing living environments or communities;

b. research projects focusing simultaneously on various family issues which may be seen as tensions or dilemmas of contemporary families with children (e.g. how to combine the interests of children, working parents and the labour market; finding quality care solutions for young children below the age of three; time use and quality time with children; the meaning of choice in family life; family management of media, schooling and parenting; positive or negative effects of different types of childcare).

**Suggestions for Project Topics:**

**Children and maternal employment:** how different types of maternal employment and care (working full-time, part-time; using different types of care) influence children’s lives and development, in the context of diverse welfare and gender equality regimes. Example of study design: cross-national survey of mothers with young children in a variety of employment situations, in different EU countries or birth cohort study.

**Children’s experiences and outcomes in families outside the labour market (unemployed, retired, sick) and/or “at risk” families (suffering physical, mental disability or some kind of addiction).**
Other proposals for cross-cutting research programmes stressed the need for studying the effects of organisational change in the world of work and daily life (hours of work, workload, geographical mobility, multilocality in daily life, etc.) on the life rhythms of children according to age groups (preschool, 6-12 years, adolescents).

In summary, more knowledge on the evaluation and impact/effects of different forms of child care, as well as their linkages to maternal and paternal employment, labour market constraints, parental leave systems and changing gender equalities/inequalities within the family, was generally considered as an important challenge for both research and policy-making.

3. Changing family composition, structures and networks. A better understanding of old and new family forms and their development over time, of why differences in family composition and structures occur and why their extent differs across EU countries was identified as an important issue for research and policy. Discussions on research gaps in this field pointed repeatedly to the following methodological problems: the lack of longitudinal and cohort data; difficulties in dealing with the concepts and indicators of family living arrangements, particularly those addressing the existing plurality of family life and relationships; an overly strong focus on the nuclear family model and the household unit and on aggregate national data rather than variations between different social and regional groups; problems regarding the comparability of European family databases with other databases in order to understand the influence, at the cross-national level, of welfare, labour market and educational systems.

Four interrelated research topics within this fundamental field of research on family composition over time and across social groups and national contexts may be underlined:

1. The need for further and improved data on family composition and structures, their plurality within national contexts and across Europe and the main factors shaping variation and diversity. Deeper understanding of new family and conjugal living arrangements (e.g. blended families, same sex unions, families separated by migration, lone fathers, joint custody families) and of the differences between social, cultural and regional groups are seen as major challenges for future research on this topic.

2. Moving beyond the focus on the household unit and the standard nuclear family model, the need for research to grasp the diverse meanings and new notions of family and family relationships in
late modernity, in particular the *sets or configurations of close relationships*, which may include a variety of important alternative ties providing support and resources (e.g. friends, relatives beyond the household unit or from other generations, colleagues).

3. Drawing on a life-course perspective, greater understanding of *family formation, transitions and trajectories*, including decision-making processes and reasons underlying or delaying family transitions (such as the transition to parenthood, to conjugal life or to divorce), as well as the linkages between different types of life trajectories, in particular between career and family trajectories; family transitions and decision-making processes must be understood in the context of specific historical, social, normative, institutional and generational contrasts.

4. Understanding the *differential effects of major demographic trends* (e.g. rising life expectancy, low fertility, increasing geographical mobility and immigration) on family forms, intergenerational relations and networks over the life-course.

---

**Suggestions for Project Topics:**

**Family forms across Europe**: obtaining further and improved data on family composition and structures.

**Families as networks**: mapping the resources that exist beyond the nuclear family, their effects on family relationships (gender and intergenerational) and care.

**Changing meanings of “family”**: grasping the diverse meanings and new notions of family and family bonds (including a variety of relatives and non-relatives providing attachment, support and resources).

---

5. **Post-divorce family forms and relationships.** Analysis of post-divorce situations is another major issue for future research and policymaking pinpointed by discussions, presentations and documents. After divorce, ‘joint custody’ is becoming more and more frequent due to changes in legislation in most European countries. There is a need for research on the diverse patterns of these post-divorce family forms and how couples negotiate and decide on the new living arrangements. But there is also need to further the analysis of their impact on mothers’ and fathers’ professional life/careers, on child care arrangements, and on children’s experiences and outcomes.
Suggestions for Project Topics:

Post-divorce living arrangements: how parents structure daily life and negotiate parenting within shared residence arrangements (“joint custody”) and consequences of this on children. Example of study design: in-depth interviews with divorced couples (each member separately) with children under 16. EU countries with “joint custody”.

Family legislation after divorce: comparative research on how policies across Europe are dealing with new post-divorce family situations such as “joint custody”, tax deductions, and who receives family benefits.

6. Families, social inequalities and living environments. Families and social inequalities also emerge as a cross-cutting issue, mainly due to the fact that research on families during the past few decades has tended to neglect analysis of social, cultural, spatial, environmental and regional differentiation and its consequences on family life and experiences. Four interrelated research topics within this fundamental field of research were highlighted:

- The need for a deeper understanding of social inequalities between families: for example, how long families/different types of families spend in disadvantage or poverty; how and why some types of families accumulate advantages (e.g. well-paid dual career couples) or disadvantages; what the experiences and effects on family members of living in disadvantaged families or environments (or in difficult housing situations) are; how and why the extent of social inequality between families and its effects on family outcomes differs across European countries.
- The need to understand more about the role of families in reproducing social inequality across the generations, thus affecting children’s life chances. Transmission of social advantage and disadvantage via the family may take place both at material and socio-cultural levels: for example, how do unequal endowments of ‘cultural capital’ in families influence children’s acquisition of social and educational skills, and how do differences in income levels or social capital affect the living conditions of children and the inheritance of economic capital and material advantage over the life-course.
- The need for greater understanding of the linkages between policies and inequalities between and within families, by examining not
only how policies help to check the worst inequalities produced by differential access to resources and living environments, but also in what ways policies are likely to challenge the entrenched advantages some families have and pass on to their children. Research on the causes and consequences of social inequalities and how policies tackle them is key to understanding the relative position of disadvantaged families and families at risk of failing.

- The need for research on specific types of families which may be more vulnerable to disadvantage, poverty or difficult living or housing conditions. Given the increase in immigration, as well as increased mobility in general within the EU, research on immigrant families and on families from minority ethnic groups was considered by participants a major and urgent challenge for research and policy-making. Research is still scarce on immigrant families and on the positive or negative changes resulting from migration. Relevant issues for research which deserve more attention include: the role of families in promoting the integration of their members; types of spatial concentration or dispersion and the way this affects how immigrant families settle and how the host city copes; immigration and care (how immigrant families manage work and care, the effects of transnational care practices on family life, and the crucial role that immigrants play today as care workers for dependent people in Europe); developments in immigration policies, in particular restrictions on family reunion, and their impact on family life; understanding how subsequent generations are coping, who succeeds and who fails to thrive in different local, national and cross-national contexts.

**Suggestions for Project Topics:**

**The complex connections between social inequality and family life:** how are families transmitting and reproducing inequalities and how does this affect children’s and young people’s life chances.

**Spatial concentration and immigrant families:** how is spatial concentration affecting access to resources (education, health, and integration)? And how do host cities and families cope with migrant groups?

**Social inequalities and school underachievement and drop-out:** the family and social trajectories of children with low achievement and how it affects their life experiences.

**Sustainability and family dynamics:** what is the impact of family dynamics on the environment? Examining the role of families (mother, fathers, children) in daily purchasing, use of energy, use of transport, etc.
7. **Doing family: family interactions and processes over the life-course.**

Another major trend of the discussion on gaps in research stressed the importance of focusing on the interactions between people within the family and on their practices in everyday life and over the life-course. From this perspective families are seen to be constructed through multiple forms of interaction (from physical and emotional interactions to cognitive, social, spatial and media-related interactions; from interactions involving cohesion and solidarity as well as conflicts, demands, stress, and even violence). A major challenge for research within this approach is therefore to understand the daily and biographical shaping of common life as a family, built upon the interactions and daily life of the different members of the family (of conjugal partners, children, fathers and mothers, siblings) and of the couple/family in relation to significant others and wider societal contexts.

This approach to family studies points to a variety of potential, interrelated themes which are important for both research and policy-making. For example: examining family practices and negotiations of paid and unpaid work and the existing gap between attitudes and practices regarding gender roles; understanding the diverse procedures and models of negotiating and practicing parenthood and partnership, and also of specific events or family transitions (illness, death, leaving home, birth of a child, etc.); understanding the interactional dimensions (emotional, physical, cognitive, social) of motherhood and fatherhood; understanding support practices and mutual care between family members and different generations; studying the effects of different interactional factors on the wellbeing of families and couples (for example, the extent to which a rich relational environment, implying support practices and ties beyond the nuclear family, are important factors for conjugal and family wellbeing, even beyond divorce); understanding how families, but also in particular children, deal with high-conflict situations; comparing practices and daily life over the life-course in diverse types of families, such as blended families, large families, lone parent families, migrant families or same sex couples.

**Suggestions for Project Topics:**

**Family interactions and wellbeing:** the effect of different types of interaction on the wellbeing of families and couples (e.g. to what extent is a rich relational environment outside the family an
important factor in conjugal and family wellbeing?)

**The life rhythms of children:** how does organisational change in the world of work, schooling and daily life (hours of work, workload, geographical mobility, multilocality in daily life, media, etc.) affect the life rhythms of children according to age group (pre-school, 6-12 years, adolescents)?

**Media as a tool for parenthood:** how are parents using the internet to help them in parenting?

**Family practices and negotiation of unpaid work:** “opening the black box” of the gender gap between discourse and practice.

**Transitions to adulthood in European societies:** mapping the extent of de-standardisation.

8. **Ageing, families and social policies.** Ageing was recognised as one of the main challenges that European societies and families will be facing over coming decades. Research issues discussed and suggested during the Conference cut across a variety of questions and topics. *Understanding changes in the life trajectories and transitions of people aged fifty and over* (e.g. transition to new partnerships, to postponed or anticipated retirement, to grandparenthood, to dependency on others in daily life), in the context of different labour market and welfare contexts, was emphasised as a first important topic for research.

Other key issues for research included the following: understanding intergenerational support and solidarity, from the perspective of elderly persons both as *care receivers and as care-givers*; understanding *how active ageing is impacting on support for dependent persons*; identifying the values, practices and important contributions of grandparenthood; understanding the connections between *ageing and migration* (immigration as a factor which slows down the process of ageing; the relationship between the growing needs of elderly care in ageing societies and the immigration of female care workers); examining *the sustainability of different care arrangements* (e.g. carer’s needs for training, respite, cash benefits, services, support for reconciling work and family life, use of new technologies); *understanding the subjective dimensions of care* (how care and the problems of caring are experienced by care-givers and by care receivers); a deeper understanding of the *new trends in social care for the elderly*, whereby flexibility and complementarity (between state, market and family, between paid and unpaid care, and between solutions developed at local or national levels,) are being highlighted and developed in most European societies.
Suggestions for Project Topics:

The transition to elderly life: examining family and work trajectories of ageing men and women and their effects on personal wellbeing.

Socially innovative forms of care: mapping best practices (including community and neighbourhood networks, information and communication technology in health support services, elderly care-friendly companies).

Welfare states, migration and care: the politics of care and the role of immigrant women in formal/informal care services across different European countries.

The experience of caring and being cared for: incorporating the views of the people in need of care/care-givers – subjective aspects and financial implications of being a carer and a care receiver.

8. Family policies. Analysis of family policies and of the intersections between family policy and other policies (e.g. gender equality, labour market, educational, social security, immigration), both at local, national and cross-national levels, is a cross-cutting issue which was raised in all the sessions of the Conference. Many proposals and thoughts on the challenges and research gaps may therefore be found in the summaries of the focus groups and workshops presented in the earlier sections of this chapter. Overall, more analysis and comparison of family policy trends in Europe were recommended. The following selected elements seek to highlight some of the more specific topics, aspects or gaps in policy research which were identified as important:

- A deeper understanding of how family policy is culturally, institutionally, politically and historically embedded in each country; in particular, the need for more research on how the development of national policy measures is being shaped by differences in socio-political pathways, regulatory frameworks and financing possibilities
- Understanding changes in family policy measures and priorities as a response to contemporary societal challenges and difficulties, in particular the economic crisis.
- The need to improve and renew existing typologies of family policies in general, as well as the typologies related to specific fields of family policy, such as institutional frameworks, parental
leave systems, social care patterns, cash and tax benefit systems. In this field, the need to move beyond dichotomic concepts such as familialisation/defamilialisation, formal/informal, choice/no choice, north/south divide, etc., towards a better understanding of the on-going complexities of family policy developments (for example, the complex ways in which policies are currently mixing and balancing formal care, informal care and immigrant worker care in order to provide care for older persons more effectively).

- A better understanding of the rationales and consequences of some of the more recent and sometimes controversial developments in policies, such as: cash for home care versus day-care for children under three; increases in maternity leave versus increases in paternity leave and measures to promote gender sharing of parental leave; universal versus selective family allowances.

- Greater understanding of the linkages between policy measures/entitlements and family ideals and practices. For example, the need for further data on the practices and consequences of parental leaves (coverage rates and uses of different leaves, decision-making processes and strategies underlying use, parents’ and other actors’ perspectives on different types and consequences of leave).

- Compensating for long-standing gaps in research on family policies. There is less research on care services for the elderly and the reconciliation of work and caring for elderly persons than on child care; not enough attention given to the importance of a life-course perspective for the framing of policies; inadequate data on tax benefits; less attention given to the quality (and the quality standards) of services than to the quantity; less attention given to the perspectives and measures implemented at local or regional levels and by employers; not enough attention given to the evaluation of existing policy measures and the need for developments in the tools (new types of services, leaves, etc.) of family policies; little attention given to the perspectives of policy makers and to how and why evidence-based policies are being developed; there are countries which are systematically under-researched.

- The need for greater understanding of the role and contributions that different types of NGO and family associations are making today and could make in the future (in the context of different national and cross-national frameworks) to the building up of support for families and policy-making.
Suggestions for Project Topics:

The politics of family policies: understanding how national policy measures are being shaped by differences in socio-political pathways, regulatory frameworks and financing possibilities.

Evaluating recent changes in policies for parents in Europe and how they affect families: for example, cash for care, leave for fathers, developments in care services, family benefits (e.g. cross-national comparison of the politics, uses and consequences of extended home-care leave in different European countries, such as Norway, Finland, Austria, etc.).

The impact of EU policies on family reunion: cases of recent restrictions on family reunion of non-EU immigrants and their consequences on family life.

In summary, in this chapter we have given a general overview of the dynamics and outcomes of the critical review process, a key event of FAMILYPLATFORM, which took place during a three-day Conference in Lisbon in May 2010.

Various conclusions may be drawn from this process, two of which are of particular importance. The first is that there are some major concerns regarding the future research and policy agenda. Against a backdrop of growing inequalities, the economic crisis, and new dilemmas and risks facing families, in particular young families and children, key concerns are the challenges of parenthood and parental negotiation, care for young children and elderly persons, difficult life transitions and work-family balance, and the changing forms, meanings and practices of contemporary families in Europe.

Family research is also of vital concern in the policy context, with a demand for in-depth analysis of policy processes and effects, both at national and cross-national levels, in order to generate evidence-based awareness and policy developments. The second conclusion is related to the impact of a Conference which involved a plurality of perspectives by bringing together around 140 participants from various sectors of society. The discussions and controversies which emerged from the Conference took the debate to a higher level of mutual understanding and recognition, as well as helping to contribute to a clearer awareness of the diversity of family actors and agendas at national and European levels. This awareness may be seen as an essential driver of dialogue and democracy in Europe.