



Improving Policy Responses and Outcomes to Socio-Economic Challenges: changing family structures, policy and practice

The I PROSEC research project was funded by the European Commission within the Framework Programme 5 Key Action for 'Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base'. The project brought together social scientists from eight EU member states (France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom) and three candidate countries (Estonia, Hungary and Poland), representing different waves of EU membership and welfare arrangements.

The research was designed to inform policy by developing a greater understanding of socio-demographic change in Europe, the social and economic challenges such change presents, and the efficacy of the policy responses formulated by national governments and at EU level. The project was particularly concerned with changing family structures and relationships and their interface with policy. The project team analysed the policy process, inputs, outcomes and impacts and assessed the potential for cross-border learning and policy development.

Comparisons of socio-economic change in EU member states and candidate countries showed that, in the closing decades of the 20th century, trends were generally moving in the same direction. However, not all countries started from the same base, and change has been occurring at a different rate and pace both between and within countries. What is seen as problematic in one society may not be considered as a cause for concern elsewhere. Nor is the level of debate and of policy interest necessarily commensurate with the extent of change and its actual or potential implications. Although the challenges raised may be similar, the approaches adopted by governments in response to change vary according to the policy environment, the political and economic climate and the legitimacy and social acceptability of state intervention in family life.

POPULATION DECLINE AND AGEING

Facts

F Fertility rates are falling.

Women in Europe today are producing only 1.48 children. Among the I PROSEC countries, in 2000, East Germany (1.22), Italy (1.24) and Spain (1.23) displayed the lowest total fertility rates. France (1.88) and Ireland (1.89) recorded the highest rates.

F Population is not being replaced.

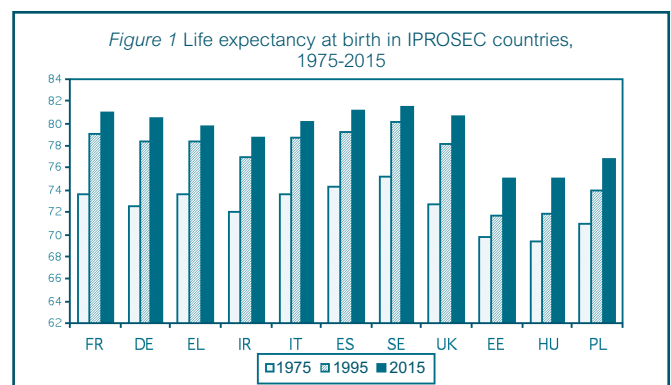
By 2000, completed fertility rates across the Union had fallen below the replacement level of 2.1 children for women born in 1960, except in Ireland and France. The lowest levels were reached in West Germany (1.60) and Italy (1.67). In West Germany, Ireland, Italy and England and Wales, one woman in five is remaining childless.

F Population growth is negative.

Natural population growth has slowed down to 1 per 1000 across the Union. By 2000, it had fallen below 0 in Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden, and in 8 of the 10 candidate countries. The Union as a whole could experience negative natural population growth within the next decade.

F The population of Europe is ageing.

The proportion of older people in the population is increasing at a faster rate in the Union than in other developed countries except Japan. In 1975, at birth, average life expectancy was 70 years. In 2015, most people will live to be at least 75, and in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden and the UK, they can expect to live to be 80. Life expectancy is much lower in the three candidate countries.



Challenges, Responses and Outcomes

'Regarding whether or not the state should give incentives so that people have more children, that's a private decision. What I think is sad is that there are external conditions (employment, the size of dwellings) that end up making you decide one way or the other. That's what needs to be resolved. The state must make means available for families, such as crèches, more affordable housing; it's not just about economic benefits, but also social services.'

'If we were in a wealthier society, people would be having more children. A more favourable climate needs to be created.' (Unmarried cohabiting Spanish woman working full time, with two children)

'There shouldn't be an obligation towards society to give birth. Subsidies shouldn't be distributed with the implicit goal of making more people have babies.' (Hungarian female divorcee with two children)

Falling fertility rates

- C** The main challenge presented by declining fertility and rising childlessness, not only where fertility rates are very low, as in Germany, the southern European and candidate countries, but also where they are above the EU average, as in Sweden and France, is whether governments should intervene to curb falling birth rates and encourage childbearing and, if so, what measures they should take.
- R** Responses to falling fertility vary across Europe. Most societies reject prohibitive and pro-natalist policy measures to influence population size. However, legislation in Poland restricts abortion and contraception, and abortion is illegal in Ireland. All IPROSEC countries except Spain and the UK provide higher levels of benefit for larger families or supplementary benefits. Tax breaks are granted for children in France, Germany, Greece, Spain and Hungary, and tax relief is given from the third child in Estonia.
- O** The outcomes of policy measures are difficult to assess. No evidence is found that negative or prohibitive measures increase fertility. Nor is unequivocal evidence available to show that supportive family policy measures necessarily result in an increase in the birth rate or family size. However, the lack of such measures and of effective economic and employment policies would seem to be contributing to falling birth rates.

Non-replacement of population

- C** The challenge presented by non-replacement of population is primarily how to sustain the future labour supply and ensure continued economic and social development.
- R** Government responses are focused on proactive measures to bolster the labour supply, including the removal of barriers to labour market entry for young people, tax and social insurance incentives for employers taking on unemployed and underemployed workers in areas of labour shortage, and measures to retain older workers.
- O** It is too early to assess the long-term outcomes of most of the responsive measures being put in place to offset the negative effects of non-replacement of population. However, employment levels appear to be rising among underemployed population groups, especially women, in northern Europe and Ireland.

Measures to achieve more balanced funding of benefits and services appear, as yet, to be having very little impact on levels of spending.

Negative population growth

- C** An important challenge raised by the prospect of negative natural population growth is whether to relax control over non-EU immigration, while intervening to promote the integration of foreign workers into the host community and prevent racial tensions from developing.
- R** The responses of governments indicate a reluctance to relax control over non-EU immigration, except for the recruitment of well-qualified working-age migrant labour in areas of labour and skills shortages. Supportive measures are being implemented to integrate migrants and their families and relieve ethnic tensions.
- O** The available evidence on outcomes suggests that non-EU immigration is sustaining population growth in Germany, Greece, Italy and Sweden, and that measures to promote multiculturalism have moved onto the political agenda in many countries.

Population ageing

- C** The challenges raised across Europe by population ageing are how to mitigate its negative financial effects on society, how to ensure the future viability of pension schemes and the provision of good quality, affordable social and medical care for older people, and how to prevent age discrimination (ageism).
- R** Governments in northern Europe and the UK are responding by encouraging research into diseases associated with ageing and by promoting campaigns to reduce health risks. Ageism is being outlawed. All countries are reforming their pension systems. Ireland, Italy, Spain, the UK, Estonia and Poland are developing public-private partnerships and fostering greater involvement of voluntary organisations in service delivery.
- O** The full impact of population ageing on pension schemes has yet to be felt. The measures being taken may help to alleviate the situation, but probably at the cost of higher contributions from employees, lower pensions, a longer working life and greater expenditure on care provision. The 'business case' for retaining older workers is being recognised in some countries.

CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE

Facts

F Family formation is being postponed.

Age at marriage and childbirth are being postponed. Across the Union, between 1960 and 2000, age at first marriage rose by 4 years to 30 for men and 28 for women. Average age at childbirth reached 29. The number of teenage pregnancies has been falling across the Union, but in the late 1990s the level remained very high in Estonia with 132 per 1000 women aged under 20, in Hungary with 119 and in the UK with 145, compared to 35 in Sweden.

F Families are becoming de-institutionalised.

Marriage rates have been falling across Europe since the 1970s. By 2000, among the IPROSEC countries, Estonia recorded the lowest level, with 4 marriages per 1000 population, compared to 10 in 1960. The number of marriages ending in divorce has been increasing. By 2000, the highest level was reached in the Nordic states, the UK and Estonia, where more than 40% of marriages contracted in the early 1980s ended in divorce. Much lower rates were recorded in the southern European countries, Ireland and Poland.

Unmarried cohabitation is a widespread living arrangement in northern Europe, accounting for about 20% of all cohabiting couples. In southern Europe, rates fall to 1–5%

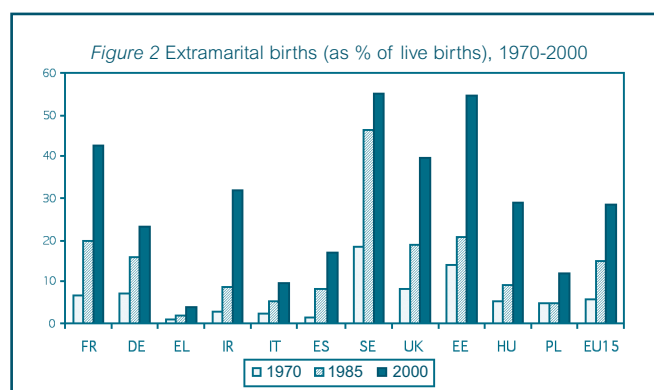
Extramarital births are most widespread in Sweden and Estonia, accounting for over 50% of all births, compared to single figures in Greece and Italy, and 12% in Poland. By the late 1990s, almost 10% of children aged under 15 were living in lone-parent households across the Union, ranging from 20% in the UK to 3% or less in Greece and Spain.

F Inequalities between families are growing.

Increasing disparities are found in the standards of living of families within and between countries. Within societies, lone-parent and large families, and older people living alone are most exposed to poverty. The gap between work-rich and work-poor families has widened.

While the social benefits received by families and children by head of population rose during the 1990s across the Union, regional variations increased. The highest level of spending on families was recorded in Ireland and Germany, and the lowest in Italy. The proportion of persons in households receiving family-related benefits ranged from 63% in Ireland to 4% in Spain, and 7% in Italy.

Differences in income, provision and delivery of services are found between north and south in Italy, East and West Germany, the regions in Sweden and the UK, and rural and urban areas in Ireland, the southern European and candidate countries.



Challenges, Responses and Outcomes

'It should not be social benefits that decide the size of the family or when you have your children. Many people are perhaps not ready to have a second child but feel they must have a second child in order to benefit from the system [speed premium]. The first might not be old enough.' (Swedish mother at home, with a reconstituted family)

'Yes, the family is a question for the state to deal with. ... Improvements can only come from the state.'

Delayed family formation

C Although changes in patterns of family formation are similar in many respects across Europe, the challenges they present are perceived differently. Few governments show concern about delayed marriage and first births. In the UK and Hungary, they are looking, rather, for ways of dealing with the high level of teenage pregnancies. In Estonia, the challenge is the large number of teenage abortions.

We can't do anything ourselves. It's natural that the state should look after families, ... because children are the citizens of tomorrow; they will be the ones paying taxes. They're the ones who will make the country function later on. That's why the state has to get involved. So, it's natural there should be facilities for children. It's the same with older people. It's natural for the state to look after them.' (French woman, in employment, with a reconstituted family)

R Some governments are responding with measures designed to influence the timing of family formation. In Sweden, a speed premium is paid to women who have their second child within 21 months of the first. Measures have been taken to discourage teenage pregnancies in all IPROSEC countries except Germany, Greece, Estonia and Poland. They include guidance on contraception in sex education programmes and, in Sweden, counselling clinics.

Contraceptives are made available in schools in France. Reproductive health is being promoted in Estonia, and incentives are given in the UK for teenage girls to engage in education and training, and to enter employment.

- Delayed family formation has not been reversed. Teenage pregnancy rates have fallen in the UK, but not to the same extent as in Sweden. Data on teenage pregnancies and abortion rates in Estonia indicate that both rates are falling. In all three countries, it is difficult to determine whether the decline is due to specific policy measures or to wider socio-economic pressures.

Family de-institutionalisation

- Concern is expressed in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Poland, on religious and moral grounds, about the extent to which family de-institutionalisation poses a threat to social order. More widely, the challenge for governments is whether to intervene in the private lives of families to discourage the development of alternative family forms, and/or to extend the rights and duties of unmarried cohabiting couples and of children in relation to their biological parents. An issue for governments that commands considerable support is how to deal with instability and insecurity within families and, more especially, with domestic violence and abuse.

- In countries, such as Ireland, Italy and Poland, where the public is more accepting of government intervention to prevent the development of alternative family forms, divorce law is restrictive. Tax incentives are used to encourage conjugal families in Germany, Italy, Estonia and Poland.

Most governments are introducing permissive measures to formalise rights and duties within alternative living arrangements, including the creation of legal contracts for unmarried cohabitants, extending to same-sex couples in France, Spain (in some regions) and Sweden. Everywhere, parents are obliged to maintain their children, and legislation is being implemented to make parents responsible for their children's misdemeanors. The absent parent is pursued after divorce or separation, except in Greece. A few countries are laying down the legal obligations of step-parents in reconstituted families.

Cases of domestic violence and abuse are being taken up in the courts. Voluntary associations are actively involved in providing support services.

- Prohibitive legislation restricts the number of divorces, though not the number of formal or informal separations.

Proactive measures to promote the formal two-parent married couple are not associated in the statistics with markedly higher marriage rates or consistently lower unmarried cohabitation rates.

In countries where de-institutionalised family forms are widespread, law reform extending rights to non-conventional families has largely removed the stigma by legitimising and normalising de facto situations. Cases of domestic violence are attracting media attention. They are being more widely reported to the authorities and are, more often, being brought before the courts.

Growing inequalities between families

- An important challenge for governments is how to reduce the marked disparities in the standards of living of families between and within societies.

The problems of poverty and indebtedness have heightened the debate about the extent to which governments should intervene in the private lives of families and about the relative merits of universal as opposed to targeted benefits and services for families at risk of falling into poverty.

- Many governments have been responding to inequalities within society by targeting support on families most in need, although the case for targeted child benefits and family allowances is not supported in all countries, as illustrated by the case of Estonia.

All IPROSEC countries, except Greece, Italy and Poland, operate income redistribution schemes, including national minimum income guarantees. Free medical and housing subsidies are provided in most countries for low income groups. In some cases, provision is made for lone parents, increasingly through incentives such as subsidised childcare, to enable them to become self-sufficient.

National governments in Germany, Italy, the UK and Estonia are directing resources towards less developed regions. The urban-rural divide is being addressed in Sweden, the UK and Estonia through schemes to improve rural infrastructures.

- Policies to redistribute incomes between social groups and regions are credited with having a positive impact on income inequalities in some countries, for example France, but they have not eliminated pockets of poverty. Policy measures targeted at families during periods of family transition offer a safety net and security for families and help to prevent them from falling into poverty, particularly in northern Europe. They also play a redistributive role, since they are often means-tested and operate according to the principle of social solidarity.

In southern Europe, governments are strongly criticised for the low level of provision, which is considered inadequate to prevent poverty and is no substitute for family support. In the candidate countries, the substantial reduction in public policy provision and the withdrawal of certain benefits and services for families in the post-Soviet era have had a detrimental impact on family well-being by both creating and fuelling widespread unemployment and poverty.

CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS

Facts

F **The life course is gendered.**

On average women in Europe can expect to live 6 years longer than men. Life expectancy at age 60 is 24 for women and 19.6 for men. The discrepancy between the sexes at birth is most marked in Estonia, with 11 years. More women are likely to be living alone in old age: 57% of women aged over 75, compared to 24% of men, ranging from 69% of women in Germany to 13% of men in Spain.

In all the IPROSEC countries except Germany, women outnumbered men in tertiary education: by 130 to 100 in Sweden, Estonia and Poland by 2000. In Germany, men outnumbered women by 100 to 90.

Women are spending longer – three-quarters of their life span – outside activities associated with childbearing and raising, but they remain under-represented in public life and government.

Parity has been reached in Sweden in national government. In the southern European and candidate countries, women account for fewer than 20% of members of national governments.

F **Working patterns are gendered.**

Across the EU, women with higher levels of education come closer to male patterns of employment. The disparity in employment rates among women by level of education is over 40% in Italy and Spain.

In the EU, women are taking more than half the new jobs being created. The overall employment gender gap for working age population fell from 24 points in 1990 to 18 points in 2000, with the smallest gap in Sweden and the widest in Greece. In the candidate countries, employment rates for both women and men fell sharply during the 1990s.

In 2000, women accounted for over 44% of the total population aged 25–49 in employment in France, Germany, Sweden and the UK, and for less than 40% in Greece, Italy and Spain. Female rates were closest to male rates in Sweden with

80%, compared to 84% for men, and furthest from them in Spain, with 53%, compared to 86% for men.

F **Work–life balance is gendered.**

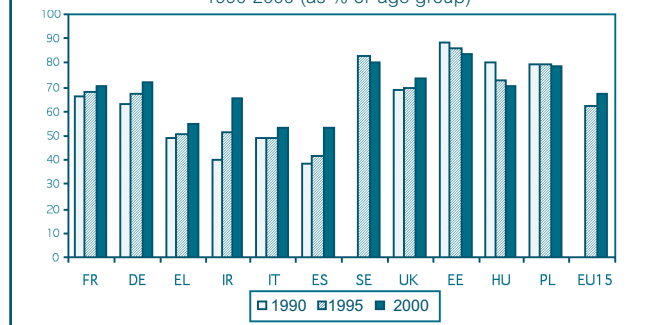
Dual earning became increasingly common during the 1990s. The presence of children is still associated with a fall in dual earning in Germany, the UK, Ireland and France, but with a higher rate in Greece and Spain. In Italy, the level remains unchanged. The number of children has a depressing effect on mothers' employment rates in Germany and the UK for the first child.

Employment rates are affected in all countries as the number of children increases. The smallest effect is found in Greece.

Female part-time employment rates in IPROSEC countries range from almost 45% in the UK, where relatively large numbers of women are in the labour force, to 8% in Greece, where small numbers of women are in employment. In the candidate countries, few women are employed part time, and both men and women work long hours.

Across Europe, irrespective of their employment status, women continue to perform a larger share of domestic tasks than men. Over 80% of employed women claim the main responsibility for housework and shopping; 45% perform child and elder caring tasks, compared to 20% and 25% for men.

Figure 3 Female employment rates at age 25-49, 1990-2000 (as % of age group)



Challenges, Responses and Outcomes

'To some extent, I think women should choose between children and career. ... I liked working but I understood that by choosing work instead of taking care of my children, I would have satisfied my personal ego at the expense of my own children.'
(Married Estonian mother at home, aged 40, with five children)

Then, once again the state has decided. They claim that we're good at gender equality. Everyone can go out to work. But in reality it's not like that, but rather let's improve gender equality, which means that absolutely everyone has to go out to work. (Older well-qualified Swedish male respondent)

The gendered life course

C Disparities in life expectancy between men and women, the under-representation of women on public bodies and the underperformance of men in

education raise challenges for governments, who have to decide whether to use positive discrimination or other measures to support women in old age and in public life, and men in education.

R Gender inequality in old age is not being directly addressed by specific measures targeting women in most IPROSEC countries, though the state provides some form of pension credit in recognition of time spent out of the workforce performing caring tasks.

In France, Germany, Sweden, the UK and Estonia, media campaigns and quotas are being used to attract more women into public life, and efforts are being made to recruit more men into teaching, in an attempt to provide male role models for boys.

O Measures recognising time spent out of the labour market are contributing to improved pensions, but are not helping older women who do not have a sustained employment record.

More women are being attracted into public life in northern European countries, where campaigning is most active and where awareness of opportunities for women is greatest, even if parity is far from being achieved.

Gendered working patterns

C In the context of declining birth rates, an ageing labour force, skills shortages and strong economic imperatives, the main challenge for government is how to strike a balance between the need to maintain and widen the fiscal base, generate a flexible labour force, and use the available skills to the full, while preventing gender discrimination and ensuring effective implementation of equality law.

R Under EU law and in the employment guidelines, governments are formally committed to increasing employment rates among women. They are using incentives such as (re)training schemes and support services to encourage more women to enter and remain in employment. Maternity leave and the reinstatement of women returners are mandatory.

Most of the new jobs being taken up by women are in the public sector, where working conditions are more strictly protected and monitored. Domestic service jobs have been regulated to bring employees into the formal labour market and provide social insurance cover in France, Spain, the UK and Estonia.

Maternity leave is funded in all the IPROSEC countries from social insurance. The cost for employers of paid parental is being alleviated in Germany, Italy, Sweden, Estonia and Hungary by funding leave through social or parental insurance. In France, childrearing benefit is financed by the family insurance fund. Employers in France, Italy, Sweden, the UK, Estonia and Hungary are, however, expected to meet the cost of paying for replacements recruited during the leave period. Governments in France, Ireland, Sweden and the UK have developed formal structures for monitoring gender equality and for hearing complaints.

The cost of policing and of bringing cases of sexual discrimination and harassment before the courts may be met from legal aid in France, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

O Employers in countries with effective systems for monitoring, policing and sanctioning gender discrimination in recruitment, training and employment are more likely to be aware of gender policies and to implement them, thereby reducing gender disparities. Where employers are able to offset the costs of maternity against insurance concessions, they are less hostile towards the employment of women.

The public sector is widely seen as gender aware and woman friendly. Where domestic and services jobs are regulated and protected, women's work has been brought into the formal economy. However, both types of employment reinforce gender segregation and the pay gap.

The gendered work-life balance

C Rising employment rates among mothers present two main policy challenges for governments: whether and how to help couples reconcile family life and employment; and whether and how to assist both men and women in balancing employment and other activities, including domestic and care work.

R Governments in France, Germany, Sweden and the UK, in particular, are encouraging employers to promote a family-friendly workplace, by introducing practices such as job sharing, flexible working arrangements, including part time, reduced, compressed and annualised working hours, term-time working and teleworking. In the UK, governments have argued the business case for work-life balance in partnership with industry. In northern Italy, schemes have been introduced to make opening hours of schools, shops and services, and the provision of public transport more amenable to work-life balance.

Governments in France, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, the UK, Estonia and Hungary are committed to ensuring adequate provision of good quality affordable child and elder care. In Germany and the UK, the voluntary sector is closely involved in delivery. Ireland, Italy, the UK and Poland are developing public-private partnerships, with a view to reducing the cost for public funds.

To encourage greater involvement of men in parenting, in all the IPROSEC countries men are entitled to take paid paternity leave. In Sweden, in an attempt to change attitudes at the workplace towards men taking leave for family reasons, full leave entitlement is conditional on take up by men.

O In some countries, strict regulatory frameworks have resulted in employers developing avoidance strategies that militate against gender equality. Elsewhere, less rigid practices in the framework of human resource policies are proving to be effective. Public policy enforcing statutory working conditions and time policies can make paid work and family activities more compatible for both men and women, and can have a positive impact on decisions about family formation and the sharing of household tasks.

CHANGING INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS

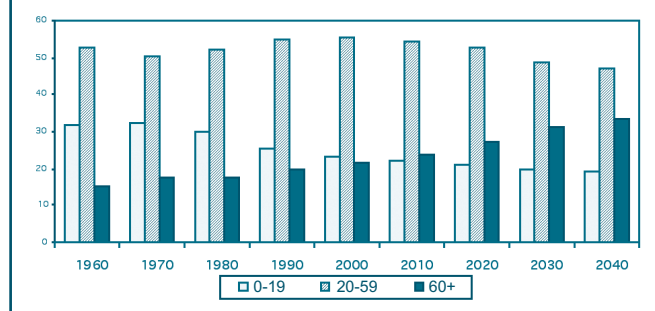
Facts

- F The dependency imbalance is growing.** In 2000, the population aged 60 and over accounted for a larger proportion of total population than that aged under 20 in Germany, Greece and Italy. Within the EU, Sweden, Italy and Greece, respectively, recorded the highest old age dependency ratios in relation to working age population, and Ireland the lowest. The age dependency ratio was more heavily weighted towards the younger population in the candidate countries due to relatively low life expectancy.
- F Intergenerational dependence is increasing.** Young adults everywhere are experiencing longer periods of financial dependency due to later labour market entry. In southern Europe, in particular, young people are delaying leaving the parental home. In 2000, the youngest age at which at least 50% of young people were no longer living with their parents was over 29 in Italy, Spain and Greece. Northern Europe is characterised by relatively high proportions of one-person households, and southern Europe and Ireland by the relatively large number of multigenerational households. Ireland records the largest proportion of households with three or more adults living with dependent children, and Sweden the smallest proportion.
- In southern Europe, older people receive a relatively large proportion of social transfer payments: in Italy, 41% of persons live in households that receive an old-age or survivor's pension, compared to 22% in

Ireland. In Germany, Italy and Spain, children below the age of 16 are most exposed to poverty. In Greece, Ireland and the UK, the group aged 65 and over is most at risk of falling into poverty.

- F Caring needs are becoming greater.** The changing age balance, in combination with later labour market entry and earlier labour market exit, has resulted in a concentration of economic activity over a shorter proportion of the life span and a heavier burden of financial and practical caring for the pivot or sandwich generation, particularly in the southern European countries. Everywhere, women are more likely than men to be involved in childcare on a daily basis. With very few exceptions, they also provide more elder care. Much larger proportions of men and women provide childcare as compared to eldercare.

Figure 4 EU population by age group, 1960-2040 (%)



Challenges, Responses and Outcomes

'I believe that for as long as they [father, mother, father-in-law, mother-in-law] are self-sufficient they should live on their own. ... Personally, I would, under no circumstances, allow one of mine to go to a home for the aged. ... I believe that children have to make some sacrifices for their parents. A place in the home has to be made for the grandfather and the

grandmother.' (Greek woman, in employment, mother-in-law living with her)

'Initially when the child is small the parents should bear responsibility. As they get older, the state should provide more, especially for the elderly.' (Retired English man with two grown-up children)

The changing dependency balance

- C** A major challenge for governments is how to manage the impact on the labour force and on government spending of the growing imbalance between the population of working age in employment, who are producing wealth and paying taxes, and the young and older dependent populations, who are primarily consumers of goods, benefits and services.
- R** Governments in EU member states are committed to producing national strategies to promote solidarity between and within generations. They are also under an obligation to control public spending.

Within the EU, since the mid-1990s emphasis has been on childcare strategies to enable women with children to participate fully in the labour force. Schemes are being introduced to enhance the employability of older people through retraining programmes in Italy, Spain and Sweden, and lifelong learning in France, Germany and the UK. The age of retirement is being postponed to delay labour market exit in Germany, Italy, the UK and Estonia, and disincentives have been introduced to curb early retirement in Italy, Spain and Sweden. Flexible, or phased, retirement, is being brought in everywhere except Greece, Ireland and Poland.

- Public childcare strategies are credited with enabling more women to enter and remain in employment when they have young children, raising parents' expectations of public service provision. Solidarity contributions and pension reserve funds are proving to be effective in countries such as France and Spain, where the age imbalance in some occupations had become critical.

Intergenerational dependence

- C** In the face of the growing awareness of the threat posed by the demographic time bomb for the intergenerational contract and for solidarity between the generations, the challenge for governments is whether and how to enforce family obligations and responsibilities and how to deal with growing tensions between the generations.
- R** In the Nordic countries, the state assumes the main responsibility for the well-being of young and older dependants. In France and Germany, families are held legally responsible for their dependants. The state plays a strong supportive role in the provision of services, together with the voluntary sector in Germany. In the transition countries, families are legally responsible for their members, and are less reliant on the state and employers for support than during the Soviet era. In Ireland and the UK, family relationships are not strictly regulated. State support is combined with heavy reliance on the private sector. In southern Europe, in law and practice, families have primary responsibilities for their own members, with minimal support from the state. Punitive legislation is applied against family members who fail to carry out their responsibilities. Except in Greece, children can be taken into care if parental control is inadequate or children are at risk. Governments in France, Germany and the UK are implementing measures through the courts, to protect older people from abuse by family members.
- O** Cutbacks in public spending on services, such as childcare, and residential homes for children and older people, together with the growing need

for financial, social and medical support in old age have placed greater pressure on families, to the extent that they are beginning to question the moral, legal and financial obligation to assume responsibility for their relatives.

Intergenerational caring

- C** As traditional carers are unavailable or reluctant to assume the burden of care work, the challenge for governments is how to ensure the provision of good quality affordable care for children and older people.
- R** The state intervenes in the provision of care for dependants through a mix of cash benefits and services, often in conjunction with the private and voluntary sectors, and involving varying degrees of commodification. France and Sweden make relatively generous provision for childcare, and other EU countries are committed to raising their level of provision. In the candidate countries, the formerly generous provision of childcare has been cut back since transition. Public childcare is limited in Germany, and provision depends heavily on the voluntary sector. In the UK and Ireland, public-private partnership arrangements operate at local level. Public provision of childcare in Greece, Italy and Spain is minimalist. In France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Hungary, tax relief is provided for home helps and childminders, and the UK low income tax credit has a childcare component. Care work for older people is being increasingly regulated and protected. In most countries, direct payments are made to care givers and/or receivers, in some cases including close relatives, for care at home. Provision is often funded and delivered at local level. It is most generous in northern Europe.
- O** More women are being paid to care for the relatives of other women who are in full-time employment. Payment to relatives is lending social recognition and a monetary value to family care work, but the future provision of quality elder care remains critical.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The findings in this publication are drawn from the European Commission funded IPROSEC project carried out between 2000 and 2003. They do not necessarily reflect the opinion or position of the Commission.

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