

# The Family in Europe Today. Challenges and Perspectives

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## 1. Changes and Transitions in Family life: For a Critical Approach

In those latest years, the EU has been more and more interested in family issues. Therefore, also thanks to Eurostat and OECD statistics, we have now quite a good amount of facts on family in Europe.

As the great part of researchers state, family in the last 50 years has undergone to meaningful changes. We will have a short overlook on the way in which those changes have affected family life, trying to be critical about this approach.

The main indicators about changes in family life usually are fertility and demographical changes, change in family types and in family transitions. All these indicators, as well as facts and figures, have been discussed during the Family Platform, a research project financed by European Commission in the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework programme, to which also Forum delle Associazioni Familiari participated as partner. You can find and download all the publications of Family Platform project on the website [www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu).

### Fertility and Demographical Changes:

In 2006 an official Communication of the European Commission was focused on the demographical changes in Europe (*The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity*):

*Demographic ageing, i.e. the increase in the proportion of older people, is above all the result of significant economic, social and medical progress giving Europeans the opportunity to live a long life in comfort and security that is without precedent in our history. However, (...) it is also one of the main challenges that the European Union will have to face in the years to come.*

Demographic ageing is also strictly linked to the continuous decrease of birth rates that Europe has been facing since the 1970s. This implies an open question on the sustainability of the European welfare system, as well as the European economy as a whole.

The demographical change in European Countries is mainly due, according to researchers, to the following trends:

- Postponement of the first childbirth
- Postponement of marriages
- Out-of-wedlock births
- Decrease in fertility rates

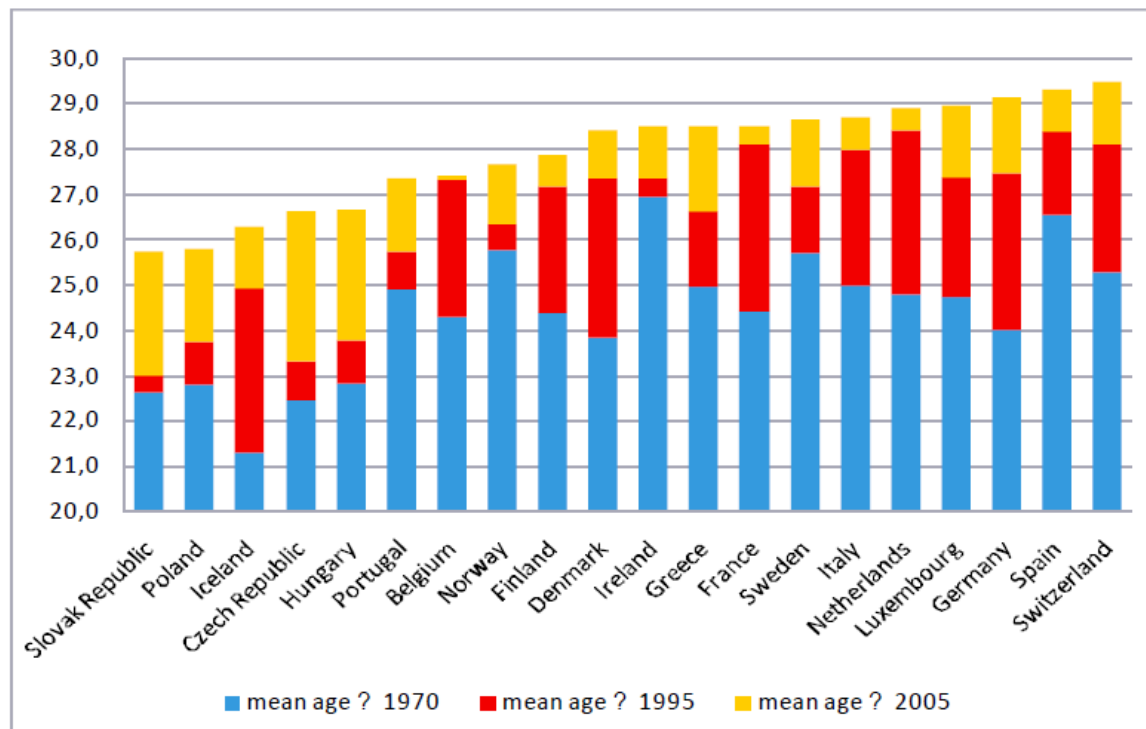
### ***Postponement of First Childbirth***

The timing of family formation varies considerably between European countries. The medium age of women when giving their first birth is lowest in Eastern Europe. In contrast, highest average ages of first childbirth are observed in the Western Europe (UK and Switzerland). Southern European and German-speaking countries show similarly high ages, while only Portugal with a comparatively early age of 27.4 years appears to deviate from this Southern European pattern.

The way in which the postponement has taken place varies greatly from country to country, nonetheless a look at the development of average ages over time, i.e. between 1970 and 2005 indicates that **in all countries, average ages of women at first birth have risen, though at a different speed and on different levels.**

As Frejka et al. (2008) show, **this postponement of births on an individual level in fact has contributed to lower overall fertility rates in Europe, but this is of course an issue of discussion** (if you compare the Netherlands and Italy, for example, you can see that the mean age at first childbirth is the same, but the two countries show very different fertility rates: Italy 1.4 vs. 1,7).

Figure 3.1: Average age of women at first childbirth, 1970-2005, by country



Source: OECD 2009

### ***Postponement of first marriage***

For many decades, first birth strongly has been related to marital patterns across Europe. In recent years, however, these two processes increasingly have decoupled. Unlike the age pattern for births in Europe, the medium age of first marriage of *women* in Europe shows a very distinct country-specific pattern. The trend is, anyway, towards the postponement of marriage.

### ***Out-of-Wedlock Births***

The trend towards “later marriages” is also reflected in the development of out-of-wedlock births (Figure 3.6): Since the 1970s, their share first started to rise in France and in the Scandinavian countries, with Denmark and Sweden showing most pronounced increases, resulting in rates of 46% and 47%, respectively, already in the 1990s. Since then, the trend has largely flattened out and remained at a largely stable level until 2006. Following the above developments in marriage and first birth ages, the share of out-of-wedlock births started to increase Eastern European countries only after the 1990s<sup>2</sup>. The Central and Southern European countries followed a development somewhat in between: their share of out-of-wedlock births

increased steadily since the 1970s reaching a low in Cyprus and Greece with below 10% in 2007 and a high of more than 50% in the Netherlands.

### ***Decrease in Fertility Rates***

Over time, **fertility rates have declined from values of two to three children per woman to less than two children in all of the country groupings.** These developments have been most pronounced in Northern and Central Europe where fertility fell from around three children per woman in 1965 to less than 1.8 in the mid-1990s. Southern European countries appeared to follow this general trend with a ten-year time-lag and most pronounced falls of fertility levels in the 1980s and 1990s. In Eastern Europe, fertility levels started to decline only after the transition from state socialism to market economies in the early- resp. mid-1990s. In both latter country groups, recent declines have resulted in very low fertility levels of less than 1.2 children per woman, that have made demographers describe these countries as displaying “lowest-low fertility” (Kohler, Billari and Ortega 2006). In recent years, the trend in fertility levels largely has “flattened” with only marginal changes since the 1990s. Some most recent research even points to partial recovery in period fertility levels since the turn of the century, especially in Northern and Central Europe (especially France and the Netherlands).

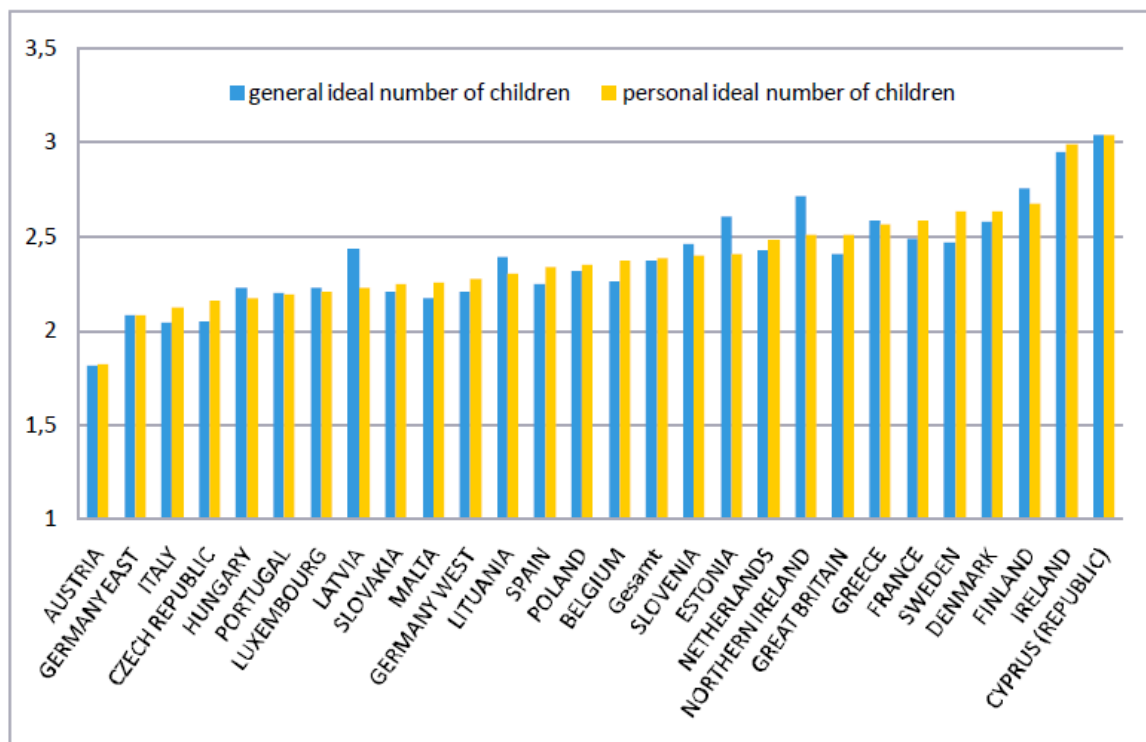
It needs to be awaited how the fertility behaviour of younger cohorts who increasingly have postponed their family formation will develop. In this respect, the crucial determinant of future fertility levels in Eastern Europe thus will be in how far current postponement effects in childbearing are compensated for by recuperation of delayed births in later ages (Frejka et al. 2008).

### ***Ideal number of children vs. real number of children***

A possible indicator of future fertility trends respectively birth at later ages are childbearing preferences, as reflected in the individually perceived ideal number of children in a family, respectively the individual intention to have (further) children in the future. In recent years, various Europe-wide social surveys such as the European Value Study (EVS), the European Social Survey (ESS) or the Eurobarometer have used questions to reconstruct these individual preferences. The figure below, based on a Eurobarometer survey in 2006, gives an exemplary overview of childbearing preferences by representing the average number of children that women generally perceive as an ideal and those that they individually would favour.

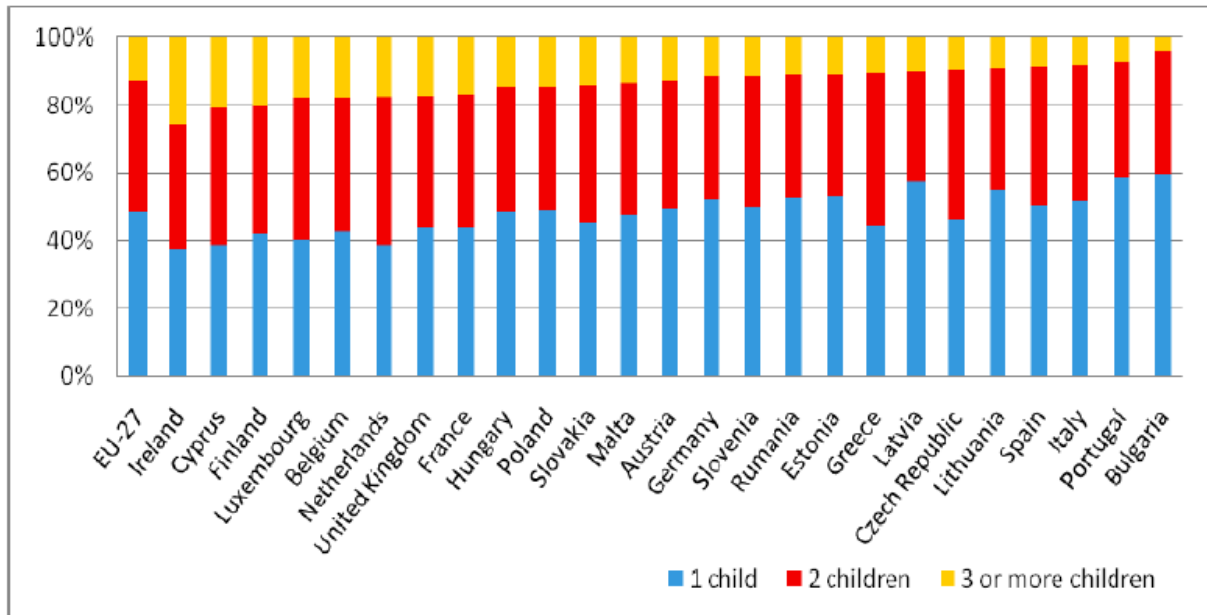
As Figure 3.10 shows, in virtually any of the European countries under study, both the ideal as well as the personally favoured number of children exceeds an average of two children; in a number of Scandinavian and Southern European countries, it even ranks between 2.5 and 3 children per woman. In most European countries, fertility intentions thus appear to clearly outnumber actually realised fertility figure; a finding that recent sociological research (e.g. Blossfeld et al. 2005) oftentimes has interpreted as reflecting the personally perceived inability to start a family, e.g. due to rising individual uncertainties, despite generally high fertility aspirations. Alternative explanations have strengthened the role of a general value change towards more “postmaterial values” such as self-fulfilment, which have contributed to a decline in the importance of more “collectivist” family values (Inglehart 1990, Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa 1986). In contrast, the traditional view that low fertility trends are an outcome of increased female labour force can be dismissed since the relationship between employment and fertility has turned in the 1990s, i.e. nowadays it is those countries with a high share of employed women that simultaneously display highest fertility rates. It is thus not employment as such but the way in which the reconciliation between work and family is facilitated that drive women’s childbearing considerations (D’addio and D’Ercole 2005). This lead also to a more and more prevalent model of the singlr child

Figure 3.10: Individual estimates of the ideal number of children in general (‘ideal’) and for the respondent (‘personal’), 2006



Source: Eurobarometer 2006, own calculations

Figure 4.6: Share of number of children in European family households (2008)



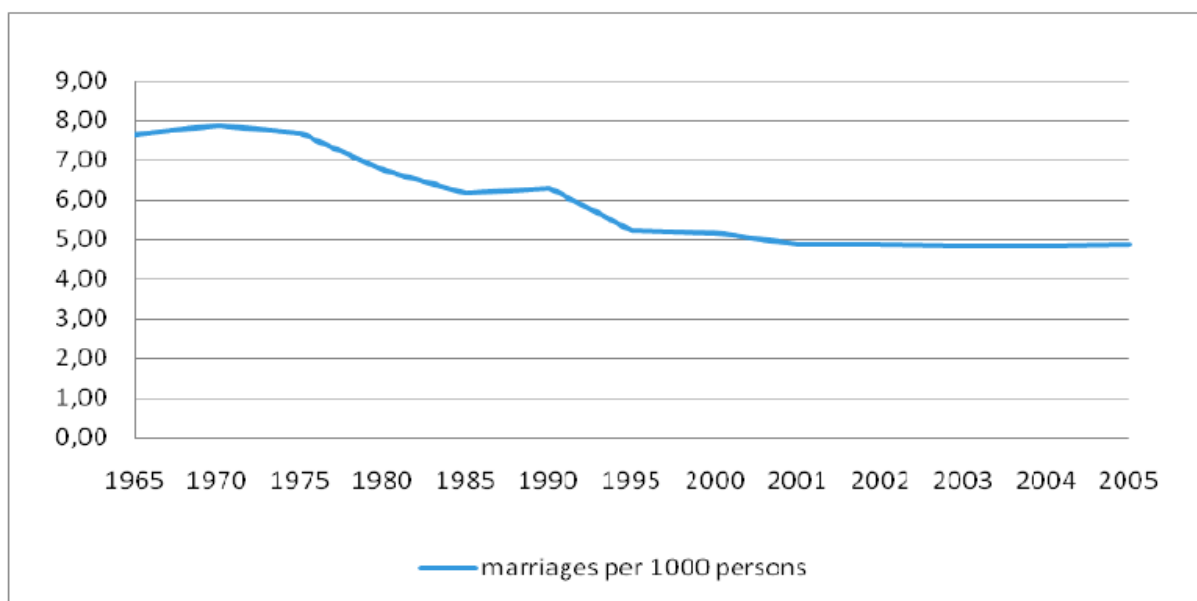
Source: Eurostat 2010

## Change of family types:

### *Decreasing marriage rates*

As Figure 4.1 below shows, since the mid-1960s, marriage rates (i.e. the number of marriages per 1000 people of the population) in Europe have been declining and only recently have stabilized. While the marriage was at 7.64 marriages per 1.000 persons in 1965, it has fallen to as low as 4.87 in 2007 (Eurostat 2010).

Figure 4.1: Development of the marriage-rate in the EU-27, 1965-2005

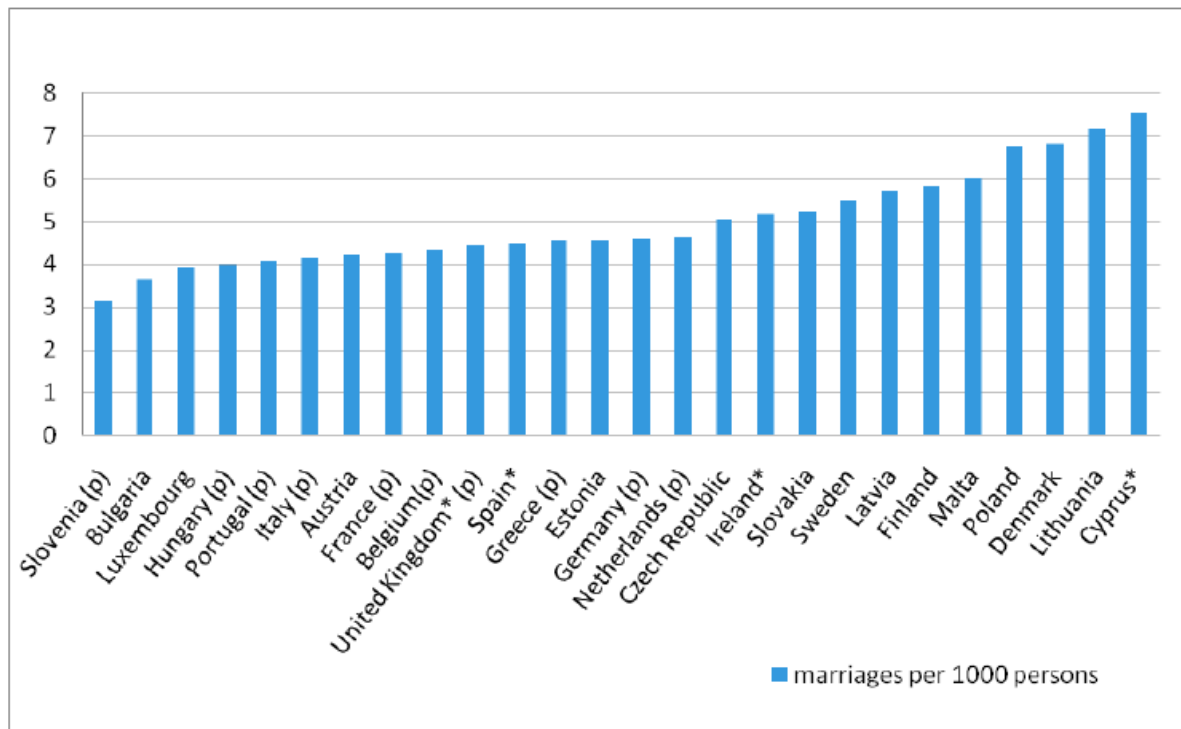


Source: Eurostat 2010

When we look at marriage statistics across Countries in Europe, we face a very heterogeneous situation and we see that the typical classification of countries (e.g. Nordic Countries, Mediterranean Countries, Eastern Countries) don't fit in for any explanation. Marriage rates varies deeply without any connection to the welfare regimes (and this should lead to some reflection about reasons and ways people to choose to marry): the countries with highest marriage rates are Malta, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania and Cyprus.

So we can observe a sort of European way to the so-called *démariage*, which seems to be due to very different causes across Europe. In Italy, for example, today's young people are faced with serious economic and working problems, with housing problems (houses are too expensive and there are no facilities for young people) and a welfare system that don't help young. On the other hand, we have also a sort of "cultural problem", parents allowing young people to live at home and doing whatever they want, without asking to take responsibilities (and, definitely, the responsibility to choose to marry). But we see that also in Nordic Countries, where usually young people at 20 years leave home, there is an increasing rate of young people staying at home. This is due of course to economic problems, but undoubtedly also with a difficulty in taking responsibilities by the new generations.

Figure 4.2: Marriage per 1000 persons in the EU-27 countries, 2008



Source: Eurostat 2010

**Increasing divorce-rate and increasing re-marriage rates**

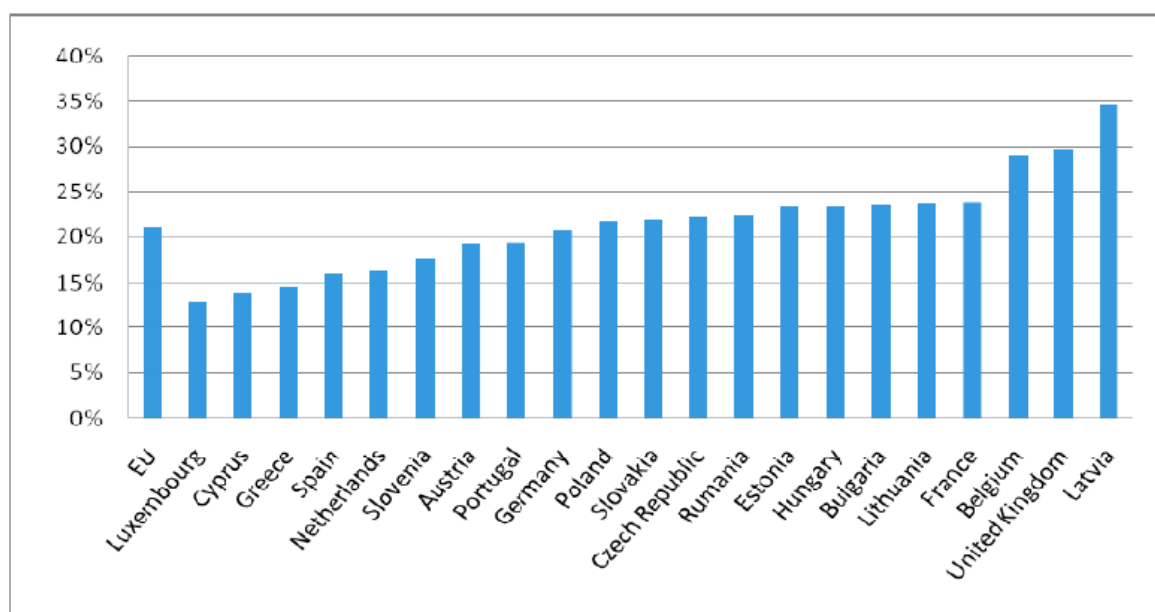
Divorces have been increasing during the last 40 years as well. In Europe, on average, 2 marriages end in divorce every 1000 people, with many differences: for example UK holds the highest rate in divorce, 2 out of 5 marriages ending with divorce, while in Malta divorce is not even allowed. The mean duration of marriages in Europe is more or less 14 years, that is to say that, when a marriage ends, both men and women are more or less 40 years old. As the expectation of life has increased significantly in Europe, this means that many men and women will probably marry once again, or are willing to “try again” to start a new family.

This leads us to some further considerations:

- despite of failures in life, people are still willing to build a family: this means that people continue to see family as a sort of “natural environment” in which they want to live and that they want to try to build.
- how many possibilities will there be, in the second marriage, not to go again over the previous mistakes? Few, indeed. But many people are not acknowledged with this.
- Which meaning are the new generations going to give to words like commitment, relation, steadiness?

### ***Lone-parents families: toward a matri-focal society?***

Lone-parent families are households where “one parent lives with his/her children but without any partner. In past times, lone-parenthood often resulted from the death of one partner, most often the husbands’. Today, there is a comparatively high percentage of unmarried as well as divorced (or separated) single-parents (mainly mothers) who live alone with their children. Since the 1980s, the share of lone-parents rose from 10% to 27% in 1999 in the EU-15 and was at about 21% in 2008 in the EU-27.



Source: Labor Force Survey microdata 2007, ifb-calculations (unweighted data)

Lone parents families mean, in the vast majority of cases, **lone-mothers families**. This issue is often forgot, but it has many consequences in our society, which is becoming a sort of matri-focal society in which fathers loose touch with their children and are more and more separated of them. An American research show that divorced fathers in joint custody of children spend 35% the time they used to spend with their children.

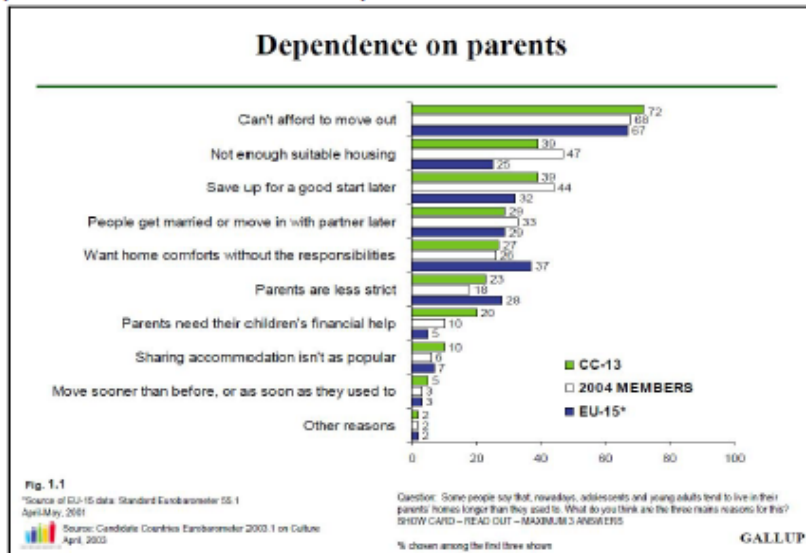
### **Change in transitions:**

#### ***Prolonged presence of young people within the family of origin***

Two distinct sets of factors and conditions contribute to this phenomenon: on one hand, the temporal extension of educational/work training paths and the concrete difficulties of entering the workforce that, to an ever-increasing extent, lead young people into precarious jobs. On the other

hand, the emergence of emotionally closer and more supportive relations between the generations.

**Table 1. Factors accounting for the dependence of young people on their parents in Europe ("Candidate Countries" and EU countries)**



Source: Eurobarometer, 2004

The term CC-13 stands for the so-called "Candidate Countries": Bulgaria, Malta, Cyprus, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania, Estonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, Turkey and Lithuania;

The term EU-15 stands for the countries making up the European Union as of 2001;

The term 2004 MEMBERS groups both the old and new countries making up the European Union.

**The traditionally and socially structured sequence of events once typical of the transition to adult life no longer constitutes the norm.** Life trajectories, which for previous generations were more standardised, have become increasingly fragmented, without clearly identifiable connections between one phase and another; indeed, at times the phases can even be inverted. This process has been referred to as the destandardisation of life courses (see Walther and Stauber, 2002) and it manifests itself in what has been called choice biography (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; du Bois-Reymond, 1998), characterised by a marked individualisation and an accentuation of traits of risk, especially related to social inequalities.

This set of transformations finds in the negotiation-and affection-based family, typical of contemporary Western society, a significant support. The passage from the rule-governed family to the family based on sentiment, in which the affective pole prevails over the normative pole, makes way for the emergence of a picture of the family in which **affection becomes the core of the experience of parenthood.**

### ***New representation of parenthood among young people (esp. the so called “new fathers”)***

The passage to adult life brings with it at least potentially another substantial transition, namely that of becoming a parent. This phase too, compared with twenty years ago, takes place later. As is well known, **becoming a parent involves an extremely profound change not just in the life course of individuals but also in the nature of the relations within the couple.** It is for this reason that couples today, whether married or not, seem to tend to evaluate and weigh up ever more carefully a series of circumstances, both present and future -from the management of relations within the couple, to employment and the income deriving from it, to the organisation and upkeep of the house -before committing themselves to bring a child into the world.

As is well known, the birth of a son or of a daughter significantly changes the existence of parents, arriving at the point **of influencing not just the identity of the young parents but also the organisation of the family as a whole, its times and its rhythms.** From the point of view of identity, the birth of a son/daughter brings with it a redefinition of professional identity starting out from the role of parent, which is confronted by way of the adoption of strategies that vary according to gender. Women very often engage in a radical review and readjustment of their career ambitions. Men, on the other hand, tend to apply themselves to work even more energetically so as to satisfy the needs of the new family, working harder and even seeking additional jobs so as to increase the family income. Moreover, if on the one hand the role of parent reinforces one’s self-esteem and helps to establish one’s identity, on the other hand it can provoke a considerable amount of tension between private life and work, especially if the work is not stable. If the presence of a child increases the expenses that a family has to face, it also demands that parents not be overwhelmed by work requirements (in particular, by a requirement to work more hours). In the majority of cases such contradictions remain unresolved.

it seems possible to identify certain common traits among the representations of the maternity and paternity of young Europeans today. This also seems to be true in respect of the division of roles and tasks within the family. A first point to note is the discrepancy between the ideas expressed by young women and young men and the actual practices put into action in family life. **While there is a tendency to aspire to more equal and balanced relations within the couple, it seems that in everyday life these aspirations do not find expression in terms of the actual distribution of domestic work,** which still penalises the maternal figure as a different national time-budgets show. It should be underlined, however, that alongside traditional visions of parenthood, on the basis of which the woman continues to have to take responsibility for the family, there are beginning to emerge in Europe some new models of parenthood which make provision for changing gender roles and obligations and a reallocation of

tasks within the family. On a different level it needs to be noted that the various European countries are jointly characterised by a widespread refusal on the part of employers to concede to employees – especially to men – periods of parental leave aimed at ensuring that parents are able to spend more time at home and be more involved in the organisation of the life of their family. Thus, it appears that there still prevails a conservative vision of gender roles, incapable of appreciating the tendency, present in young fathers, to willingly allow themselves to become involved in taking care of new-born babies. As a result, on a general level legitimacy continues to be denied to that **new paternal figure** that desires to participate in the everyday activity of care-taking within the family.

### ***Conjugal instability***

In contemporary society the two adult members of the couple choose to establish a relationship, fixing their own norms of behaviour, constructing their own project, drawing strength from values, desires and expectations that they themselves establish. But, above all, the factor of cohesion underpinning the union is constituted by the sharing of a code of sentiment capable of substituting the contractual agreement and the external regulation of the conjugal commitment. In this way concrete form is given to what has been defined as “sentimental individualism” or, in other words, the affirmation of individual autonomy within the field of sentiment, be it at times at the cost of the longevity of the ties (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). In this way the family tends to be increasingly seen as a “private matter”, as an area of life and relations that is “personal”, exclusive and negotiable<sup>27</sup>. This is reinforced by a form of solidarity regulated by internal codes -generated by the family relations themselves – conceived more and more in psychological and emotional terms.

### ***The new role of grandparents***

In our societies, in which life expectancy is extending and the health conditions of people have significantly improved, the figure of the grandparent is becoming more important for a range of reasons. Not only are grandmothers and grandfathers, as is emerging from research work throughout Europe (UP2YOUTH, 1999; SOCCARE, 2000), becoming a resource for their children and their children’s families but they themselves are choosing ever more frequently (health permitting) to become active subjects in their own life, deciding autonomously how to spend their free time (now more abundant) and how to spend their money.

As pointed out by Facchini and Rampazi (2009), these subjects in the final phase of adult life live a further important phase of transition, marked essentially by a quest to bring to a completion their overall life project. While some have the opportunity to plan and to “invent a future”, others, on the other hand, essentially submit to the consequences of so-called “reflected uncertainty”, namely that

situation in which the effects of the biographical uncertainty of young people impacts on the life prospects of older people.

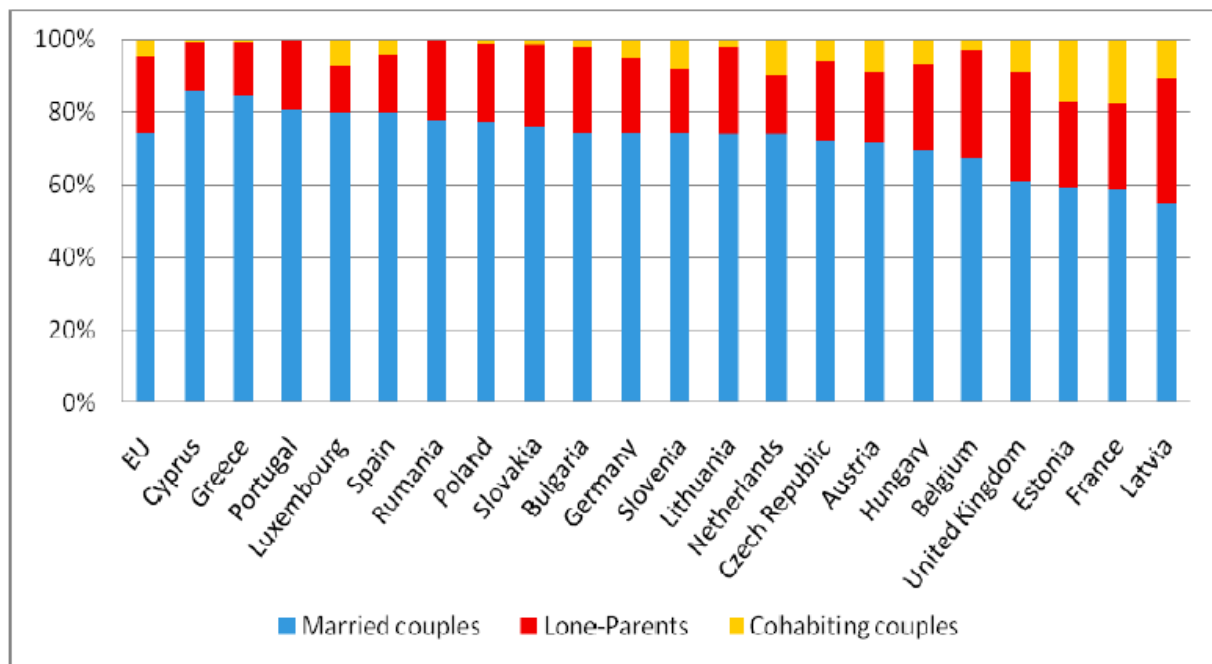
Another constriction may be formed by the obligations that grandmothers/grandfathers find themselves having to fulfil when their children work and are not in a condition to be able to make use of external help in looking after their children. On the other hand, it needs to be underlined that this situation may be perceived and lived by grandmothers and grandfathers as a kind of social re-engagement and not necessarily as a limitation.

In general terms, and more particularly in the context of the formation of new families, it is necessary to stress the role played in the majority of European countries by grandmothers (and grandfathers) as a support in the care of children, for example in the case of sickness or where public services are limited and where the economic resources available are not sufficient to pay for external services (for example, baby-sitters or crèches: the research indicates that grandparents are considered to be especially important in Italy, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Germany).

### **For a critical approach:**

- Fertility and Demographic changes have become a priority in the EU Strategy: Europeans know that they can not be a sustainable and competitive reality, in a globalised world, if they become “too old”. The European strategy for 2020 aims to build a *sustainable, competitive* and *inclusive* Europe. The Lisbon strategy for 2010 aimed at increasing the percentage of working women to 60%. This objective, also due to the economic breakdown in 2008, has failed but it brings to light also significant doubts and difficulties, first of all about the care tasks, that cannot be renounced or outsourced by families. The European Community is therefore investing a lot also on work-life balance issues.
- Statistics and media are looking at “the dark side of the moon”: the vast majority of Europeans are still living, and are still dreaming, of the natural family based on the marriage of a man and a woman, willing to have children. According to statistics, almost 80% of families are composed by married couples (Family Platform Project: [www.familyplatform.eu](http://www.familyplatform.eu))

Figure 4.7: Share of family-types in the EU-27 countries<sup>16</sup>, 2007



Source: Labor Force Survey microdata 2007, ifb-calculations (unweighted data)

- Changes affect the way in which people are trying to do family, not “the nature of family”: and that’s one of the big cultural challenges we have to face, today, in Europe. FDAF has clearly stated that we consider family as the social pact between a man and a woman, willing to have children.

We will try to focus, with this critical approach, to one debated issue in Europe today: divorce.

## 2. Divorce: an apparent right, and its consequences

Divorce has become, in the last Century, an individual right sanctioned by laws in all the European Countries, except of Malta, of course. The increasing-rate of divorce are sometimes presented as an “enlightened development”, something good for the complete freedom of the individual as well as a proof of the declining sorts of the so called traditional families.

Of course our societies have erased the stigma that once accompanied divorce, but they can no longer ignore its effects. In U.S.A., where 50% of children are in divorced families, as well as in U.K. and in all the Countries confronting with high rates of divorce, a very different approach is nowadays developing (see also various social and religious movements asking for a *covenant marriage*, in US).

Divorce is becoming to be seen as a social cost. What does it mean?

- Post-divorce families usually suffer financially. Economic difficulties, of course, have an impact on the education and development of children
- Women are the ones asking for divorce in large extents, but they suffer from economic restraint, need to go back to full-time paid work and less time to devote of children
- Men are usually confronted with greater emotional adjustment problems than women, and end up in spending only 35% of the time they usually spent with their children
- Children are, of course, the major victims of divorce. We have plenty of studied that show the psychological and emotional consequences of divorce on children
- A study conducted in 2000 found those who were unhappy but stay married were more likely to be happy five years later than those who divorced

### **FROM FAMILY PLATFORM DOCUMENT (Perego, Leccardi):**

«A large number of studies, both economic and social, have examined the consequences that divorce can have on men and women. Several decades ago, when divorce rates were beginning to rise, sociologists argued that a marriage is composed of two different marriages, “his” and “her” marriage (Bernard, 1972). It was argued that men and women not only had different perceptions of the way their marriage was organised, but that they would also gain different benefits from it. Alongside the distinction between “his” and “her” marriage, a certain number of scholars

proposed another analogous distinction, namely between “his” and “her” divorce (Kalmijn and Rigt-Poortman, 2006). This research is focused on the differences between men and women in the degree to which they initiate a divorce. (...)

Shortly, “her” divorce occurs more frequently than “his” divorce; the differential effects of the determinants in the study considered suggest that men seem to base their decision to avoid divorce to a greater extent than women on the social costs of divorce, particularly on the risk of losing contact with their children.

So far as the economic consequences of divorce are concerned, we have dedicated particular attention to studies of a comparative kind, in particular, those which take into consideration countries belonging to various geographic areas of Europe and characterised by distinct welfare systems.

Summarising the various results, it is possible to affirm that **the major economic consequences of divorce fall upon women** (McKeever and Wolfinger, 2001; Assve, Betti, Mazzucco and Mencarini, 2006). In fact, women experience salary-related discrimination in the labour market and are subject to phenomena of vertical and horizontal segregation which are amplified in situations of divorce or in the case of the death of a partner. These situations, characterised by high levels of risk and precariousness, can even develop into conditions of out-and-out poverty when the woman is required to take responsibility for one or more children, especially if minors.

Today studies on the unwanted consequences and effects provoked by separation and divorce also focus on separation and divorce also focus on **men who, while suffering less from an economic point of view, nonetheless seem to suffer other negative effects, such as a deterioration in the quality of their life style, their housing and their general consumption as well as a deterioration in the quality of their relationships with family and friends.**

Obviously, a crucial role in regard to the economic and social consequences of divorce is played by the welfare system and the services it offers, which differ from one European country to another (Kalmijn and Rigt-Poortman, 2006; Uunk, 2004).»

The social cost of divorce has been underlined in one of the last proposals of David Cameron’s Government in UK: putting a sort of “tax on divorce”, when children are involved, to pay for the social costs of maintenance and fostering of children. Again, an American survey showed that US federal and state governments spent \$ 150 billion per year to subsidize and sustain single-parent families, and \$ 150 million to strengthen marriage.

This last remark lead us to the third point of interest, that is about Family Policies

### 3. Family Policies: Promoting the Family

In the Family Platform EU Project we have confronted with Family Policies across Europe. We face some problems:

- A European debate: **what** is Family policy?

It is not merely a welfare policy nor even a policy against poverty.

According to many scholars, Family Policy has to be **explicit, coherent** and **legitimate**: it means that nations or local governments should have «a defined set of goals, pursued by a coherent set of policies, and implemented through an institutional framework of a designated government department» (Millar, 1998: 121). This is in the same time a strict and broad definition: *strict*, as it leaves a narrow “espace” for differentiation, and *narrow*, as it compels Nations, as well as Local Governments, to bring on many different actions. Of course, as noticed: «If the criterion is adopted that family policies should have the family as their target population, many of the measures examined in analysis of national family policies may not, strictly speaking, fall within this policy domain. Few member states readily admit, for instance, that policies in area such as childcare and parental leave are directly aimed at family unit» (Hantrais, 2000: p. 45). The notion of Family policy bears in itself a double complexity. First of all, family policy entangles policies not specifically linked to family, such as childcare provisions, labour market, and urban development. Secondly, family policy is sometimes an “uneasy” issue to be approach for politicians and governors.

Family policies are often composed by different policies:

- Leave Policies
- Care Services
- Cash and Tax Benefits
- ...

According to our view, Family Policies need to be:

- **explicit**: having the family as the specific target of policies. Explicit policies promote, support and protect couple relations, intergenerational relations and family tasks (care, education...)
- **direct**: family policies are not individual policies, but they are targeting the family as a whole, not the single members. Many individual policies, on the contrary, are often presented as family policies (e.g. work/life balance policies based on equal opportunities

between man and woman and gender equality). In this sense, family policies should be **relational policies** (policies that recognize and foster the relations among persons)

- **distinctive**: that is to say that family policies should distinguish among the different contexts: contexts related to family life, and contexts related to other choices.
- **coherent**: family policies should include the different dimensions of family, with organic and connected interventions. This implies also the capacity to evaluate the so-called “family impact” of “family mainstreaming”, that is to say how have laws in the economic fields, in School or in Health systems impact on family life [FAMILY MAINSTREAMING]
- **promotional**: family policies should consider each family not as a problem, but starting from its capacities and inner potential (exit from the deficit model, towards a capabilities’ approach). Family policies need to come out from the vision of a Welfare System that considers only fragilities in families and try to assist families. We need a promotional approach, able to highlight resources and to prevent problems and fragilities. This approach is the main way to build [FAMILY EMPOWERMENT, CAPABILITY MODEL AND SUBSIDIARY SYSTEMS]

We will therefore try to focus on three main criteria, already mentioned but worth of an indeep analysis, to develop a family policy:

- **Family Mainstreaming**

The concept of “Family Mainstreaming” finally deserves some specific attention/definition: it means, in the international approach, that the family becomes even more central as a criterion of good work in politics and administration. So far, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the European Parliament have developed concrete definitions of the term Family Mainstreaming and its aims. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs includes in ‘mainstreaming the family issue’ the processes of ☐ identifying the implications for families of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes; ☐ making family concerns an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies; ☐ strengthening family-centred policies and programmes as part of an integrated and comprehensive approach to development planning. The UN stresses that not only should the focus be on the family as a whole, but also that impacts on individual family members must be taken into account. The aims are similar to those of Gender Mainstreaming: real freedom of choice, equal participation, no discrimination. The family is seen here as the primary access to the members of a family. Thus, for example, it is not possible to support children who are HIV positive or who have

AIDS if the family context is not also taken into account. In the same way, new and emerging issues such as fatherhood can be integrated into a family perspective. A central aspect of the UN's call is not "strengthening the family" but rather "strengthening the functions of the family". The UN includes as functions undertaken by members of the family caring, support and affiliation. 'Family Mainstreaming' therefore means giving these functions state support. A standard definition of what the family is supposed to look like should, however, be avoided. The function of the family is thus seen as a place where persons undertake responsibility for each other. Family is therefore here defined by terms such as identity, responsibility and affiliation than as a marriage-centred institution. The European Parliament has taken up the term 'Family Mainstreaming' in its *Resolution on Reconciling Professional, Family and Private Lives (2003/2129 INI)* and developed a much narrower definition than the UN. Here, 'Family Mainstreaming' means encouraging the Member States and accession states to analyse the impact of their policies on families, while at the same time calling on the Commission to take account of the various dimensions and definitions of the family in order to identify the social impact of the measures proposed. Thus, this would involve reviewing the anticipated impacts of family policy on various family forms and family members. According to the European Parliament, this would enable all family members to participate equally in the tasks and responsibilities of the family. Equally, various ways should be opened up for more freedom of choice with regard to matters of compatibility and discrimination should be avoided, especially in tax policy.

#### - **Family Empowerment and Subsidiarity**

Families have their fragilities but it's crucial to see family always as a possible resource, and not only as a problem. This means that social services and family policies have to change point of view. Parents must be seen as able to raise their children, and must be helped in doing that. The State should not take the place of parents, but should leave them their authority and support parenting and doing families, support the well-being of families.

In order to obtain this change in perspective, we need that also families gain a clear conscience of their rights and of their social responsibilities. Families need to gather together, lobbying, fight for their rights. Family Associations are born in order to do that, and to accomplish the task of "doing family together". Families need to understand that "doing family together" is also a way of "doing family better"