FamiliesAndSocieties - Changing families and sustainable societies: Policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations

Third Annual meeting and Stakeholder workshop January 2016- Vienna, Austria

The main objectives of the FamiliesAndSocieties project are:
- to investigate the diversity of family forms, relationships, and life courses in Europe;
- to assess the compatibility of existing policies to family changes; and
- to contribute to evidence-based policy-making

Outputs and results of the FamiliesandSocieties project are presented through a series of Work Packages; each with their own set of sub-objectives. This summary contains an overview of the main results from February 2013 – December 2015, which were presented in Vienna at the 3rd Annual meeting in January 2016.

Work Package 2- Diverse family constellations: Life goals and life course transitions

Objectives: To study the genesis, evolution, dissolution and recomposition of families in Europe in a dynamic life course perspective. To study the prevalence of non-standard family forms in Europe

Key Findings:

- In nearly all European countries, family forms have become more varied and individual and family life courses increasingly diverse. The sequence of events and the pace at which they occur have become less standardized than before. Moreover, some events are becoming increasingly frequent in the “standard” life course: more people dissolve their unions, experience single parenthood, re-partner or enter stepfamilies.

- Some other family forms, now recognised more openly, have been emerging from this new standard. These “new” family forms are Living-Apart-Together relationships, same-sex families and people with multiple residences. All these changes have been part of the de-standardization and deinstitutionalization of family forms.
Upcoming papers from this Work Package of note include:


- Inge Pasteels and Dimitri Mortelmans. The socioeconomic determinants of repartnering after divorce or separation in Belgium

- Clara Cortina and Ana Garriga. Diversity of children’s family structures in Spain: exploring educational differences in the impact of divorce

Work Package 3: New Roles of Men and Women and the Implications for Families and Societies

Objectives:
To address the complex interplay between the new roles of women and men and the diversity of family life courses in contemporary Europe

- to describe change and diversity in family life
- to explain new patterns
- to highlight consequences of change
- to indicate policy implications

Key Findings:

- Need to be aware of different family forms and treat them equally; policy to support children irrespective of family forms they live in is imperative.

- An increasing proportion of women are breadwinners - between 20% and almost 50% for childless women and between 3 and 25% for women with toddlers, it may offset the motherhood penalty; supporting women’s employment and reducing the gender pay gap

- Education is essential as a determinant of family forms

- More and more fathers are willing to take parental leave. However, value structures work against them, promotion of the impacts of father’s presence during the child’s first year on both father-child and partners’ relationships and the later distribution of child care between parents is needed. The duration of
Parental leave matters. Parental leave for a short time, a few weeks only, would not have impact on the father-child relation; prolongation of leave for fathers, optimally to the same duration as for mother, would improve both father-child and partners’ relationships

**Work Package 5: Family dynamics and children’s life chances**

**Objectives:**

- Analysis of the effects of various family forms
- Estimation of causal effects of family forms
- Parenting and social relationships in family diversity
- Variation in effects across cultural and SES lines
- Variation in effects between countries and across cohorts

**Key Findings:**

- Parental separations are not what they used to be (less conflict, more step-families and residential moves, more lower class backgrounds). But their effects have remained remarkably stable

- The effects of parental separations are heterogeneous- Stronger penalties when parents have higher education

- Parental separations affect parenting, which itself mediates effects on children; children in shared custody fare better

- Many children experience several transitions, which can have cumulative effects

- Parental separation has causal effects on children’s outcomes, but the causal effects are heterogeneous
Work Package 6: Childcare Arrangements- determinants and consequences

Objectives:

The Working Package 6 aims to look at the different forms of childcare arrangements exemplified among parental care, family members’ care, public, and private care. Specifically, it looks at the determinants and consequences of childcare use for different families. The effects on child outcomes are explored along the dimensions of economics, socio-demographics, and psychology, as well as in relation to the child development process.

Key Findings:

- Child care decisions are largely determined by time and space constraints. Parents resort to accessing different modes such as grandparents, relatives, and babysitters to address these constraints and to complement the usage of formal child care services, considering their employment obligations.

- Most of the existing literature considered parental care as synonymous to maternal care, in line with the increased female labour force participation and the traditional family value system. However, recent changes in the institutional, demographic, and family beliefs have encouraged a more active father role in the child rearing process.

- Disparities according to demographic and socio-economic characteristics exist, and may be attributable to the difference in type of care or activities performed. Nevertheless, child care benefits the disadvantaged children the most. The disparity in child outcomes according to household structures show that those from two-parent households perform better than those from single-parent households, and this may be ascribed to the difference in type of care or activities performed.

- Using Italian time diaries, Mencarini, Pasqua, and Romiti (2014) investigate differences in the behaviour and scholastic achievements of 5-18 year old children from intact and nonintact families in relation to parental investments of time and money. They find that children from single-mother households spend less time readying and studying, especially in low-income households with low-educated mothers. With a sample of children younger than 14 years of age from the same dataset, Nazio (ND) uses the following categorization: pure married, cohabiting, blended, and single-parent. She finds that children from
two parent households receive more child care time. Whereas children in cohabiting families seem to have an advantage over children from married parents, those from single parents and blended families experience a larger recourse to a structuring of their time and activities outside the family (more formal provision of education and courses).

- Maternal education and socio-economic status play a (positive) significant role in child care usage and child outcomes, as well as in the time use of the child. However, disparities according to socio-economic and demographic characteristics can be offset by the provision of high quality child care.

- Similarly, Del Boca, Piazzalunga, and Pronzato (ND) find that the effect of formal childcare vary for children from different family backgrounds, and that a significant reduction in disparities if children from low income families attend formal care

- Non-parental care such as grandparent and formal care have overall positive effects on child outcomes

**Policy Implications:**

- Family-friendly policies such as parental leave must consider both parents, as time investments from parents are separable. Moreover, they should consider the timing of intervention according to the effectiveness in improving child outcomes.

- Certain families select into using child care. Policies on child care supply must consider the potential effect of selection criteria of households more responsive to child care.

- Policies must consider different sub-populations. While there is a general need for the expansion of child care provision for adequate and homogenous coverage, different subgroups have different needs and policies must give particular attention to those from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to reduce inequality gaps.
Work Package 8: New Europeans: Social inclusion of migrant and ethnic minority families

Objectives:
To examine family trajectories among immigrants and ethnic minorities in Europe with a focus on partnership changes and childbearing.

Key Findings:
Policy-makers should be aware of the diversity of partnership forms and the presence of large families in some ethnic minority groups in Europe and ensure that social and housing policies support such families and that children from large families will have the same educational opportunities as those from ‘standard’ (two-child) families.

Work Package 10: Foresight activities

Objectives:
To inform policy makers about the impact that family-related policies have in the long run on well-being and on satisfying family needs.

Key Findings:
- Vulnerable families and their wellbeing - solo parents and families with many children (large families) are more “at risk”. These families may face a higher risk because the reconciliation of work and family is particularly challenging for them. The inability to reconcile the two spheres of life is likely to lead to economic problems. However, problems of reconciliation also affect social as well as emotional wellbeing (e.g. time pressure and stress, reduction of social contacts, less quality time with children).

- Forces that might be crucial for the wellbeing of (vulnerable) families were often related to worklife balance (e.g. changes in institutional childcare provision, changing gender roles) as well as the role of the “culture of work” and employers’ attitudes towards family responsibilities of their employees.

- One key challenge for the future is to help vulnerable families not only temporarily (by mitigating the most urgent needs) but to improve their situation in a sustainable manner. In this regard, experts recognised a necessity for a comprehensive strategy and complementary policies: education, employment and the creation of a more family-friendly society were seen as indispensable. In their opinion, education is crucial to prevent the
“reproduction of vulnerability” from one generation to another. It was emphasised that education is needed for children, parents, employers and the society as a whole.

- The workshop with policy-makers and stakeholders concluded that some family forms are more vulnerable (i.e. either potentially or currently disadvantaged): non-traditional families, like cohabiting and non-cohabiting couples, and single parents; patchwork families (e.g. stepfamilies or families with children from different parents); and lastly, large families.