

Family Observer

European Observatory on Family Matters

Social protection & social action

***Youth as a transition
to full autonomy***

***Public child-care
schemes***

***What happens to the
European family?***

Generations

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European Commission



The Lisbon Summit highlighted the essential linkage between Europe's economic strength and its social welfare states model. Social policy is seen as part of the European Union's policy framework to manage structural change and contain undesirable social consequences. Within this framework, the Commission's new Social Policy Agenda places an overall focus on the promotion of 'quality' as the driving force for a thriving economy, more and better jobs and an inclusive society.

The recent conclusions of the Council (Employment and Social Policy) of 29 November 2000 in relation to this agenda state that an emphasis on the promotion of quality in all areas of social policy — quality in training, quality in work, quality of industrial relations and quality of social policy as a whole — is an essential factor if the European Union is to achieve the goals it has set itself regarding competitiveness and full employment. Furthermore, it points out that strengthening and modernising the European social model means realising the implications of the interaction between economic growth, employment and social cohesion when defining the policies of the Union. This provides the political basis for a comprehensive

strategy of mutually reinforcing economic, employment and social policies. The overview of the social situation in the EU Member States compiled in the European Commission's Social Reports is a major element in developing sustainable and competitive labour market policies.

The European Observatory on Family Matters focuses on the family as one key element shaping the social situation in Europe. It monitors family arrangements and the relation between the individual members constituting a family. Individualisation of choices was the most characteristic social trend in the 20th century. There is more diversity in terms of social models, lifestyles, modes of consumption and social opportunities for self-development. This is seen in the large social acceptance of various forms of living arrangements. For example, consensual unions (partnership without marriage) have increased sharply in most Member-States: 8% of all couples are living in such an arrangement in Europe.

The welfare systems in the Member States try to cope with the continuous changes taking place in Europe. They have played a fundamental role in promoting a cohesive society and combating risks of exclusion. However, they now face a series of significant common challenges such as the need to adapt to demographic changes and the requirements of the knowledge-based society.

Demographic trends will affect the structure of the labour market and the supply of labour. At the same time they

will also put heavy pressure on pension and health systems. The information revolution presents yet another challenge for welfare systems. They will have to ensure that the opportunities offered by new technologies are exploited to the full and that the risks of negative side effects are eliminated.

In achieving sustainable economic growth and full employment, social policy will play a crucial role by ensuring that human resources are treated with much more care than in the past and that they become a strategic, productive factor. The current inequalities in income distribution, education and health represent a significant challenge. Those people mostly belonging to less favoured groups of the working age population must be enabled to participate in society to their full potential.

Social policy should therefore not only be seen as a contribution to a more equitable society, but its role as a productive factor should also be acknowledged. Social policy can only be successful if it can demonstrate its cost-effectiveness. This underlines the need to monitor social trends as well as to better understand their overall impact on the economy and society as a whole in order to obtain the most efficient policy mixes. The articles published in the *Family Observer* are to be seen as contributions facilitating the development of such policies.

*Gabrielle Clotuche,
Director of Social Policy,
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Commission*



Fertility is a central element of demography. The Annual Seminar 2000 of the European Observatory on Family Matters dealt with it from a family-research point of view. All presentations underlined the importance of the social

Do you want to
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and social
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This is the third issue of the *Family Observer*, published by the European Observatory on Family Matters. Like previous issues, it seeks to provide information on new developments in the European family arena. Evolution is the essence of these new developments in the field of tension between science and politics, theory and practice, disciplines and interdisciplinary work, expectation and reality. By reporting them, we also depict the real-life situations of the people who make up these families. They, too, face different role expect-

embedding of the family. The better chances are to be able to combine work and family life, to have a stable partnership, and to find suitable housing, the higher is the likelihood that couples will decide to have a child. This proves that the family cannot be regarded as an isolated, private unit in society, but that the social environment is decisive for the family's well-being.

One of the aims of the Annual Seminars organised by the European Observatory on Family Matters is to share research findings with the public at large. The list of participants included not only scientists, but also politicians and family practitioners. Experts from Singapore and the USA contributed input on aspects that transcended the European perspective. The findings of the Seminar are published on the Observatory's homepage. It has been extended and now contains information on the Observatory in its three working languages (English, French and

German), as well as tables on family issues with important statistical data from each EU Member State.

A special feature is the collection of links to institutions engaged in family research in the EU Member States. The Observatory's homepage is continuously updated and developed. In the future, it will also provide answers to frequently asked questions on family issues. Your suggestions regarding the Observatory homepage will be most welcome. Please write to us or send us an e-mail.

Rudolf Richter
President, Austrian Institute for
Family Studies
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Please also let us know if you want to receive the *Family Observer* in English, French or German.

Note that future issues of the *Family Observer* will be published and circulated electronically only!

The Observatory's website features information and research results on family matters, demographic developments and social security issues:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/family/observatory/home.html

Make sure you don't miss out on family-relevant topics!

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Dear Reader!

tations and contradicting needs. On the one hand, there may be children who want to spend time with their parents whenever they like and for as long as they like, and who look at them with sad eyes if this is not possible. On the other hand, there is the legitimate wish of the parents to keep in touch with the world of work. Another example is the loneliness of old people and the fact that their needs for companionship remain unmet because roads inadequate for the volume of today's traffic turn just a few miles into a major undertaking for potential visitors.

This time, Christine Prantauer, the Tyrolean artist who illustrated the first two issues of the *Family Observer*, has chosen a very subtle theme. She puts people in family contexts into public spaces. In the past two issues, she focused on the world of children and women's activities. This time, she shows us how invisible people in families can become in the public: because they are constantly in motion, it is hard to keep up with them. Thus, their tracks quickly fade, and it becomes obvious that every step into the public indeed tends to make the needs of families less visible.

The topics discussed in the *Family Observer* should enable you to detect some new trends. We hope that facts will make it easier for both of us to identify new developments. May you enjoy the hunt!

Irene M. Kernthaler
Editor

PS: Future issues of the *Family Observer* will no longer leave any tracks on paper, appearing only on the data highway, i.e. the Internet. This will entail major changes. At the moment, we can only reach 10% of our readership by e-mail to inform them about updates and new issues of the *Family Observer* on our homepage. We do not want to lose you as a reader of our magazine! However, to ensure that you are briefed on a regular basis, we need your help. If you want to be informed about the latest developments and trends in family matters, demography and social security, please send an e-mail to: famobs@oif.ac.at

See you in the world wide web!

Youth as a transition to full autonomy

Life stages

Young people are no longer children, but not yet full-fledged adults. Their lives are characterised by numerous changes. What do they involve? How significant are they for the family and for society?

Juan Antonio Fernández Cordon

What distinguishes youth most from other life stages is that it bridges two basic life times: childhood dependency and adult independence. Both are well defined but have fluid boundaries. Youth has neither a clear demographic delimitation nor any strict legal definition; it can only be regarded as a complex and evolving social phenomenon. Like any other age-based classification, youth is a transitory state. However, it is a unique and special phase of varying duration, depending on both historical and social circumstances. Youth can be considered a temporary borderline condition experienced by individuals for longer or shorter periods

of time, the length of which is determined by the type of society in which the young people live (Levi/Schmitt 1996). Youth is characterised by a double transition: from school to work, and from family of origin to family of procreation (Mauger 1995).

Youth terminates with integration into adult society, when the individual achieves the economic and social independence that not only guarantees recognition of his or her adult rights, but also the ability to exercise them. In some ancient societies where social divisions were mainly based on age, initiation rites imposed clear boundaries between adjacent stages of life. The passage from one to the other was equivalent to the passage from one class to another, almost from one universe to

another. In a more recent past, the transition to adulthood was based on two essential rules: that of instantaneity — of the suddenness with which the passage from adolescence to adulthood took place — and that of the temporary overlapping of the three most significant moments of the transition, i.e. leaving the parental home, beginning working life and forming a new family (Sgritta 1999). In modern Western societies, things have changed considerably. The transition from youth to adulthood is gradual, not necessarily straightforward and not symbolically attached to any particular event. Working, studying and leaving the parental household are linked by a rich pattern of interdependencies (Martínez/Ruiz-Castillo 1998).



The boundaries of youth as a distinct age have become increasingly blurred. The widespread tendency to remain at school well beyond the legal minimum age when a student is permitted to drop out, means that childhood ends at an increasingly later age. It is even more difficult to say exactly when youth ends, because it now extends into such stages as co-habitation without marriage or even partnership without permanent co-habitation. This makes it difficult to pin down exactly when a new family, distinct from the paternal one, is actually formed. Moreover, the labour market increasingly demands flexibility, especially from newly hired personnel, i.e. mainly young people, who are expected to change jobs before getting a stable position — if they ever reach that stage.

Recent studies have shown that, in many countries, young people's relative standard of living is decreasing, while that of old people is rising to an extent that will eventually exceed the average living standard of the active population. In many Member States of the European Union, the rising living standards of old people have been particularly pronounced in recent years, and their increasing economic and residential independence is in striking contrast to the situation of young people.

The negative effect of these changes has also been noted in the birth rates in the Southern countries of the European Union. At present, the basic reason for Spain's or Italy's extremely low birth rates is the persistent decline in the fertility of young women aged 20–30, and especially those aged 25–29. The problem of the third child, once regarded as the key for demographic recovery, has become far less important than the fact that young adults do not even have a first child.

The two main factors shaping the transition to adulthood are residential independence (living with parents vs. living outside the parental home) and getting a job (as a means of obtaining economic independence). Leaving the parental home is a key moment in the life of any person, because having a home of one's own constitutes a vital condition for social recognition. In our modern societies, people who do not have a home are at the bottom end of the social

scale, and the word 'homeless' has become synonymous for 'excluded person'. Any obstacle young people face in gaining residential independence is, at the same time, a symptom of the difficulties regarding their social integration and a cause for them. Residential independence does not necessarily imply that the young person must have a job, if parents or the partner are able to supply the needed resources. Yet it is also true that a job may not warrant residential independence, if earnings are not sufficient for buying or renting a home, or if an unstable job situation weakens a young person's financial means.

Y oung people's residential situation

The generations that were in their youth phase during the 1960s and the 1970s tended to leave the parental home early. They wanted to gain independence from their families who, at that time, were less tolerant than families are nowadays, while society was appealingly engaged in cultural revolutionary movements revolving around drugs, sexuality, music and politics. At the same time, jobs abounded and competition was not considered a central value. Meanwhile, things have changed; and the proportion of young people who still live with their parents (taken as an inverse indicator of the degree of residential independence) has increased in all EU Member States in the age brackets 20–24 and 25–29 (Figure 1). All across the EU, the family has turned into a more democratic institution; and living with parents now gives young people sufficient freedom while, at the same time, the job market has become increasingly difficult for them.

The residential situation is closely related to age. Almost all young people below 20, of both sexes, are still living with their parents. There is practically no difference between the EU Member States. Compared to other age groups, the difference between the maximum percentage in Italy (more than 96%) and the minimum in the UK (over 91%) is very small. This share is also very

stable over time; almost no change has occurred since 1986. In such countries as Belgium, Germany, France, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the proportion of youngsters living in the parental home declines sharply after that age. In 1995, only 45–63% of those aged 20–24 remained with their parents, and some 14–20% in the age group 25–29. France and the UK appear to be the countries with the lowest proportion of young people living with their parents at age 25–29. The picture in the Southern countries is quite different. The share of young men aged 20–24 who still lived with their parents in 1995 was very high in Spain (89%) and Italy (87%). But it is in the 25–29 age group that we find the specificity of Southern countries: a high and growing proportion of residentially dependent people, reaching 59% in Spain and 56% in Italy in 1995 after a sharp increase (from 49% in Spain and 39% in Italy) in 1987.

A very similar pattern can be seen in the case of women who, moreover, display some specific features. At all ages, the share of women living with their parents is lower than the corresponding share of men. In relative terms, the difference is higher in the 25–29 age group. From 1986 to 1994, dependency increased more for men in both age groups (Fernández Cordon 1997).

According to a Eurobarometer survey from 1993, the majority of the population sees the fact that children are staying longer in the parental home as "quite a good thing" (limited to the 12 Member States then forming the EU). Negative opinions were shared by only 20%. Differences among Member States were small, but it is remarkable that the lowest percentage expressing a positive opinion was found in Spain (Eurostat 1997). Proportions were similar among persons aged 40–54 (parents' generation) and among those aged 15–24 (children); the latter were only slightly less enthusiastic than the former.

Apart from the difference already commented upon in the proportions of young people who still live with their parents, residentially independent young people have a somewhat higher tendency to live as a couple with children in the Southern countries, where more than half the resi-

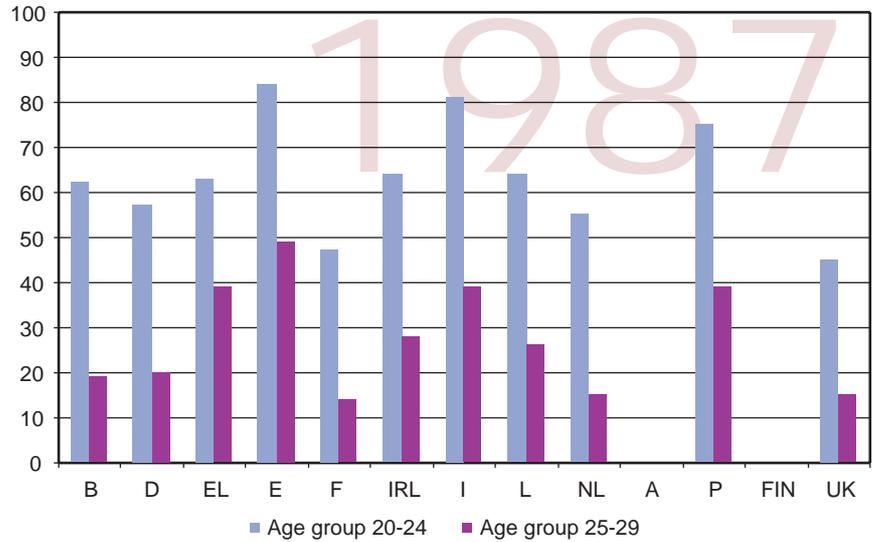
dentially independent women are part of a couple with children (Table 2). To a lesser extent, this also applies to men. Despite this fact, a consequence of the scarcity of residentially independent young persons in Southern countries is the low proportion leading an own family life: In 1994, 14% of the men and 30% of the women lived in couples or had children, as opposed to 35% and 55%, respectively, in the Central European Member States of the EU. This crude fact has to be related to the very low fertility levels in the South of Europe.

Living alone is uncommon for young people everywhere: Less than 10% of those aged 20–24 and 12% of those aged 25–29 lived alone in 1995 (Eurostat 1997). There are huge differences between Southern, Central and Northern European countries (ranging from 1% in Spain to 23% in Finland).

T ransition from childhood to adulthood

Childhood is characterised by economic and residential dependency, determined by the fact that children up to a certain age are legally bound to remain at school and thus prohibited to work. The age may vary from 14 to 16 years, depending on the Member State. They are out of the labour market and, almost without exception, residentially dependent, i.e. living with their parents. Voluntary schooling that may last until they have finished their studies at the university increasingly extends the period of dependency. By contrast, adulthood is characterised by full economic and residential independence. The change from one status to another is no longer a direct transition. Educational periods have become longer and are made use of by an increasing part of the population (including women and less favoured social classes). In this way, teenage-like situations have been preserved beyond the age of 20 and changed what used to be the traditional model: early entry into the labour force for unqualified persons, and early marriage for less-educated women. Between the initial state of full dependency (in which a person is economically and

1a: Percentage of young people (age groups 20–24 and 25–29) in EU Member States who live with their parents (1987)



Source: Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat)

residentially dependent), and the final state of full autonomy (when the person has attained both economic and residential independence), we now find intermediate and complex stages. They comprise various forms of incomplete independence, depending on the young person's residential and work situation. Women still present a special case, as some of them are in a stable situation as inactive but residentially independent, living with a spouse or partner. This economic dependency in marriage or cohabitation may be regarded as a form of independence for women, to the extent that the situation is socially stable and exempts them from competing for work and housing. In all EU Member States, women with a partner have increasingly become part of the labour force; but a significant number, especially of older and married women in Southern countries, are still economically dependent on their husbands.

The transition from absolute dependency to complete independence is not a linear process. Some studies have shown the important and growing phenomenon that young people return from an advanced to a previous stage (for instance, returning to the parental home after a period of work and residential independence). This contributes

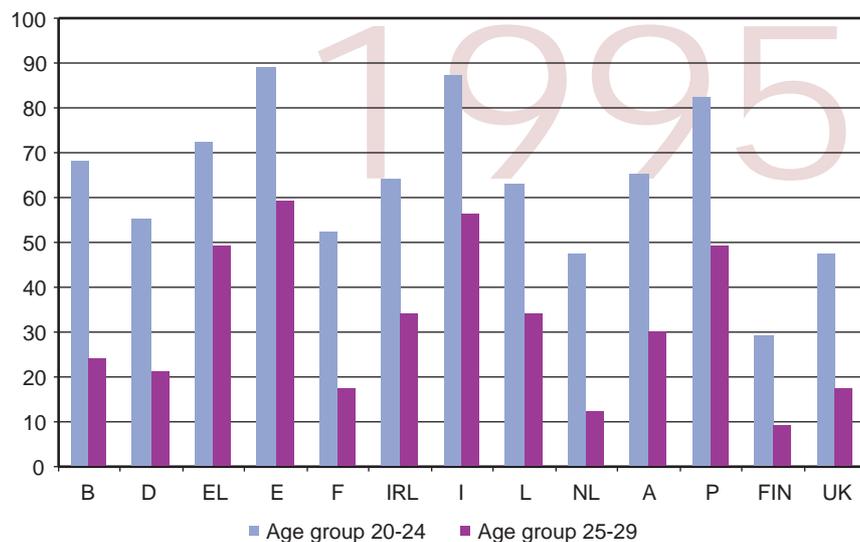
to maintaining intermediate situations. The possibly frequent alternation of residentially independent young people between the status of being employed and being unemployed means returning from full autonomy to an intermediate situation in the lengthy process of finding 'the job that counts'.

The direct transition from full dependency to full autonomy is becoming less frequent, and increasing numbers of young people find themselves in intermediate situations.¹ After a certain age, the importance of these types of situations diminishes, while the proportion of persons in full autonomy increases. Males and females basically follow the same pattern; but if we consider the status of the housewife as a form of autonomy, the share of females in intermediate situations is lower than that of males.

Both in Central European and Southern Member States, the past years were char-

¹ Either entering the labour market while staying at the parental home or living apart while remaining inactive.

1b: Percentage of young people (age groups 20–24 and 25–29) in EU Member States who live with their parents (1995)



Source: Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat)

acterised by a clear tendency towards delayed autonomy for males and females. However, the differences between these two groups of countries are most striking. At present, the proportion of young people in full dependency is higher in Southern countries for all age groups, for both males and females; whereas the proportion of youngsters living in intermediate situations is higher in Central European countries at early ages and lower at later ones. In Central Europe, the distribution of this category by age follows a pattern reflecting a normal process of indirect transition from complete dependency to complete autonomy. At earlier ages, the proportion increases as young people are taking jobs while living with their parents; and after a certain age, it shrinks because they are leaving the parental home. In the Southern countries, the proportion of people below 20 having a job is much lower; and at later ages, the number of people who are working and still living with their parents increases and remains high until the age of 27, to decrease slightly thereafter. A similar pattern is found among women. Intermediate situations are a transitory stage towards full autonomy, and the higher proportions at later ages in the Southern Member States indicate the difficulties in completing the transition.

In the two groups of EU Member States, exit from full dependency took place at a higher average age in 1994 than in 1986. Males and females followed the same path very closely: a significant delay at 20, progressively reduced at older ages. Exit has mainly shifted from the 15–19 age group to the 20–24 age group and, to a far lesser extent, to those aged 25–29.

In the Central European Member States of the EU, the proportion of young people living in full autonomy at age 30 decreased slightly from 1986 to 1994 (from 76% to 74% for males, from 86% to 84% for women, including housewives) and quite sharply in the Southern countries (from 60% to 43% for males, from 74% to 56% for females). The achievement of independence, either personally or — for women — through marriage or cohabitation, still happens at an earlier age for women than for men, although the trend towards delay is even more pronounced for women. The proportion experiencing intermediate situations at age 30 follows an inverse pattern, rising slightly in Central Europe (from 23% to 25% for males, from 13% to 15% for females) and notably in the Southern countries (from 37% to 48% for males, from 21% to 35% for females).

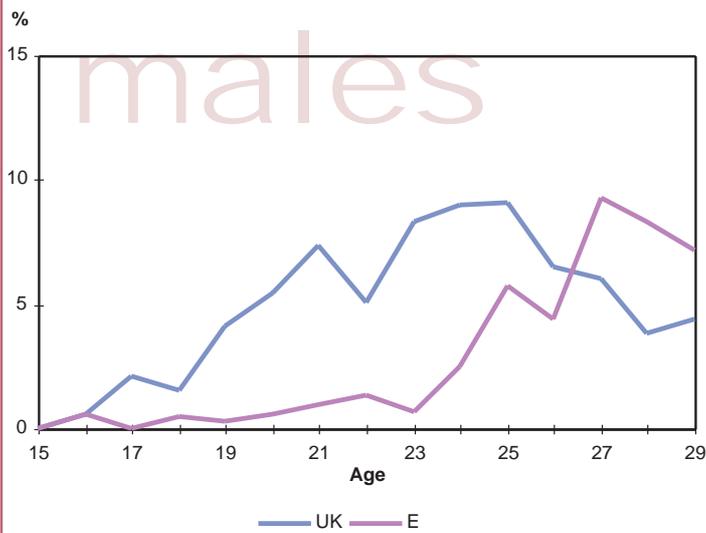
For women, the most characteristic feature is undoubtedly the marked decrease in housewife status at all ages in both groups of EU Member States between 1986 and 1994. In Central Europe, 32% were housewives at the age of 30 in 1986; and 23% in 1994. In Southern countries, the figures were 40% in 1986 and 27% in 1994. In this particular case, the gap between the two groups of Member States has narrowed. In Central Europe, while the share of housewives decreased, the proportion of women

2: Family status of young people aged 20–29 in two groups of EU Member States (1994)

Family situation	Men		Women	
	Southern Member States	Central European Member States	Southern Member States	Central European Member States
Living with parents	78.0	41.1	62.7	25.1
Not living with parents:				
Without a partner	8.2	23.4	7.7	20.0
Couple without children	4.9	17.4	8.2	21.1
Couple with children	8.7	17.9	20.8	27.9
Lone parent	0.2	0.2	0.6	5.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

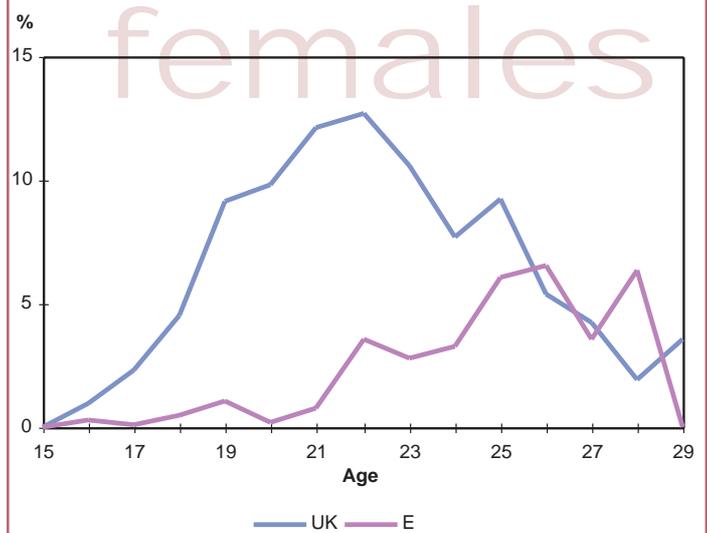
Source: Labour Force Surveys, in Fernández Cordón (1997).
 Southern Member States: Greece, Italy, Spain.
 Central European Member States: France, Germany, United Kingdom.

3a: Annual percentage of males entering full autonomy



Source: Data for 1993–1994 Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat)

3b: Annual percentage of females entering full autonomy



Source: Data for 1993–1994 Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat)

in full personal autonomy increased — making the two forms of autonomy almost equal. It failed to do so in the Southern countries, however, where the share of women in full personal autonomy has also decreased. As a result, only slightly more than half of the women aged 30 were fully autonomous (personally or by marriage) in 1994, as compared to 84% in Central Europe.

In the Southern EU Member States, almost 10% of the males who reached age 30 in 1994 were fully dependent; and almost half of them were still in an intermediate state, unable to reach full autonomy. In this intermediate situation, we find mostly people who are on the labour market, employed or unemployed, but who still live with their parents.²

In this respect, Spain and the UK are examples of two very differing countries, each representing a group of countries with similar behaviour. The distribution by age of exit from full dependency is quite different: In the UK, it is concentrated in the early years, with a high peak at 16, followed by steadily decreasing rates reaching almost

zero by the age of 22. In Spain, the shape of the curve is rather different. First, we see a peak, also at age 16. It corresponds to the exit of those abandoning the educational system immediately after the compulsory period to enter the labour market. Most of them continue to live with their parents. This is followed by another upsurge from age 18 onwards, peaking at the age of 20. It corresponds to those leaving education after secondary school. The observed difference is mainly due to the fact that in the UK, as in the rest of the Central European EU Member States, very young people living with their parents are engaged in the labour force in a significantly higher proportion than in Spain and in the Southern Member States in general.

Females and males show very similar patterns in the UK, but quite different ones in Spain. The female total exit from full dependency of Spanish females is higher than for males, and no peak is observed in the age distribution: The curve is flat from 15 to 25 and drops quickly afterwards. In Southern Member States, the differences between the situation of women and men have always been more pronounced than in the rest of Europe. Gender-specific differences in working and living conditions tend to diminish throughout the EU, but changes in women's conditions are conveyed by new generations and take a long time to

spread. Moreover, they also set in later in the Southern part of Europe. If we now turn to the entry into a state of full autonomy, we find that differences between Spain and the UK are far more substantial than for exit from full dependency. This shows the very important delay in attaining full autonomy and the prolonged intermediate states experienced by young people in Spain and generally in the Southern countries of the European Union. In the UK, most young men attain full autonomy between the ages of 20 and 25, whereas the Spaniards arrive at this stage much later and less frequently. The contrast is sharper for females: Entries peak at 21 in the UK and as late at 26 in Spain, at a much lower level (Figures 3a and 3b).

We can distinguish two components in the differences between the two groups of EU Member States. The first concerns the youngest age group (15–19), and the second concerns the oldest age bracket (25–29). Very young people (below 20) almost always live with their parents in both groups of Member States. They are involved in the labour market in higher proportions in Central Europe, thus avoiding the state of full dependency. This fact may not be related to differences in the status of the family but rather to the degree of participation in the labour market. The second component of observed differences

² As age increases, it may also happen that more situations are found of inverse dependency (parents depending on children).

is that, in Southern Europe, young people in gainful employment have a higher and increasing propensity to remain at their parental home around and after the age of 25. This is the most significant element and shows a close relation between the residential situation and the status of having a job.

The importance of work

Until the age of 20, residential independence does not depend on gainful employment. Differences in living conditions between active and inactive young people are noticeable from the age of 23 onwards. They continue to increase in a way that shows how important one's status as a 'working person' actually is when it comes to the decision of whether or not to leave the parental home. The proportion of residentially independent young people in their late twenties varies greatly and reflects their situation on the labour market: It is very low among economically inactive young adults, mostly students, and higher

among active persons (be they employed or unemployed). Recent changes in the employment status of young people have decisively influenced their residential behaviour.

educational period, which in some ways has also served as a substitute for non-existing jobs. In the Southern countries, few inactive young people are residentially independent (less than 10%), whereas almost half of them live on their own (approaching two thirds in the UK) in Central Europe. The living conditions of this group of inactive youngsters clearly show the cultural specificity of each EU Member State. However, we should also take into account the difference in family resources, permitting or prohibiting parents to support the residential independence of their grown-up children.

In 1986, the share of inactive females (not counting housewives) was higher than that of inactive males. Moreover, it has increased, which may partly be due to the fact that women remain in the educational system longer, and partly because being inactive is socially more acceptable in the case of women. Among the inactive women (excluding housewives), the share of those who are residentially independent is also very small.

Southern countries have much higher unemployment rates, particularly for young people. Youth unemployment is much more pronounced there than in the rest of the EU. In Central Europe, the majority of

provoking a major crisis. Especially for women, youth employment has been extremely sensitive to economic fluctuations in all EU Member States, and the differences between the Central European and the Southern Member States are growing.

The picture that emerges shows that European countries share two important and closely related features concerning young people: a reduction of employment and a rise in residential dependency. The main aspects of recent trends are an increase in the inactive youth population — the majority of them living with their parents — and a reduction of employment, together with a significant increase of young people working (especially in the 25–29 age group) but still living with their parents in the Southern countries. Lagging far behind their neighbours (lower employment rates, greater residential dependency) in 1986, Southern countries have not only failed to overcome the existing imbalance but have actually succeeded in making it worse.

The core of observed trends is best summarised by picturing the evolution of the percentages of working and non-working young people living with their parents (Figures 4a and 4b).

To explain the similarities between the three Southern countries, one could look for factors they have in common. It goes without saying that they are very close from a cultural standpoint, especially in relation to the role played by the family and the importance people attach to it. This may explain why residential dependency is so widespread in this area, which distinguishes it so clearly from the Northern countries. However, two other factors suggest a rather different explanation.

The first one is that, since 1986, the percentage of young people who have a job and still live with their parents has increased in the Southern countries but not in Central Europe. In an interpretation stressing cultural factors, this would mean a step towards more traditional behaviour in the South. However, there is little doubt that cultural differences have narrowed among the EU Member States — as is demon-

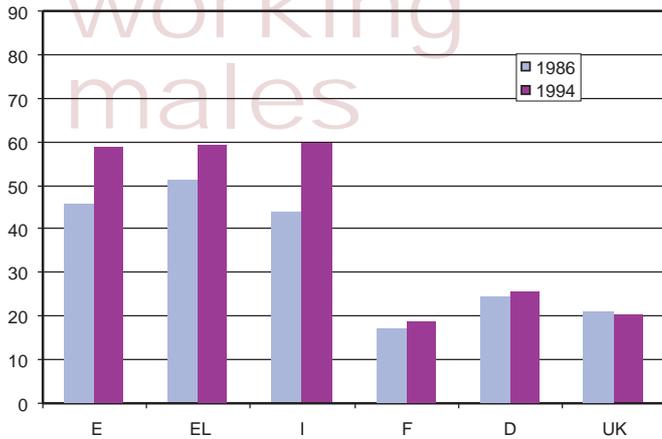
“Between 1986 and 1994, the share of housewives dropped considerably in all age groups”

among active persons (be they employed or unemployed). Recent changes in the employment status of young people have decisively influenced their residential behaviour.

The proportion of inactive males aged 20–29 has risen in all countries, somewhat more in the Southern countries than in the Central European Member States of the EU. This is a consequence of the lengthening

the unemployed are residentially independent (70% of women and over 50% of men), whereas the contrary holds true in the Southern countries: 84% of unemployed males and almost 70% of unemployed females live with their parents. The role played by the family in coping with the very high unemployment rates in Southern Europe becomes quite obvious here. It is a key factor in explaining how such high levels can be socially acceptable without

4a: Percentage of working males aged 25–29 living with their parents



Source: Data from Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat)

4b: Percentage of non-working males aged 25–29 living with their parents



Source: Data from Labour Force Surveys (Eurostat)

strated, for instance, by the successive surveys known as Eurobarometers. The second factor is that the proportion of those non-working people (unemployed and inactive) who are residentially dependent has not changed. In fact, the increased job insecurity has only hit the employed, as the unemployed always felt extremely insecure. Thus, growing job insecurity might have played an important role in delaying access to full autonomy. Housing may also be influential to a certain extent, although the problem is not the shortage of available houses but rather the meagre funds available to young people with small incomes and precarious jobs.

The non-controversial fact is that — unlike in previous times — having a job no longer guarantees full independence. The family plays an essential role in making society accept the new type of precarious underpaid jobs said to be necessary for economic competitiveness.

When analysing the situation of the young, the debate invoking ‘material’ causes (scarce and precarious jobs, housing beyond reach) and psychological or even ‘societal’ causes (different ‘preferences’ of the young, a different conception of the family) is not central. Both causes are valid but not at the same level. The kind of family that exists in Southern countries is able to absorb the difficulties young people face in finding a

suitable job and suitable housing. It may even be correct that the cosiness of the ‘family nest’ prevents young people from better adapting to the changing conditions on the labour market and from changing their preferences in relation to housing. In that way, the role of the family may be part of the problem, but it does not create the problem. The Southern EU Member States face a special situation, because the parents of their young people belong to generations with possibly stronger family values. Once more, the meaningful question must be addressed to the future. As things are changing for the better on the labour market (as they already are and hopefully will continue to do), young people will get jobs more easily and their views on stability may also change (even if this no longer means keeping the same job forever). Will they continue to stay with their parents as long as they do now? Or is it more likely that they will behave in the same way as their peers in the rest of Europe? It seems difficult to believe that the important differences now existing between Southern countries and the rest of Europe will remain. The attitudes and opinions of young people are very similar in all EU Member States, including some seemingly traditional attitudes such as the importance given to the family or the persistent desire to have children. There are no easy answers to these questions; but if one listens to what young people say when interviewed in Italy or Spain, it does not

seem that they have adopted the present situation as a ‘new normality’ (Fernández Córdón/Sgritta 2000).

Conclusion

In the middle of the 1980s, the situation of young people in the Southern EU Member States deteriorated in various ways, particularly regarding their failure to achieve full social integration as responsible, independent adults. In more than half of these Member States, 30-year-olds have not achieved the full autonomy associated with a stable job and a home of their own. Very few unemployed young people live on their own, and there are more residentially dependent employed young people than in the past. These trends differ noticeably from those observed in such Member States as France, Germany and the UK. In the Southern parts of the EU, the common causes of the problem should not so much be sought in shared cultural values but rather in similar economic structures and recent history.

The delay in attaining full autonomy cannot be interpreted as a simple deferral of social integration. What was once defined as a clear social rite marking the transition

5: Projection of the population aged 20–29 EU (15) and selected Member States (2000–2020)

EU Member States	Population aged 20- bis 29				% variation 2000–2020	
	2000		2020		20–29	total population
	number*	% of total	number*	% of total		
EU 15	50.961	13.5	43.889	11.5	-13.9	1.3
Spain	6.488	16.4	3.922	10.0	-39.5	-0.3
Italy	8.207	14.3	5.842	10.4	-28.8	-2.6
UK	7.652	12.9	7.815	12.6	2.1	4.5
Germany	9.612	11.7	8.818	11.2	-8.3	-4.5
France	8.093	13.6	7.780	12.3	-3.9	6.8

Source: Eurostat (1999) * = in thousands

between two well-defined stages in life has now turned into a competitive process that young people have to confront in order to gain access to the social advantages and benefits associated with adulthood — and especially to the most highly-prized achievement of a job. Youth only ends when all obstacles have been overcome, and social exclusion is always a threat.

The present situation reveals a profound imbalance between age groups, as young people have to bear the lion's share of the burden caused by structural changes and economic recessions while older age groups enjoy the benefits of the welfare state, which those who are young today are by no means certain to receive when their time comes. Mid-term forecasts project that this could well lead to open clashes radically different from traditional forms of intergenerational conflict. In any case, young people's diffi-

culties to become integrated into adult society have become a major problem, because they are endangering the inter-generational contract that guarantees social cohesion and constitutes the very basis of social continuity, i.e. the ability of populations to reproduce themselves.

In the long run, the situation may change considerably because of the projected population structure. According to Eurostat, the percentage of young people is expected to decrease all across the European Union within the next 20 years (Table 5). The EU population aged 20–29 will drop from 50.9 million in 2000 to 43.9 million in 2020. This is a decrease of 13.9%, as compared to the expected 1.3% increase in the total population during the same period. For the Southern countries, the projection shows a dramatic decrease in the young population (-40% for Spain, -29% for Italy), bringing

the share of young people in the overall population from the present high levels to below EU average in 2020 (Eurostat 1999). This situation is due to population ageing, and more specifically to the persistently low fertility level. It may be considered negative with regard to the general equilibrium of the welfare system. However, it should also have some positive effects on the situation of the young, who will be under less stress regarding competition on the labour and housing markets. Among other consequences, one can expect a rise in the level of fertility that will contribute to correcting the structural imbalances between age groups in the population. The present predicament of the young may then only affect a few generations, who happen to be the same generations who will have to come to terms with a weakened pension system when they get older and retire. Their destiny should be an urgent matter of concern for public policy.

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New approaches to public part-time care schemes for pre-school children

Child care

In many European countries, there is an ongoing discussion of how to revamp state support for part-time care of pre-school children. The concept for child-care vouchers developed by the Austrian Institute for Family Studies provides a relevant and forward-looking response to current deficits and challenges.

Helmuth Schattovits

For many young parents, organising and financing (part-time) care for their pre-school children poses a major challenge. Problems of how to reconcile child care with individual lifestyles (e.g. when both parents are gainfully employed) and, more critically, equity issues with regard to an economy-based evaluation of caring for and raising children, have once again focused attention in the family policy field on the subject of part-time care for pre-school children. Added to this is the fact that budgetary constraints, austerity budgets and

cost-effective measures have all forced many European countries to allocate the funds available for child care along efficiency criteria.

Initiatives to find a new solution

The current importance of this issue in many European countries is made clearly evident by the large number of initiatives proposed in an effort to find a new solution: Norway introduced a cash subsidy to parents whose children do not use external care services. This was justified on the grounds of equity (the equality principle).

- In Germany, a salary for staying home to raise a child is being discussed across party lines. Its aim is to give caring for a child at home the same recognition and status as gainful employment.
- Stockholm recently revised its grant schemes for child-care facilities: the subsidy is now granted to the place where the child is actually cared for rather than the institutional carrier.
- On 1 January 2002, Hamburg will convert its pre-school child-care system to an earmarked individual grant. The so-called 'Kita Card' (a voucher concept) is designed to enable parents to opt for the



child-care facility of their choice. This innovation was also motivated by the serious decline in the birth rate, which is causing severe problems for demand planners.

C hild-care benefit rather than parental leave benefit

Austria has also begun preparations for a fundamental reform of public part-time care for pre-school children. Though the restricted space available here does not allow an in-depth discussion, the following provides a brief summary of the current situation.

The programme developed by the new Austrian government envisages the introduction of a 'child-care benefit' (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*, or KBG) as of 1 January 2002 for all children born on or after 1 July 2000. This benefit will replace the parental-leave benefit (*Karenzgeld*, or KG; see box for an outline of this scheme). The basic difference between the two benefits is that the new KBG is based on the child and his/her needs, whereas the KG depended on such parental criteria as employment.

The child-care benefit KBG and its consequences

Typical features of this benefit are as follows:

- Eligibility for the benefit is vested in the child — not in the parents (as is the case with the parental-leave benefit).
- Payment is irrespective of any reduction in gainful employment (whereas the full extent of the parental-leave benefit is granted only when the income margin of about Euro 300 is not exceeded).
- Parents can use the transfer payment to purchase external care or to reduce their opportunity costs.
- Parents may freely choose among care services, because it is they who are given the financial means rather than the provider — as is the case when money is given to support facilities.

The history of the child-care benefit

The concept of a state voucher to support part-time child care was first presented in early 1995, with the conclusions of two studies conducted by the Austrian Institute for Family Studies (ÖIF) and commissioned by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family. Among the empirical findings of the study, two discoveries played a key role:

First, part-time care for children up to six years of age in 1994/1995 showed the following support pattern:

- Children between 0 and <2 years of age received about ATS 13 billion (Euro 940 million), usually by way of monetary grants from public funds at the federal level (in particular, the two-year parental-leave benefit).
- Children between 2 and <4 years of age received about ATS 3.5 billion (Euro 250 million), partly by way of cash payments and partly by direct care services financed by the federal, provincial and local governments as well as other public programmes (special unemployment assistance, crèches, kindergarten, family subsidies, etc.).
- Children between 4 and <6 years of age received about ATS 11 billion (Euro 800 million), mostly by way of direct care facilities primarily financed by provincial and local governments.

Expenditure for the group of 2- to <4-year-olds was thus substantially below that granted to the two other age groups. This difference comes about as the result of the different responsibilities assumed by territorial government units, different funding sources and methods, and the focus on individual vs. facility support¹. At the time even experts were widely unaware of these facts, since utilising the customary categories (0- to <3-year-olds and 3- to <6-year-

olds) when tabulating data did not adequately pinpoint the problem. Nor was there any objective reason to assume that the difference was intended politically. The relatively low support for 2- to <4-year-olds appears simply to have 'happened', due to the interaction between different compet-

being able to select a specific type of care satisfactory in both personal and material terms.

Considering the wide range of interests, the sole possible approach for a solution was a non-specific measure: money. This approach

“Parent’s wishes for child care show a high level of variation”

encies, funding sources and subsidising principles. Thus, it should be viewed as a deficit in need of a prompt remedy.

Secondly, the parents' wishes for child care, when identified empirically show a high level of variation (see diagram).

The survey encountered a broad field reflecting the different situations in which young parents find themselves. Yet in spite of all the differences, it was discovered that parents clearly desire to exercise the right of individual choice when selecting the best care option for their pre-school children, both with regard to personal care during the child's first years of life and by

could be put in concrete terms and offered for public discussion in the form of the child-care voucher (*Kinderbetreuungsscheck*, or KBS).

A concept that gives rise to heated debate

In late 1995, the idea of a child-care voucher gave rise to a wide and increasingly fierce debate in Austria. There was hardly any superregional medium that did not provide news reports on this scheme. The discussion extended not only to such social bodies as family organisations, the social partners and grassroots movements, but

The current KG regulation

In Austria, parents who are dependently employed are entitled to a parental leave of 24 months following the mother's legal maternity period (protected by law), in order to take care of the child. Provided that one of the parents was employed and covered by unemployment insurance for at least 52 weeks prior to the child's birth, they are currently eligible to receive ATS 185.50 (Euro 13.5) per day as a parental-leave benefit. Single mothers and low-income couples are paid an additional grant of ATS 82.20 (Euro 6) per day, which has to be paid back if the household income rises beyond a specified level.

If only one parent takes parental leave, the parental-leave benefit can be collected until the child is 18 months old (leave is granted until the child's second birthday). If both parents take turns leaving their workplace to care for the child during the parental-leave period, the benefit can be collected until the child's second birthday. For as long as the parental-leave benefit is in force, the parent concerned is fully covered by social security (health, accident and pension insurance).

¹ Individual support means that support is given to the child or to provide a physical place in a child-care facility, whereas facility support means financing the institutional authority.

also to government bodies at the provincial level.

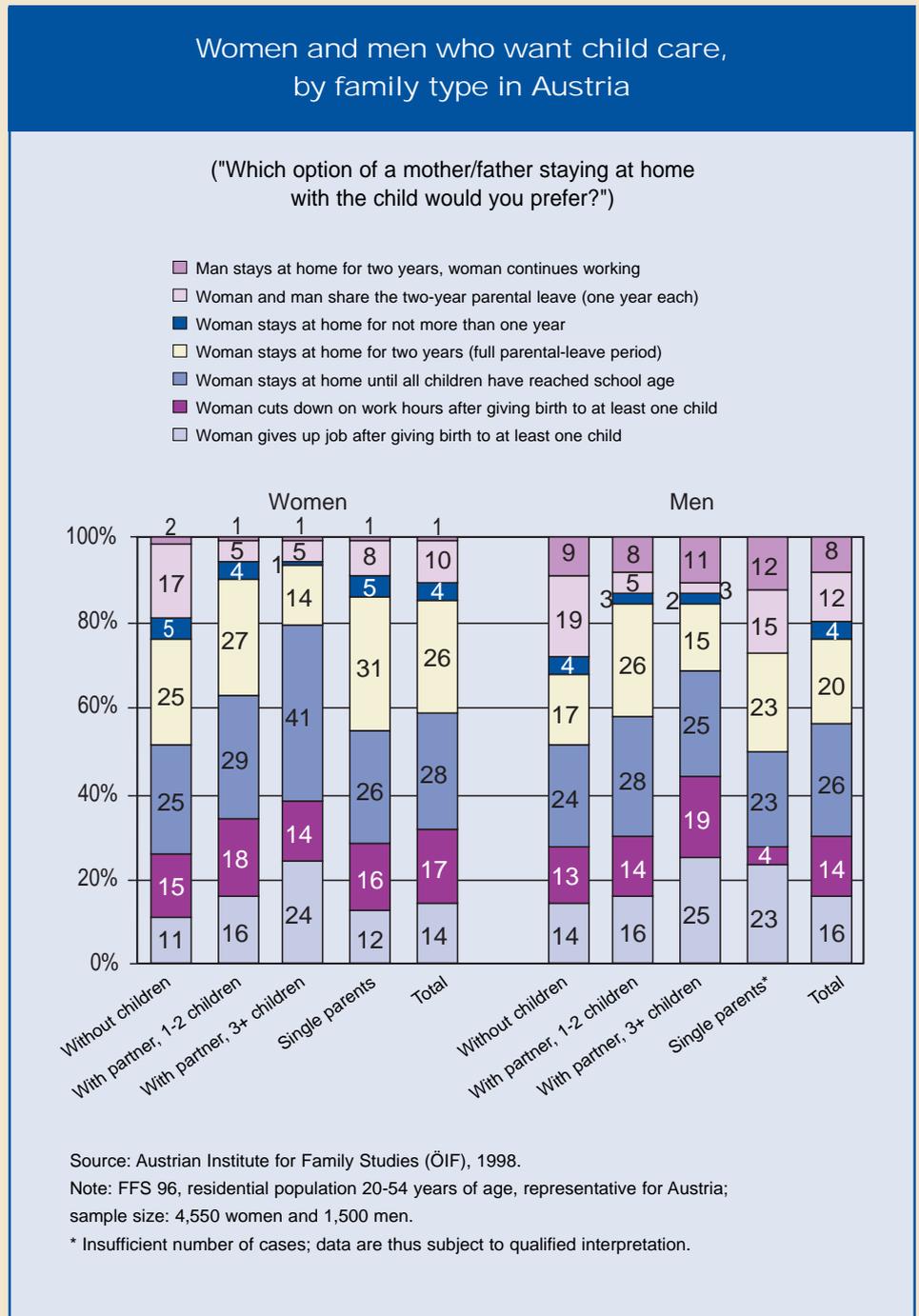
One remarkable aspect of the discussion was how the subject grew in the course of the dispute. The voucher was seen as, *inter alia*,

- a tool to combat family poverty,
- basic income for mothers/fathers with children falling within the age limits where care is needed,
- an analogy to the federally granted long-term care benefit,
- an expression for reassessing the status of work,
- an instrument to secure the future of human resources, and
- an investment in the social infrastructure of society.

Feasibility study emphasises relevance to the family

In November 1996, the Family Policy Advisory Council to the Federal Ministry of Environment, Youth and Family unanimously recommended that the ÖIF carry out a feasibility study on the above scheme. The Minister, Martin Bartenstein, accepted the recommendation and commissioned the study in May 1997. Its final report is now available. In the course of discussions, particularly those within the scope of the feasibility study, the idea of the child-care voucher was developed into a consistent concept, one that also highlighted the relevance of the voucher for the family. In this context, four aspects should be noted:

- *Contract among three generations:* Social change calls for including the State in the balance of costs and benefits between the generation that is retired, the generation that is not yet actively employed, and the generation that is currently gainfully employed. Industrialised countries show an asymmetry that puts the children's generation at a disadvantage.
- *Gender imbalance:* Mothers perform a large part of all unpaid care work, work that profits the entire society. For the sake of equity, it is therefore necessary to provide individual remuneration and social security during this phase.
- *Compensation as the third pillar of the welfare concept:* In addition to insurance



and welfare, compensation (prudentiality) needs to be specifically added as a factor for transfer payments. In this way, it will be possible to cover work of social relevance. Such compensation could be compared to the 'participation income' proposed by the British economist Anthony Atkinson.

- *Policy mix:* Among the measures of relevance to families, the child-care voucher takes its place among general preventive measures.

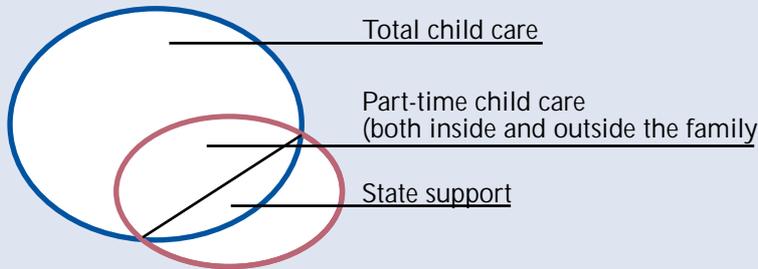
Components of the child-care voucher scheme

The concept developed in the feasibility study provides for three components in the child-care voucher scheme:

Cash payment: Eligibility is based on the youngest child up to his/her fourth birthday. The payment will be ATS 6,000 (Euro 436) net to the primary carer (12 times a year). The planned child-care benefit, on the other hand, envisages cash

Diagram to explain 'part-time child care'

(dimensions are arbitrary)



Source: Helmuth Schattovits, ÖIF

Elucidation

'Child care' is frequently used in the public debate without proper differentiation. It usually does not mean round-the-clock care but extends only to such periods as are covered by the customary working hours. However, in order to arrive at an objective treatment of the issue, it is both necessary and useful to provide a proper differentiation. A study on this type of care therefore introduced the term of 'part-time care' to facilitate this distinction. Accordingly, part-time care is a partial quantity of the total care required, regardless of whether such care is given inside or outside the family. The diagram illustrates this meaning. Introduction of the term 'part-time care' also separates the specific aspect of a parent-child relationship from that of temporary external care, which can also be provided by a third party.

payments up to the eve of the youngest child's fourth birthday.

Individual social security: Coverage is extended to one carer (usually the mother or father) in addition to the cash payment. Insurance coverage includes pension, health and accident insurance. Such coverage will not affect the amount of unemployment insurance the carer had accumulated up to that time, though voluntary unemployment insurance may be taken out.

Voucher: Each child between four and six years of age is entitled to a voucher. The voucher serves as payment to a recognised child-care facility and cannot be cashed. It is designed as an incentive

to use external care, as well as to optimise the use of public money and improve the awareness of costs. Its implementation will be determined by the provincial and local governments.

High degree of popular approval

A separate empirical study questioned almost 1,000 people on their opinion of the concept and their ideas for a child-care voucher, as well as what they saw as its expected consequences. In general, 71% of those polled welcomed the scheme as an improvement over the current situation. Approval varied between groups (positive user difference):

- women (74%) were more in favour than men (64%),
- persons under 40 years of age (80%) had a higher agreement rate than older persons (63%),
- persons with children under six (85%) had a higher approval rate than persons with older children (66%),
- single parents (84%) favoured the voucher more than did dual-parent families (71%).

With regard to the three components of the scheme (see above), the highest approval rating went to the proposed broadening of social-security coverage (with 89% approval). A majority (58% of those polled; 81% of all women under the age of 40 who were not gainfully employed) approved of the extended coverage. Relaxing the ban on employment was advocated by less than half (45% of those polled), whereas 58% of childless women under 40 were in favour.

Objections to the child-care voucher

In the intense debate on the scheme and in comments given after the draft report was presented, some objections were voiced to the concept. These are summarised and discussed below, in five categories:

- *Lack of financial feasibility:* The objection voiced most often was in relation to how the voucher will be financed and the fear that existing benefits would have to be reduced in exchange. No basis for this objection, however, could be found in the concept. The study presumes that additional monies will be available, in particular from earmarked funds obtained by the Family Allowance Fund. From the start, the project had refused to calculate a cost-neutral version, arguing that there is an unjustifiable deficit of about ATS 9 billion to support the 2–4 age group (see above). In parallel to the reference on the high cost of the voucher, critics frequently called for extending care facilities for small children. This objection can be similarly refuted: Considering that these facilities would mostly be crèches, they would give rise to substantially higher costs than would the child-care voucher. Other care services (such as day-care mothers and play groups) provide a better cost-benefit ratio, and parents are increasingly using them. The child-care voucher will provide

those parents with the requisite purchasing power.

- *Professionalism deficit:* Another objection was that — apart from the parents' primary care — professional care by crèches, kindergartens, kiddie groups, day-care parents, etc., constitutes a major addition to family life when it comes to child-raising and educational work. It was pointed out that this is of particular importance for the growing number of 'only' children (i.e. children with no siblings). However, this viewpoint pre-empted the child-care voucher system to a considerable extent. Models provide for a voucher to be used from the fourth year of life, which is a major incentive to make use of external child-care facilities. An even more fundamental objection was voiced in that child-raising by the parents does not constitute gainful employment and thus should not be linked to it. The voucher concept certainly takes account of this view, e.g. by assuming a transfer remuneration based on minimum standards rather than a salary, and by being designed as provision for part-time care rather than all the care required for a child.

- *Derogation of the mother's standing:* A third group of objections concerned the negative impact that the scheme might have on the mother's employment and on work-sharing within the family. In theory, the abolition of the ban on employment for mothers/fathers provided for in the voucher models helps rather than hinders the reconciliation of work and family. The empirical study (see above) provides several indications that people will make use of this opportunity. This finding was countered in the debate by the objection that mothers will be put under even greater pressure by their partner and society to stay at home with their child for a prolonged period. Even if this should be the case, however, it does not argue against the voucher scheme; rather, it sheds light upon the need for awareness-raising. This problem reaches far beyond the child-care voucher, touching, *inter alia*, on issues of taking responsibility and individual empowerment that extend to all social benefits. With regard to sharing work within the family, empirical data clearly point at a cohort effect (as is the case with women's employment): Younger women are much

more focused on a career, and young men contribute much more to household work and child-raising than older cohorts (Family Fertility Survey 96). The child care voucher will concern future mothers and thus young cohorts of women, who are expected to put emphasis on employment and partnership relations.

- *Negative signal:* It was feared that, regardless of the concrete implementation of the scheme and the resultant options, a 'wrong' signal might be sent to society.

"The State must neither impose a specific way of child care on parents nor must it decide how long a parent stays at home"

This objection involves mainly the fear that women might be urged to remove themselves from gainful employment and that an increased market for child-care facilities might be thus rejected. The problem with this fear is that the signal sent by the abolition of the ban on employment is not properly appreciated. This ban will turn the 'either/or' decision required by the current parental-leave benefit into a 'both ways' decision. The signal that the child-care voucher scheme will actually emit, will depend greatly on the framework and on the additional measures to be taken in the course of its introduction. It will certainly be important to communicate the emancipatory reasons and contents of the scheme, and to continue with existing efforts to achieve better working conditions (e.g. the family-and-work audit, or the competition for the most women-friendly company). One undisputed point is that the overwhelming majority of young mothers want flexible types of (temporary) part-time work. The voucher scheme can help them in financial terms and by furnishing appropriate child care. Nevertheless, steps need to be taken to ensure that the economy will provide suitable jobs.

- *Negative effects on external child care:* The last category of objections concerns the fear of negative consequences suffered by external child-care facilities in terms of costs. Again, it needs to be pointed out that substantial additional means are to be allocated to support them (both in absolute terms and for each child), which should improve the supply. The decline in the number of children and increasing competition among facilities, providers and care professions (including elementary schools

and their teachers), as well as the ongoing enlargement of facilities within the scope of the 'kindergarten billion', tend to raise the supply (number of places in relation to number of children) throughout Austria. Considering these facts, the costs should decline rather than increase. Naturally, the transition from supporting facilities to supporting individual children, as is envisaged by the voucher concept, needs to be prepared and introduced with great care and caution. Obviously, the voucher concept assumes that the State will continue to share responsibility for supporting part-time child care. Such care will be exposed to a greater challenge by the voucher but will also undergo innovative development.

C onclusion

A broad political consensus prevails in Austria that parents need to be supported by the State when providing care for their children. How such support should look, however, is increasingly subject to dis-

cussion. In this connection, the basic question is whether current measures should be expanded and enlarged, or whether new avenues need to be explored to empower parents to take responsibility and to give them a choice in the matter.

The trend is to allocate funding away from facilities and towards individuals, by means

of cash payments and a voucher scheme. The latter would reflect the needs and requirements of children, mothers and fathers. It allows for choices in one's daily lifestyle. Parents are no longer 'petitioners' applying to carrier organisations, but customers for providers. The State will take care of quality assurance and supply the requisite purchasing power by means of transfers.

With its components of cash payments, pension insurance coverage and vouchers for external part-time care, the system provides a combined package of measures to meet new social needs. It also eliminates deficits in the part-time care for children of pre-school age.

Survey of the National Experts at the Observatory

1. Which philosophies and motives underlie support for the care of pre-school children ?
2. Support schemes for facilities and individuals in other EU Member States.

Belgium

Pre-school child care is subsidised by the regional governments and paid to NGOs. The parents do not receive any direct payment, but they can deduct a certain amount from their taxable income. Parents receive pre-school child-care money for taking care of their children themselves in two ways:

- If they are employed, they can take parental leave (minimum three months, maximum five years) and receive a monthly allowance.
- If they take care of their children at home (and are not employed), they can deduct a lump sum from the family's taxable income.

Wilfried Dumon

Germany

Germany features both state-run child-care institutions and facilities organised by private authorities. They are funded from a range of sources: land and building costs are partly financed by the *Land*, staff costs mostly by the local government, and other costs by the authority and contributions

from parents. The share of public financing is about 80%. The type of financing used varies between *Laender* and communities.

Walter Bien

Greece

In general terms, financial support is given to the organisation that runs the institution. The organisation receives the money, but not for every care place that is used. There is no individual financial support for the person who needs the care (e.g. the child). Parents get a certain amount of money, though it is not clearly defined as financial support for child care but merely the general amount of cash benefits given to the parents for children.

For child care in particular, parents have the following options:

- Child care at home, paid for by parents who do not receive any type of specific financial support; or child care provided by relatives free of charge.
- Child care provided by a private — and usually very expensive — institution. This is paid for entirely by parents. Sometimes the total amount spent for child care is taken into account when calculating the families' taxes.

- Child care in a public institution; but there are not enough places to respond to present child-care needs.
- Last, there is the exceptional case of people working in such institutions as large private companies, or in an extremely low number of public institutions that provide free child care for their employees' children.

Christos Bagavos

Ireland

In Ireland, there is no direct financial support paid to families to help them bear the cost of child care. State support is primarily given to the child-care suppliers in the form of capital grants and staff training. Except for the provision of child care for certain low-income families in disadvantaged circumstances and deemed to be at risk, the provision and purchase of child care is largely left to the workings of the free market. The Government has, however, committed itself to adopting an "equitable strategy to support parents in meeting their child-care needs".

Gabriel Kiely

Luxembourg

Pre-school education is compulsory for four-year-olds in Luxembourg. The question of child-care services is of crucial importance up to this age. Despite a growing care network, there are not enough places to accommodate the increasing demand on the part of families.

The Ministry of Family Affairs can provide funds for three purposes: (a) to cover deficits in management costs; (b) to fund hourly expenses for day care; and (c) to rent places in the private sector. These places are then offered to the families at a social price.

Since 1999, each structure that takes care of more than three children is obliged to obtain a permit. The permit can be issued by the Ministry of Family Affairs, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women, the Ministry of Youth, or the Ministry of Health.

Monique Borsenberger

Netherlands

At the moment, the financing of child-care facilities is supply-driven; local authorities play a central role in meeting the (growing) demand for places. At the same time, there is emphasis on co-financing by employers. This particular situation has turned into a system with three different child-care arrangements: subsidised places, company places and private places. Subsidised places are financed by local authorities; parents pay a price based on their income. Company places are provided in collective agreements or company rules; parents pay a contribution while the rest of the costs are borne by the employer. Private places are unsubsidised places financed by a private company.

Currently, the system is under discussion because of the heavily regulated and non-competitive character of the sector. In spring 2000, Parliament proposed a new law, the *Wet Basisvoorziening Kinderopvang* (Basic Provision of Childcare Act) to be discussed in the Second Chamber on 4 December 2000. The new act emphasises the importance of a more demand-driven system. The new proposal envisages giving parents the right to financial reimbursement of child-care costs through (most probably) the tax system. However, parents will neither be entitled to a place in a child-care facility, nor will they receive a cash benefit. The basic idea is that this reimbursement system will generate more purchasing power on the part of the consumer. This should entice private parties to enter the child-care market and eventually increase efficiency levels.

Janneke Plantenga

Portugal

To understand financial support for pre-school child care, it is necessary to distinguish between 'public' facilities (publicly owned and operated by a central administration or by local authorities) and state-supported, private non-profit institutions. In the first case, costs for what is considered as the 'educational component' (five hours) are shouldered by the Ministry of Education and the 'social component' (canteens, child care beyond five hours) is subsidised by the Ministry of Employment and Solidarity.

Financial responsibility for this component may be transferred, by agreement, to local authorities. Families whose children stay only five hours do not pay fees; the fees for the social component are calculated on a sliding scale based on family income and it is the institution that receives the funds.

Funding for publicly supported private non-profit institutions is carried out on the basis of the cost per child. The individual amount is fixed annually by the State after receiving input from the organisations that represent the interests of these institutions. Financial support is given to the institution that runs the care facility. For child care provided in these institutions, families then pay fees differentiated according to their means. In private, for-profit and co-operative pre-school establishments, families shoulder

the costs; but the law on pre-school education (1997) allows for some sponsorship in these schools via special development programmes.

Karin Wall

Sweden

Child-care institutions are financed through a combination of fees paid by the parents, and allocations from the budget of the local government. The local communities, which have their own budgets, in turn receive non-earmarked money from the State budget to arrange child care. There is no local community that has decided to direct the financial support to the parents rather than directly to the child-care institution, although this is theoretically possible. It is within the mandate of the local community, and this kind of system is indeed used in some places for school children. The parents then fill in a form, where they indicate their choice of school for their child, and a certain amount of money (called *skolpeng*) is then made available to that particular school.

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What happens to the European family?

Trends & motives

The European Observatory on Family Matters discusses low fertility in Europe at its annual seminar held in Seville from 15 to 16 September 2000

Christos Bagavos and Claude Martin

The hackneyed perceptions of fertility levels in Europe are no longer true. Forget about the stereotype of large Mediterranean families: The picture of the Italian 'mamma' surrounded by numerous offspring is a thing of the past. Italy's women now have fewer children than any of their European counterparts. Some Italian regions even show fertility rates of below 1, whereas the replacement level is around 2.1 children per woman. Such a revolution in fertility regimes worries all those who have long measured the economic, political and social soundness of nations against the yardstick of popu-

lation figures. What will happen to a Europe that can no longer assure the renewal of generations? What will happen to an ageing Europe? The European Observatory on Family Matters addressed this issue at its annual seminar in Seville on 15 and 16 September 2000. Far from being alarmist, the papers presented at this meeting contributed to a better understanding of the ins and outs of the problem.

Diagnosing the social situation in Europe

The European Commission's first report on the social situation in the European Union





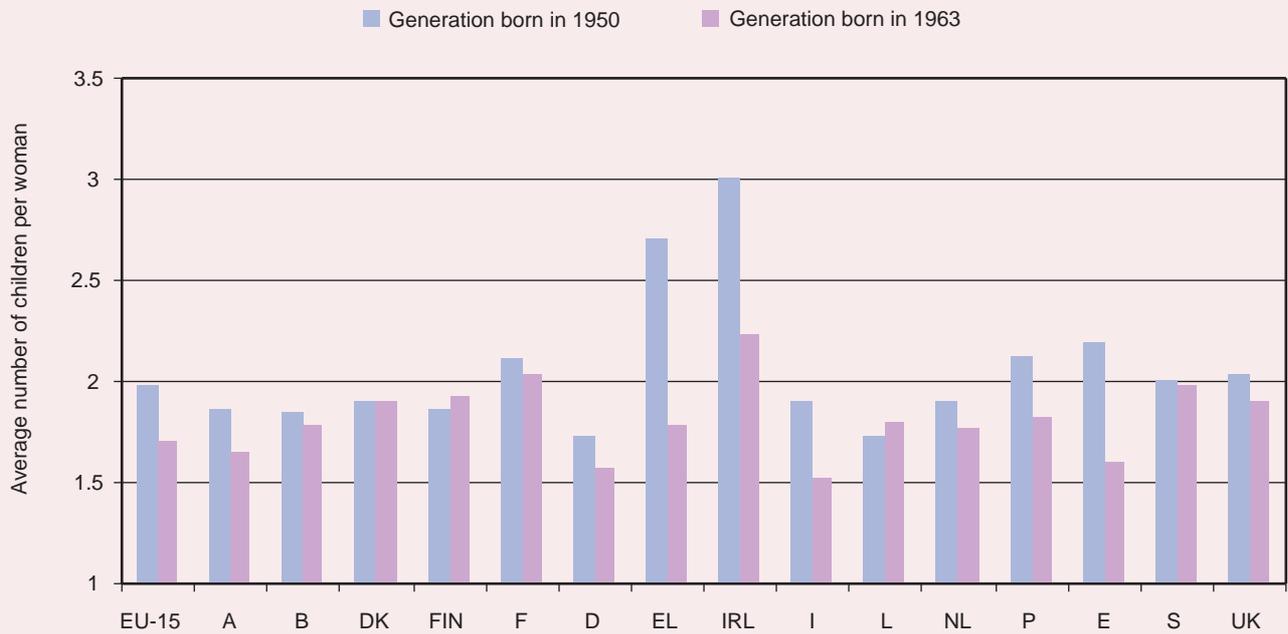
shows that in the years to come, the rising demand for social services will be one of the major challenges to Europe's societies and policy-makers, while low fertility and thus demographic ageing raise questions as to Europe's future population development. What is the link between social situation and low fertility? Does very low fertility really point to a poor social situation in any given country (e.g. high unemployment rate, wide pay gaps, inadequate housing, difficulties in reconciling work and family life)?

In fact, the realisation of an individual's life plans — such as having children — requires government support. Where the demand for social support remains unsatisfied, fertility may have a lower level than the one actually desired by individuals and couples. On the other hand, where the social situation is better and both government support and social services meet people's needs, it will become more likely that life plans are implemented and fertility rates reach the levels desired by couples. Hence, low fertility must be interpreted as a sign of difficulties encountered by individuals in the implementation of plans at different levels: family, employment, improvement of the quality of life. A fertility level that is definitely below the one desired implies shortcomings in the supply of social services and social support arrangements. The resultant policy perspective — namely, to invest in services rather than in cash benefits — is new for Europe.

Low fertility affects all developed countries

Declining birth rates and their sustained slippage below replacement fertility is one of the characteristic developments not only in Europe, but also in all other developed countries. This evolution is not new: For example, in most Member States, the descendants of the post-war generation remained below replacement level (Fig. 1) (for the different methods of measuring

1: EU: Completed fertility by generations born in 1950 and 1963



Source: Eurostat, Demographic Statistics

fertility see *Family Observer*, No. 1, 1999). But what is new, according to David Coleman, is the speed of the decline and the persistence of low fertility levels. This implies that we are currently witnessing an unprecedented evolution within demographic history, both in Europe and in all other developed countries.

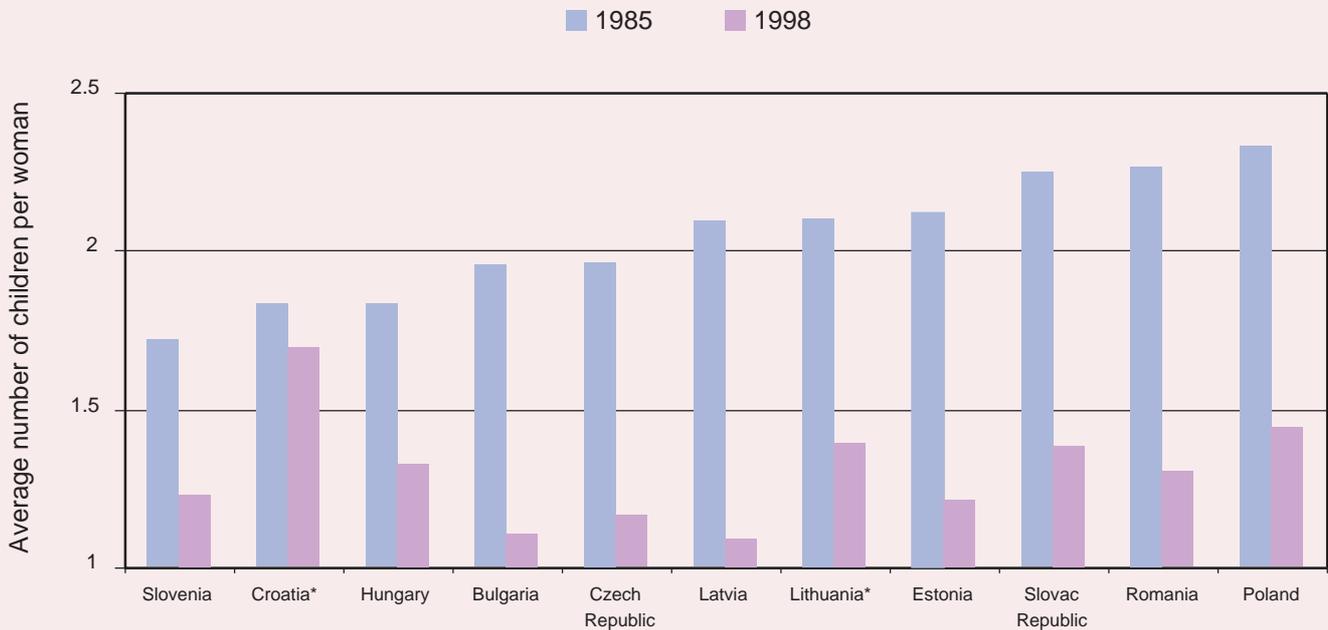
Despite the convergence towards low fertility levels, EU Member States differ in terms of timing and intensity of developments. In the Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal), fertility dropped much later — but then, much faster. The levels attained by Spain, Italy and Greece are extremely low. At the seminar, Juan Antonio Fernández Córdón and Giovanni Sgritta presented an

analysis of the particulars of these countries and addressed the paradoxical situation that, while they have the lowest level of fertility, they retain high marriage levels, know hardly any other forms of cohabitation and have few extramarital births. The explanation for this extremely low fertility is primarily found in the later age at which people marry and at which their first child is born. The Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland and Sweden) enjoyed a slight increase in fertility rates at the end of the 1980s. Despite a renewed decline in recent years, their current fertility levels are among the highest in the European Union. Fluctuating fertility rates that are always below — but sometimes very close to — replacement level characterise the developments in Belgium, France, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom; whereas Germany, Austria and — to a certain extent also Luxembourg — have seen their birth rates stagnate at low levels for almost 20 years.

Boasting the highest fertility within the EU for a long time, Ireland is now rapidly approaching a level that is definitely below 2.1 children per woman.

The pace of these developments has been extremely fast in all industrial nations. A particularly dramatic decline in fertility can be observed in the former Communist countries (Fig. 2). Whereas in the mid-1980s the average number of children per woman tended to hover around replacement level in most of these countries, the current rates are very low. Some Eastern European countries have the lowest fertility levels ever recorded world-wide. The United States and New Zealand are the only developed countries to show replacement fertility. According to Peter McDonald, this evolution is in part due to the higher fertility of Hispanic women and young US-Americans and to the significantly higher fertility of the Maori population in New Zealand.

2: Total fertility rates in selected European non-EU countries



*1997
Source: Eurostat, Demographic Statistics

Different approaches to an understanding of the phenomenon

The above developments raise a number of questions within the public policy debate on how to engineer changes in demography and especially fertility. How can we explain the decline in fertility and the persistently low fertility rates? What do the fertility differentials between Member States actually mean? Is there a time lag between countries in socio-economic convergence, or are we faced with country-specific models? How and under which circumstances can public policy impact on fertility when it is too low? What do we actually know about the repercussions of various social and, more specifically, family policies on fertility levels? Is there a need for social support and services, and how does this need relate to worryingly low fertility rates? How is public opinion formed on this issue? What is

the role of the media in forming public opinion?

To understand these developments, various approaches are possible. We may, as suggested by Bernhard Nauck, use models for the economic rationale behind the willingness to have children. We may, as proposed by Walter Bien, analyse the changing social attitudes of the young generation as to how they value children and family formation. Or we may focus on the media's information policy regarding demographic issues and their reception by the public, as did Maura Misiti who conducted extensive quantitative surveys.

It is quite evident that any attempts at raising fertility levels require a proper understanding of the reasons for low fertility and a definition of the tools available to governments within their efforts to influence fertility patterns.

Which public policies impact on fertility?

Before examining the fertility-related efficacy of family policies — a question critically reviewed by John Ditch, who stressed the very marginal impact of family-policy incentives on fertility — we should, according to Anne Gauthier, raise the no less delicate question of the limits and contexts of family policies in the various EU countries and study their recent development to see whether or not there is any convergence at the European level.

As Anne Gauthier put it, there is a real need to redefine the traditional approach to family policies in view of the increasingly blurred borderlines between family policy and other public policy domains (old age, employment, gender equality, etc.). Within the context of current demographic and family patterns, family policy can no longer be restricted to financial packages and family-related services. As regards family policies, Anne Gauthier maintains that, although we are witnessing a growing convergence, there are still marked differences between countries. What is common to all countries is the importance of reconciling work and family life. This is where the European institutions come into play, which have put employment and equal opportunities on the EU agenda.

Several other speakers stressed the role of employment policy and its impact on fertility. Eva Bernhardt showed that replacement fertility would depend on

women's care options in developed societies (child care and elder care). In a society where women and men are integrated into the labour market, it is very

children. Jo Murphy-Lawless develops an analogous perspective by focusing on the essential contributions by feminist analysis, which help us understand

“Labour-market policies, measures for senior citizens and equality issues will also have to be discussed in a family-policy context”

likely that many women either choose not to have children or postpone child-bearing — meaning they will have fewer

women's needs relating to infants and encourage us to explore previously uncharted terrain.

The 'toolbox' of public

Financial incentives

a) Periodic cash payments

This includes all child-related payments made in the form of cash. Principally this takes the form of regular payments to parents for each child.

b) Lump sum payments or loans

This can include payments at the time of birth of a baby (baby bonus, maternity benefit), at the time a child starts school or at some other age.

c) Tax rebates, credits or deductions

This includes tax reductions or credits based on the presence of a child. These measures can be targeted to children of different ages or children of different birth orders.

d) Free or subsidised services or goods

The services are education at all levels, medical and dental services, public transport, and recreation services such as sporting, entertainment, leisure or artistic activities.

e) Housing subsidies

This can take the form of periodic cash payments such as housing benefits, lump sum cash payments as first-time home-buyer grants or mortgage reductions at the birth of each child, tax rebates or deductions for housing costs, or subsidies to housing-related services.

Work and family initiatives

a) Maternity and paternity leave

The right of return to a position following leave related to the birth of a child: Current policy has many nuances such as its duration, whether the leave is paid and at what level, how much of the leave is available to mothers or to fathers, whether fathers are 'forced' to take some part of the leave, and whether there is a right of return to part-time work.

b) Child care

Provision of free or subsidised child care. It is an element of the family-friendly employment policies. It should be equally available to those who are not employed, as this may provide them with opportunities for training or for job seeking.

c) Flexible working hours and short-term leave for family-related purposes

Flexible working hours with a view to the employee's family responsibilities: Also, provision might be made for short-term absences related to the care of a sick child, school occasions or taking children to unavoidable appointments.

d) Anti-discrimination legislation and gender equity in employment practices

There should be employment legislation that prohibits discrimination in employment on the grounds of gender, relationship status or family status. Individual rather than family taxation



Policies to impact on fertility

is likely to prevent the emergence of work disincentives for second earners in the tax system; hence, it is to be encouraged.

e) Work hours

Employees should not be expected to have their work hours changed at short notice, or to have meetings or work-related social occasions scheduled at times that those with responsibility for young children would have difficulty meeting. Work hours need to be set in concert with school hours.

Broad social change supportive of children and parenting

a) Employment initiatives

Stimulation of jobs for women and young people, especially jobs in the service sector: Part-time work with *pro rata* employment benefits and job security is

also likely to provide more options for parents.

b) Child-friendly environments

Traffic calming, safe neighbourhood policies, public recreational facilities such as playgrounds, provision for children in places of entertainment and in shopping centres in order to build a child-friendly environment.

c) Gender equity

Non-gender-specific workplace policies, gender-neutral tax-transfer policies including social insurance, support of workers with family responsibilities irrespective of gender, removal of institutional remnants of the male breadwinner model of the family, acceptance of fathers as parents by the service providers and more general recognition and support to fathers as parents.

d) Marriage and relationship supports

Other policies already listed may give young people greater encouragement in the formation of relationships, but there may also be more direct initiatives. Relationship education may be helpful as well as relationship counselling. There may also be room for economic incentives to marry, such as housing assistance.

e) Development of positive social attitudes towards children and parenting

Giving a clear and simple message, formulated in terms of good public policy, that people desiring children will be supported by society without creating inequities to the childless, voluntary or involuntary.

Source: Contribution by Peter McDonald to Seville Seminar

Will the gender division of paid and unpaid labour have an impact on the decision of individuals and couples to have children?

To answer this question, we may, as proposed by Hans-Joachim Schulze, juxtapose two configurations:

- In the first case, there is a clear distinction between the responsibilities of men, which relate to their jobs, and the responsibilities of women, which relate to care and domestic work — a scenario we may term 'complementary division of labour' (job versus family).
- In the second case, there is no differentiation between men and women concerning the distribution of paid and unpaid work. This is a 'symmetric division of responsibilities'.

At first sight, we cannot say whether the one or the other scenario is more favourable to fertility. In fact, the answer to this question will largely depend on the economic and socio-cultural context. It is also linked to the policies applied in the family and labour-market domain.

If we take a closer look at the EU Member States, we see that, although there is no predominant form of how work is shared between women and men, the complementary division of labour is losing in importance. The majority of women want to participate in the labour force and share care and domestic work with their partners;



they are increasingly aspiring towards an equal gender division in family and household tasks. In countries where women want to participate in employment, but where neither public policies nor men's contribution to family duties change

considerably, fertility levels are likely to be low. If, however, policy-makers enable women to better reconcile work and family life and men take on a greater share of the household tasks, couples wanting to have children will realise their plans more readily.

In other words, the process of modernisation does not necessarily engender low fertility figures. Beginning at a certain level, which prevails throughout the EU, modernisation may — under certain conditions — be favourable to fertility. The example of the Scandinavian countries illustrates that people will choose to become parents if the efforts undertaken to raise employment go hand in hand with policies incorporating some sort of gender-equality perspective. It also shows that the exercise of a pro-natalist choice and the creation of a better environment for children will only be possible through modernised family policies and alternative child-care policies, as pointed out by Sirpa Taskinen. Moreover, there is a need for appropriate labour-market policies and an across-the-board re-design of gender relations.

What are the necessary policies and their fundamentals?

Policies aimed at raising the current fertility level have to be situated within the specific context of the life plans of couples. Any attempts at modifying couples' desires in terms of reproduction will go against the prevailing values of modern society and may also result in ultimately ineffective measures. That is why it is absolutely essential to know not only people's fertility-related intentions, but also the reasons why these intentions have not been followed up.

It would be wrong to assume that fertility is only a matter of women. Fertility levels are the outcome of individual — female and male — 'strategies' and of joint 'partner strategies'. These strategic decisions are also determined by parental concern regarding the well-being of their children, which highlights the importance of government involvement in family and child issues. As Sheila Kamerman said in her concluding remarks, any policy designed to improve the



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well-being of women, men, children and couples can only be favourable to fertility developments.

to be pursued must not relate to either individuals or couples alone. Rather, they have to be mainstreamed into the entire

“Having children is not only a woman’s decision, but also the result of a couple’s strategy”

Any attempts at helping couples make a positive choice through public policies have to consider the often major differences between countries in terms of institutional structures, the factors underlying low fertility levels, the demographic targets to be attained, as well as the indirect and sometimes undesirable effects of such policies.

If fertility is to be seen, at least in part, as a challenge to society as a whole, the policies

range of social policies. This is why the principles of simplicity, effectiveness, equity, quality and accessibility are to be applied, as should be the case for any other state policies. To ensure their efficacy, we need a whole policy package that affects the various fields of society rather than a number of isolated measures that tend to pervert the original idea.



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Contributions to the Annual Seminar 2000: Low fertility, families and public policies

Eva Bernhardt	Female careers between employment and children
Walter Bien	Changing values among the future parents of Europe
David Coleman	Trends and regional variations in European fertility
John Ditch	Fee, fo, fi, fum: fertility, social protection and fiscal welfare
Juan Antonio Fernández Cordón and Giovanni B. Sgritta	The Southern European paradox
Constantinos Fotakis	Presentation of Social Report 2000
Anne Gauthier	Public policies affecting fertility and families in Europe: a survey of the 15 Member States
Wolfgang Lutz	Social support and the decision to have children: the topic of this Seminar as a specific aspect of the theme of the 2000 Social Report
Peter McDonald	The ‘toolbox’ of public policies to impact on fertility — a global view
Maura Misiti	Public opinion and the role of the media
Jo Murphy-Lawless	Women’s perspectives on childbearing: challenges in need of creative solutions
Bernhard Nauck	Social and economic rationales in the decision to have children
Hans-Joachim Schulze	Does burden-sharing of men and women affect the decision to have children?
Sirpa Taskinen	Alternative child-care policies and fertility

You can download the full versions of the contributions from the website of the European Observatory on Family Matters:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/family/observatory/home.html

Intergenerational solidarity or intergenerational ambivalence?

Social relationships

Will there be a war of generations?

Kurt Lüscher

Will we soon find ourselves involved in a war of generations? You might be justified in thinking so when you read newspaper headlines of an 'age explosion', or of ever-higher pensions being paid at the cost of the young. On the other hand, the young seem to view the old as 'relics' who need to 'make room for the young'. Contrast this, though, to reports that many older people regularly support their children and grandchildren, either with money or services, whereas many younger people — and in particular women — take on the long-term care of

parents and parents-in-law. A group photography of the generations is obviously made up of many shades of grey.

In everyday family life, too, it is both common and widespread that parents and their grown-up children do not always project a harmonious portrait of perfection. They disagree and quarrel. Their relationship can become remote without totally disintegrating, however. To the contrary: Regular telephone calls — frequently of considerable duration — are used to stay in touch and share each other's troubles. Special events such as Christmas or 'round' birthdays (60, 70, etc.) serve to put in vivid display their

closeness and remoteness, their harmony and disputes.

Individuals feel torn by emotions and attitudes, by ambiguous relationships between parents and children or — more generally — between the old and the young. Writers and poets go on endlessly about these subjects, often turning them into tragedies of fatally linked love and hate.

The dynamic relations between generations have already been described by the writers of Antiquity. The Greek gods, in their roles as fathers and sons, symbolised repression and rebellion, which occasionally even

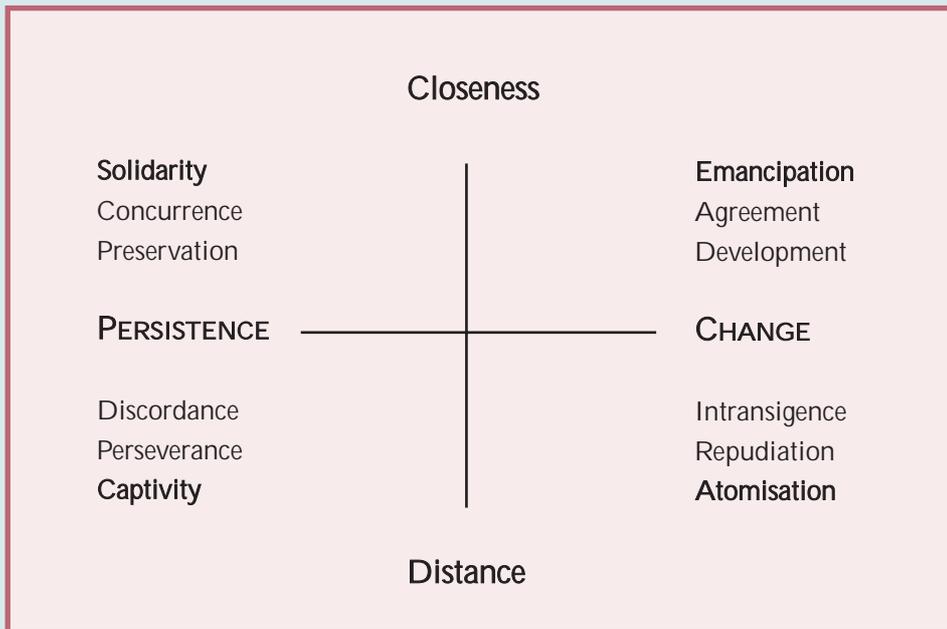




ended up as murder. Uranus threw his Cyclops sons into the netherworld, from which — led by Kronos — they assaulted and emasculated him while he was asleep. The adventures of Oedipus most clearly illustrate the fateful bond between father and son. Although Laius abandoned rather than killed his son, Oedipus killed his father unknowingly — a fate which points at the inescapable antagonism between father and son. In twentieth-century literature, the subject is broached by authors such as Kafka who, in his 'Metamorphosis', generates ambiguity in the reader. He exhaustively describes his own problematic father-son relationship in his 'Letter to my Father'.

In spite of this background in legend and personal experience, both research and social policy so far have focused their attention primarily on intergenerational *solidarity*. This is to some degree understandable, considering that political rhetoric has often confused the way things are with how they should be. Intergenerational relations, as much as families themselves, gel into a core around which solidarity should crystallise, and which should serve as an anchor for social cohesion. Families are seen as the guarantors of social integration, and tensions and conflicts are accordingly viewed as undesirable, aberrant and destructive.

In contrast, history proffers a view based on the idea that the shaping of intergenerational relationships, be it in the family or in society at large, always requires coping with ambiguities. These may be more or less obvious and may cause conflict and alienation under certain circumstances, but under other circumstances they may not play any role at all. What happens under which circumstances needs to be discovered by observation and investigation. This is not always easy, because allowing for ambiguous feelings and underlying disagreements is usually seen as socially undesirable.



— a simple model to characterise basic patterns for designing intergenerational relations, as follows:

The scheme suggests that '*solidarity*' should be understood as one of four basic patterns of intergenerational relationships in the family and in society. It will occur when relations between generations are expressed in acts that can be summarised as 'concurring preservation'. At the poles of intergenerational ambivalence, the focus is more on retaining existing (family) structures, and there is a high degree of personal sympathy and closeness.

If this goes together with more weight being put on change, and if there is agreement that the personal development of all parties involved is a maxim of joint activities, we arrive at the basic pattern of '*emancipation*'. If people drift apart in terms of both personal opinions and attitudes *vis-à-vis* lifestyles, and if conflicts arise and relations are (temporarily) suspended, the resultant pattern may markedly be considered as '*individualisation*'. Considering, however, that this term in turn is ambiguous, it

Nevertheless, we took this idea as the starting point for our research and scientific exchange within the scope of our work for the 'Society and Family' core subject at Constance, in co-operation with the Bronfenbrenner Life Course Center of Cornell University and, consequently, an international network supported by the Transcoop programme (Lüscher/Pillemer 1998).

embedded in social structures and institutions — most specifically, the family — which experiences forces both of persistence and of change.

Based on such deliberations, we developed — for the first phase of our research work

With regard to the theoretical basis, we introduced the 'ambivalence' concept to characterise our main thesis. It is used in everyday life as much as in the social sciences and humanities to express the experience of ambiguity, the wavering between affection and rejection, between independence and dependency, between the departure for something new and the obligation to the old. We recalled that the term 'generation' is ambiguous in and of itself. It refers to the link within a sequence, a 'generational chain' so to speak, but also to the new factor unflinching added to what already exists — the succeeding links of the generational chain. We also considered that intergenerational relations always have at least two dimensions. Like all other social relationships, they refer to a subjective sympathy (closeness) or antipathy (distance) felt by an individual. These are



appears preferable to speak of 'atomisation'. And lastly, the model points at a type of generational relationships where those involved have little to say to each other but are bound to a given lifestyle, a situation which might be expressed as 'captivity'.

Like all designs of this type, this model of 'intergenerational ambivalence' is primarily of 'heuristic' value, i.e. it aims to provide an incentive to observe and study, to order data and to continue analysis on the basis of results. Within the scope of the Constance study, this was done by first analysing open interviews with parents and their grown-up children (103 persons in all), where the issue was how families reorganise themselves after divorce. The results, which essentially confirm the model, have meanwhile been published (Lüscher/Pajung-Bilger 1998). Based on this analysis, a quantitative study was conducted of 52 grown-up children and 72 parents in families selected by type. Analogous studies have so far been carried out in Ithaca (New York) and Berne. Their findings are still being analysed. The Constance study has already produced initial data with the following findings (Lüscher/Lettke 2000):

- Only a minority — one out of five parents and grown-up children — report that they have *never* felt ambivalent about their relationship. Almost all have thought about ambiguities, which, surprisingly, were considered as both positive and negative by more than half of those polled.
- The experience of frequent ambivalence varies between generations and genders: There is greater ambivalence between fathers and daughters than between fathers and sons. Ambivalence is lowest among sons in their relationship with their mother, whereas mothers report more ambivalence in their relationship with their sons than with their daughters.
- Ambivalence at the institutional level, which affects structural bonds, is greater than at the personal level.
- The experience of greater intergenerational ambivalence co-exists with the view that the quality of relationships has deteriorated, which is

perfectly logical. But there are also indications that the connexion is not linear, which appears reconcilable with the mixed view of ambiguities.

What interim conclusions can be drawn at this point in time? First, it should be noted that the research perspective of 'intergenerational ambivalence' does not use normative standards included (though frequently unobserved) in many analyses putting forth the assumption that solidarity is an intrinsic feature or goal. It rather concentrates on the perception that relations between generations must be understood as an individual and social *responsibility*.

As an *anthropologically* based responsibility, the process of forming intergenerational relationships needs to be constantly re-evaluated, analysed and interpreted anew to reflect continuous change in a social context. Part of this task is finding ways how to handle the ambiguities and conflicts arising from them. Understanding this is important when it comes to advising politicians. All attempts at idealisation should be avoided!

Consideration may also be given to transferring the question of how to handle ambivalence in other aspects of family dynamics. This appears particularly useful for processes of generative action, including the phenomenon of childlessness. Similarly, separation or divorce requires coping with ambivalence. By assuming (plausibly) that there are similarities in family and social relationships between generations, the

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'intergenerational ambivalence' model can be interpreted in a macrosociological way. Its contradictions provide a link to theories related to tensions within and between modernisation processes that are impossible to ignore.

Research findings confirm the close link between generation and gender. Both are based on the structural fact and personal experience of polar differences that cannot be smoothed over and will thus always provide, albeit in different forms, the basis for constituting identity and the breeding ground for social inequalities. For this reason, it can be assumed that, in further developing the analyses presented, there are different strategies for handling ambivalence: those that confine and those that liberate. Handling ambivalence consciously thus constitutes not only a burden but also an opportunity for innovation and development — for the individual as much as for society.

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LoveTalks®: a sex-education model successfully exported to Europe

Preventive action

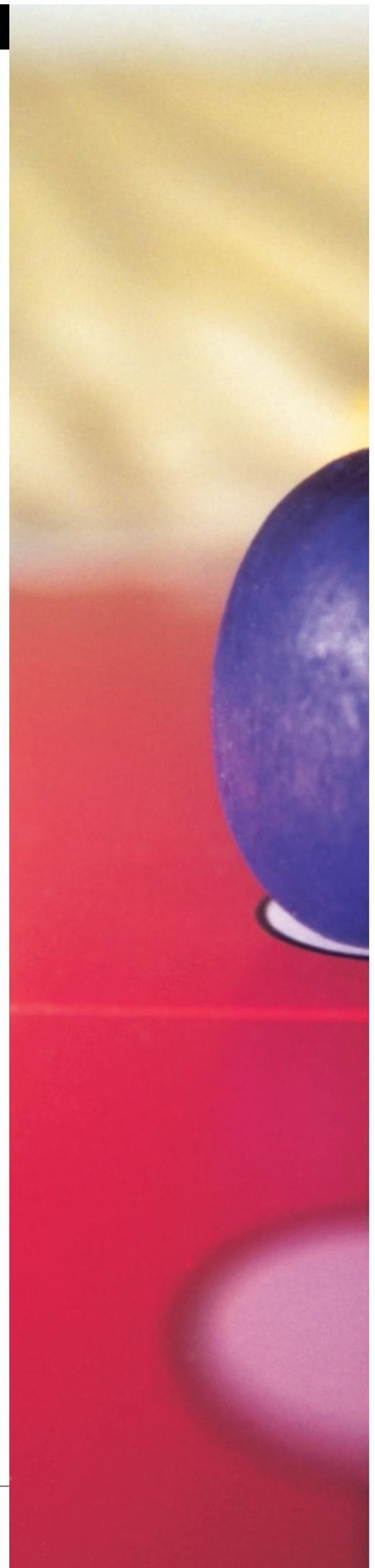
Studies in Austria have found that sex-education schemes need to be judged by their ability to facilitate and encourage communication. LoveTalks®, the preventive model developed in Austria, meets this expectation.

Brigitte Cizek, Olaf Kapella, Maria Steck

“ I can't believe it—s/he'd never dare to ask anything like that at home or at school”: a typical reaction from parents and teachers encountered by sex-education moderators at LoveTalks® sessions when confronting adults with questions on sex that kids and young people ask anonymously. No matter where the LoveTalks® moderators hold their sessions — be it in Austria, Germany, the Czech Republic or Italy —

they find that, regardless of how old they are or what level of school they attend, children tend to come up with plenty of basic, elementary questions on sexuality, even in an environment previously mute on such issues.

Thus, the anonymous 'question slips' by elementary-school children typically read like this: “How does the baby get into the tummy?” “How do you make a baby?”



"Does sex hurt?" "Why do women have a bosom?" "What is a condom?" "Why do people get married?" "What exactly is love?" "Why do men go crazy when a baby is born?" "Why do my parents fight so much?" "Why is talking about sex so embarrassing for everybody?" "Should I go to a striptease class with my girlfriend?"

Schoolgirls/boys of 13 to 14 years of age are interested in things like the following: "How can I find out whether he really loves me?" "How do I go about picking up a girl?" "I'm so terribly in love (and have been for three weeks). She loves me too, at least she says so. Should I ask her? I'm so embarrassed." "I've totally fallen for a girl, but I simply don't dare to tell her. What should I do?" "I'm so lovesick." "How do I know that she's the right one?" "Can you kiss boys with acne, too?" "The man gets a stiff prick — what about the woman?" "Can you tear your foreskin by masturbating?" "What happens when the woman swallows the sperm?" "What does an orgasm feel like?" "I'm often embarrassed about mentioning 'sex' in front of other people or even in my family. Is that normal?" "If you're gay, how do you write a letter to your boyfriend?" "Can you catch a disease by kissing somebody?" "How old do you have to be to start having sex?" "Does it hurt the first time?" "Will it make me sick or impotent if I take a hot shower before having sex?" "What is the best kind of birth control?" "Will the pill protect me against AIDS?" "Is an abortion bad for your health?"

Kurt Loewit, a professor of medical psychology and psychotherapy at the University of Innsbruck, comments: "Apart from sexuality, there's no other field in which parents and the school are so deficient in catering to the needs of adolescents, where they leave them so much to their own devices and to the uncontrolled machinations of — occasionally dangerous — instructors, and let them stumble into life with so little preparation."

Is the subject still taboo, in spite of the sexual revolution and exhaustive media coverage? Brigitte Cizek, project manager of the LoveTalks® model, clarifies the point: "In our experience, it is usually not a knowledge deficit on the part of grownups that makes it difficult for them to talk about sexuality

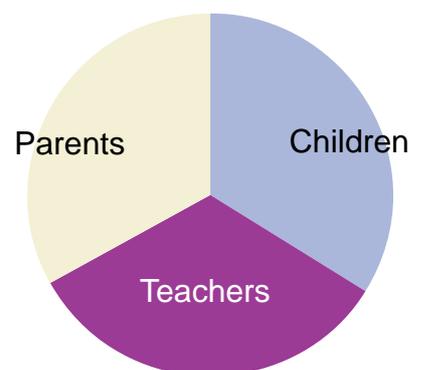
with kids and adolescents. The problem is rather in communication. Parents and teachers are usually unsure how to discuss sexuality with young people. Overcoming this barrier is the goal of the sex-education approach taken by the LoveTalks® model."

LoveTalks® is a three-stage model of sex education (for the stages, see below) providing a protected platform for all parties involved (i.e. parents, children and teachers) to facilitate a communicative exchange on sex-education issues.

What is LoveTalks®?

LoveTalks® is a preventive model of sex education aimed at getting schoolchildren and teachers to talk to each other about the sensitive issue of sex education. LoveTalks® was developed by Brigitte Cizek and Helmuth Schattovits, based on findings from a study on the need for sex education both at school and within the family. As Brigitte Cizek notes, "We see all participants as experts in sex education. In other words, everybody's experiences and desires — be they parents, children or teachers — are taken seriously and treated with equal consideration." When it comes to talks between parents, children and teachers, it is of the greatest importance to protect the privacy of everyone involved. The task of

1: Parents, children, teachers: partners in sex education





family counselling centre (*tertiary prevention*).

Based on the adage that to talk with each other is to learn from each other, it was found that LoveTalks® provides an exemplary model for prevention at schools where the principle of partnership is operational. It helps participants become more articulate in the field of sex education.

How does LoveTalks® work in practice? — The three stages of communication.

Acceptance of the model
A moderator presents the model to the *teachers' conference*, in open-house meetings with parents and in *talks to students*, inviting them to five *working-group meetings*. For developmental reasons, children need to be at least 15 years old to participate directly in the working groups. Younger schoolchildren have their questions and needs included in the working group meetings.

and teachers meet to talk about a wide range of subjects and hear each other's views. The *two last meetings* are dedicated to planning and developing a project on sex education at school.

The external moderator encourages their joint work by offering methodology and expert know-how, thus providing the basis for a positive environment during the discussions.

The project
Projects vary greatly among schools. Here are some examples: "Love and partnership", "Pregnancy and birth", "Birth control", "Setting limits", "Taking on another role", excursions to a gynaecologist, a maternity ward, a family counselling centre, a round-table on homosexuality, etc. Creative ideas are always welcome, as is evidenced by such LoveTalks® projects as elementary school children designing their own sex-education book or young people writing an AIDS brochure and developing a computer test to check on a person's knowledge of birth control and sexuality.

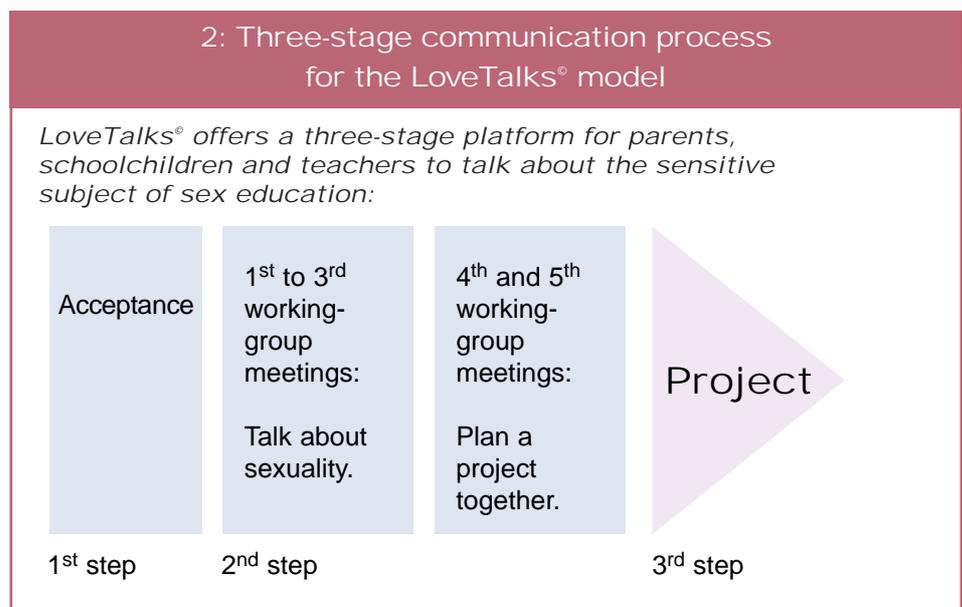
The sex-education moderators employed by the LoveTalks® model are trained by the Austrian Institute for Family Studies (ÖIF). The course takes one year and is targeted at people with relevant occupa-

creating such a protective environment and encouraging open dialogue is entrusted to an outside moderator trained in the didactics of sex education.

LoveTalks® begins with the current needs of participants and the specific situation of the school involved. The sex-education moderators adapt the content of the LoveTalks® working groups to the subjects, issues and concerns of the participants.

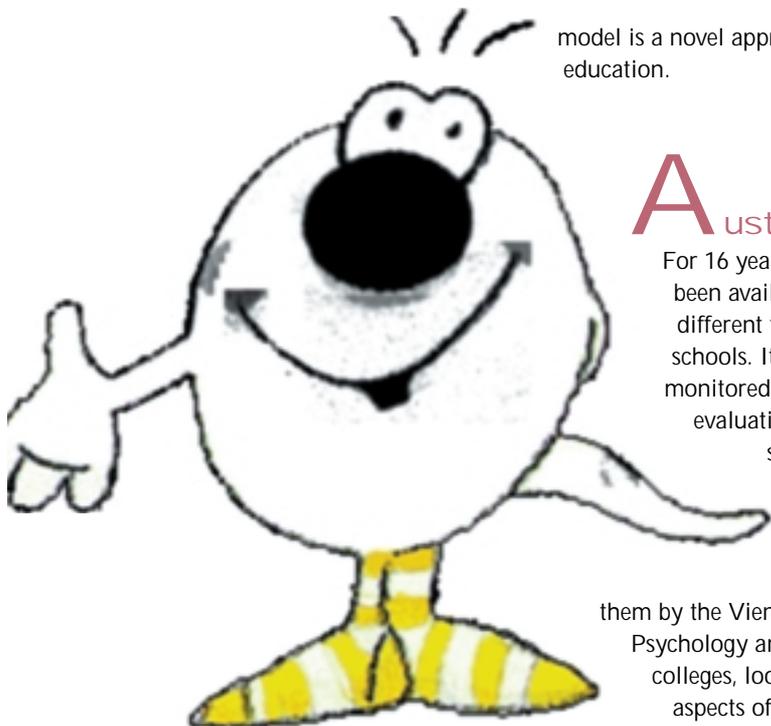
Preventive action is a major concern of LoveTalks®. Evaluation studies have found that LoveTalks® really does get involved at all three levels of prevention (as defined by Caplan):

- Within the scope of *primary prevention*, LoveTalks® sensitises the consciousness of participants by teaching them how to handle relationships and sexuality with care, as well as how to reflect on and talk about these issues.
- Concrete work helps detect psychosocial and/or medical problems at an early date (*secondary prevention*).
- In some cases, participants will follow up by obtaining help from an outside institution, such as services offered by a



Working-group meetings
For the first *three meetings*, parents, sixth-form (upper secondary-level) school students

tional training (psychologists, physicians, teachers, educators specialising in social skills).



model is a novel approach to sex education.

Austria

For 16 years, LoveTalks® has been available at all the different types of Austrian schools. It has been constantly monitored through continuous evaluation by a team of ÖIF sociologists. The model has been the subject of several external evaluations, among them by the Vienna Institute of Psychology and the teachers' colleges, looking at different aspects of the model. In

January 1999, LoveTalks® gained the status of an acknowledged teachers' inservice training model.

To offer this model at Austrian national level, networking nodes have been set up for each *Land* (province) at the state-subsidised marriage and family counselling centres. So far, about 170 moderators have been trained in seven courses. Their work is subject to intense quality control, and the validity of their certificate depends on participation in regular supervisory sessions, inservice training programmes and the accompanying scientific evaluation.

Financed by the Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations and by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, LoveTalks® is offered free of charge at all Austrian schools.

Where is LoveTalks® offered?

In Austria, LoveTalks® is now offered at all types of schools to children and young people of all ages. Thanks to the collaboration of *Lebenshilfe Salzburg*, an association helping mentally- and multiply-challenged people, the model has been adapted for use by people with disabilities. Currently, a pilot study is looking into options to extend LoveTalks® to the kindergarten level.

Apart from broadening the range of the model, it has also been successfully exported to other European countries. From its original model in Austria, it was prepared for European application within the scope of the EU programme *Socrates Comenius 3.1*. So far, the LoveTalks® model has been applied in Germany, Italy and the Czech Republic.

In the Czech Republic, LoveTalks® constitutes the (re)launch of sex education. In Italy (South Tyrol) and Germany, the

Statistics and evaluation (Austria)

From the date that scientific evaluation of the LoveTalks® model was first started during the 1996 school year to the end of 2000, a total of 1,038 teachers, 2,890 parents and 681 schoolchildren participated in 243 supervised working groups. School sex-education projects so far have reached a total of 10,792 children.

A summary of the main findings in the current evaluation indicates the degree of satisfaction of those who participated:

- Direct communication among parents, children and teachers was felt to be positive and to have a beneficial impact on collaboration among the three groups that went beyond the working group's activities. Thus, one participant reported, "All participants worked well with one another. I greatly liked the open and trusting atmosphere."
- Three out of four participants considered the moderator's ability to handle working groups, subjects and personal contacts to be 'very good'. Thus, one participant noted that "the moderator was able to talk soundly, openly and sensitively about all subjects. It was just great!"
- The knowledge disseminated to participants is presented in a form suitable for their respective roles as parents, teachers and schoolchildren, and experienced by those involved as extending a helping hand rather than being patronising or moralising. Parents feel better empowered to answer their children's questions. Teachers tell of getting ideas on how to improve their presentation of the subject. School students stress that they get answers to their questions and are stimulated to continue their thought processes. One participant reported getting personal benefits from "the rather more open handling of the subject of sexuality" and that it was now "easier to talk to others".

Germany

In Germany, LoveTalks® was initiated by the *Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung* (Federal Centre for Health Education, BZgA), which in 1992 was first given the task of developing target-oriented concepts and programmes for holistic sex education (Section 1 SFHG). In a series of collaborative projects, BZgA is organising models for sex education and family planning in Germany, following up on its work with attempts to implement them on a larger scale. Evaluation of these projects is mandatory.

The first contact between BZgA and LoveTalks was in 1996, within a framework of information exchange at international conferences and through co-operation in the EU's *Socrates* programme. In the ÖIF, the BZgA found a partner capable of providing the requisite scientific monitoring for the model project. As Birgit Gaschina-Hergarten notes, "For BZgA, what was special about LoveTalks® was not only that it provided an opportunity to reach out to the relevant target groups in a school context — i.e. parents, school children and teachers — but also the model's communicative approach. The BZgA had been offering education and inservice training for multipliers before, but LoveTalks® allows them to reach parents as well, who are a key target group."

Based on a feasibility study, LoveTalks® was launched in 1998 as a model project in Bavaria (organised by the Catholic Women's Social Service), Berlin (Senate Administration for Schools, Youth and Sports) and Saxony-Anhalt (Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs and Health). These three *Laender* had been chosen to test LoveTalks® in highly different contexts. It was found that LoveTalks® met with both approval and great interest, be it in relatively rural Bavaria, urban Berlin or one of the new German *Laender*. Particularly in Berlin, the broad media coverage confirmed the need for high-quality sex education. The success of LoveTalks® is evident from the detailed documentation of the model phase and, even more, from the surveys of the moderators' evaluations. BZgA financing of



pure knowledge and providing holistic sex education at school, where taking into account the individual and his/her environment is always important. Using theme-centred interaction (a group-dynamic method of humanist psychology aimed at holistic life-based learning), the working group set out to give equal standing to individuals, groups/forms, knowledge on sex education and the social environment. As a consequence of this approach, parents were included into the planning and implementation of school sex-education projects.

the model phase will end in second quarter 2001; thereafter, the project will have to survive at least partly on private contributions. All parties involved are convinced that LoveTalks® will succeed.

South Tyrol

In the mid-1990s, the Health Education Department of the Deutsches Schulamt (German School Administration) in Bolzano/South Tyrol appointed a working group to prepare proposals for sex-education projects at schools. A major conclusion of this working group was the need to draw a strict line between imparting

LoveTalks® came to the attention of the German School Administration in 1997, within the scope of an EU *Socrates* project. Due to its structured working-group meetings, the model offered an excellent structure for including parents. The Administration therefore decided to provide an opportunity for moderators to receive training in the LoveTalks® model. This is because it supports the foremost goal of holistic sex education in South Tyrol, namely co-operation with parents, so nicely.





Initial experience has shown that the idea is taking root. Today, it is often the parents who are the driving force behind the introduction of the model at their children's school. Accordingly, parents show a high acceptance level for the model. Teachers in turn appreciate the support from parents and school management, since it facilitates their commitment to become involved in the working groups and to implement the project. According to Annalies Tumpfer-Staffler of the Government Agency for Health Education at the German School Administration in Bolzano, "Teachers and parents usually respond positively when shown the model, since they are quick to grasp the constructive opportunities for co-operation."

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the motivation to finance and support a project to train moderators for sex education is a product

of the fundamental social change that the country has been undergoing since the fall of the Iron Curtain a decade ago.

Prior to 1989, society was strongly focused on traditional family values. There was a clear distribution of roles within both the family and relationships. The young received little or no formal education on sex, became pregnant at a very young age and usually married their first sexual partner. Sex was taboo, the subject of jokes but not of talks with children and young people.

The teachers, who all had grown up under these social conditions, are today faced with schoolchildren exposed to entirely different influences. The prostitution rate in the Czech Republic is among the highest in Europe. New options for family planning, as well as for emancipation, have produced a large gap in the birth rate among the generation of 20–30-year-olds. Today's Czechs start families much later. The role distribution is shifting rapidly and people

lead a more liberated, independent and self-determined life. Sex has become a subject that you meet everywhere in everyday life — although the old taboos and inhibitions have not vanished at the same speed.

Accordingly, a vacuum has formed in this changing society. Hardly anybody offers the young any mechanisms on how to handle issues involving sexuality and their sex life. Given such considerations, the Czech Ministry for Education has made sex education one of the priorities for educational principles and inservice teacher training. Using advanced methods, teachers are to be prepared for new educational themes and social issues. The ÖIF's LoveTalks® model offers flexible options and — even more importantly — sufficient leeway for customised projects. The idea of moderators coming in from the outside, who do not have to carry any local burden and thus are better able to maintain an objective distance from the taboo subject, was one that looked highly promising to the Czech authorities.

The training was supported by the *Verein Kulturkontakt* (Culture Contact Society). Primarily for financial reasons, the training was slightly modified and divided into two parts, theoretical and practical. To qualify, moderators need to pass both parts. The first phase of training has since been completed and the participants are now in their practical stage. They have become fully committed and are convinced that the model can be implemented. There are some unsettled issues with regard to organisational practice and finances, however. Brigitte Sorger, the project head, thinks that, "Altogether, the Austrian LoveTalks® model, in terms of both content and structure, provides a good pattern from which to develop a Czech model for sex education at school; but we need to find a suitable form for a society undergoing enormous change".

I nternational

In response to the brisk demand, ÖIF is exporting the LoveTalks model to other European countries. As the country reports have shown, LoveTalks® has been organised under a range of external frameworks. The structure of the LoveTalks® process has been found to be positive in all countries that have tried the model so far. Its clarity of structure and joint action by all groups of participants involved provide a solid foundation in the sensitive field of sex education. At the same time, the model allows sufficient leeway to cater to individual needs, such as the choice of

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subjects to talk about at working-group meetings, or the content of a school sex-education project. This basic principle of a process focused on need allows for the export of LoveTalks® to other countries.

With this in mind, a feasibility study on reproductive health has prepared the groundwork for testing LoveTalks® in Africa, where it is to be implemented in a pilot project.



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Family competencies — innovative coaching for a successful return to the world of work

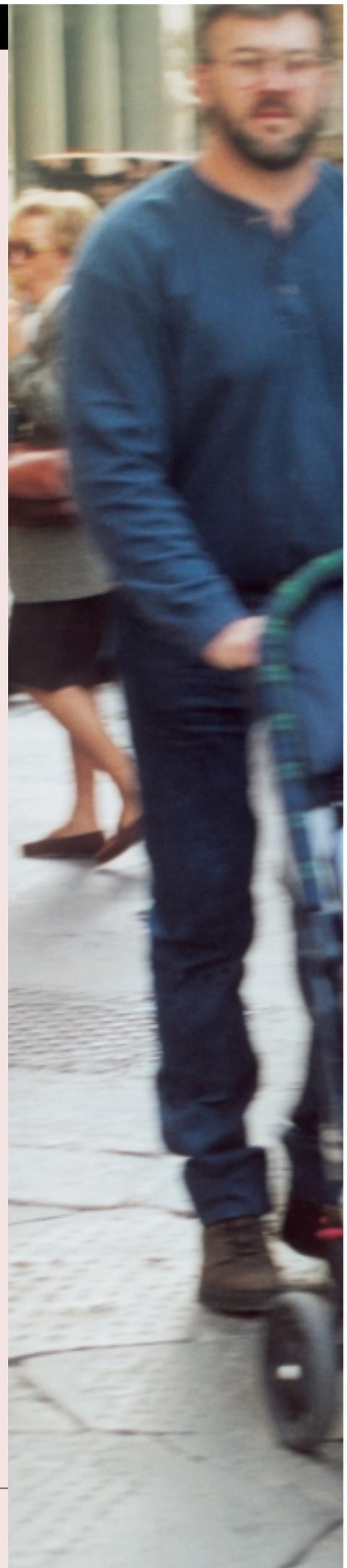
Best-practice model

Society and the business world should pay more attention not only to work performed within the family, but also to the key competencies people acquire and learn by doing family work. An innovative coaching programme puts forth the objective of making it easier for women to return to work, particularly after taking a long break to look after children.

Doris Palz

Most employers, but also parents who stay at home — usually mothers — consider time dedicated to child care and intensive family work as irrelevant for their job and/or career. It is still a widely-held belief that people who stay at home (= do family work) neither learn anything nor

acquire or learn skills relevant to the world of work. While the business world has somewhat revised this idea regarding the work of volunteers — whose competencies acquired outside regular employment have become increasingly important when judging the qualification of these applicants — the relevance of family work is hardly ever taken into account when determining a person's competency profile. Definitely,





this is wrong! Indeed, studies have shown which skills are acquired during the family phase of the life course:

- communication skills,
- organisational skills,
- conflict-solving skills,
- the ability to achieve one's objectives,
- flexibility,
- problem-solving skills,
- educational abilities,
- own initiative, and
- stress resistance.

Rising demand for key competencies

The above skills have become increasingly important as 'key competencies' in business. In a time characterised by rapid technological development, the half-life of technical knowledge continues to shrink while personal competencies tend to gain significance. Flexible staff members who are communicative, able to organise social processes and to react quickly to complex demands are now seen as able to provide a decisive competitive advantage for their companies.

F

amily competencies — a key to more success at work

Starting in autumn 2000, the new *Family Competencies* project launched by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Social Security and Generations offers women with children the possibility to prepare for a return to the world of work. Selected family counselling centres offer an innovative coaching programme to help enhance the labour-market potential of this group.

A preliminary information session gives the women a chance to sound out their specific re-entry ambitions, as well as providing basic orientation by presenting the project and setting down procedures. Another important aim of this session is to make the women aware of the significance of the skills they have acquired in family work and to get them to assert them in a positive way.

Making use of the family as a place to learn

At the beginning of September 2000, the *Katholische Arbeitnehmer Bewegung* (Catholic Employees' Movement) and the *Deutsches Jugendinstitut* (German Youth Institute) presented their project *Family Competencies as a Potential in Innovative Personnel Development* to European experts in Brussels. The project was aimed at providing convincing answers to old social-policy questions and to new economic challenges.

The initiative was aimed at bringing to the attention of companies and personnel managers the relevance of competencies acquired in family work to business life. In a labour market characterised by dynamic development and by the fact that technical qualifications rapidly become obsolete, non-technical and social skills are playing an increasingly important role. Many companies have already become aware of this challenge. To date, however, their only response has been to offer staff costly training programmes.

In order to raise and deepen their awareness, they are given a handbook offering numerous examples, checklists and training programmes that familiarise participants with the strengths of family competencies.

The second step is an interim interview to establish the extent to which the participant has familiarised herself with the topic of family competencies. Moreover, it helps to assess her aptitude and sets a date for taking the test.

In the third step, the participant takes the computer test measuring family competencies. The test was developed in 1988 and has been used millions of times in a process of continuous improvement. It has become well established in business and has been successfully applied in personnel developments for both assessing staff potential and recruiting. Among others, Daimler Chrysler, the United Bank of Switzerland and the Swiss Postal Services — as well as the Austrian Federal Railways — have adopted this proven and informative computer test.

Based on the test results, the participant receives a written expert report on her

strengths and potential. The results and findings are subsequently discussed with her in a comprehensive counselling session. The Ministry and the Economic Chamber then issue a certificate that the woman can use to certify her competencies when applying for a job. This will help future employers to get a clear picture of the applicant's personal competency profile.

So far, the educational resource of family work as the equivalent of an on-the-job training programme in key job skills has remained untapped by companies. The project *Family Competencies as a Potential in Innovative Personnel Development* aims to bring this decisive 'informal' learning site out of its shadowy existence. Like other extra-mural or extra-entrepreneurial places of learning, family work provides people with social, planning and co-ordinating skills that are relevant in business and have become increasingly important in the managerial sector. The initiators of the project bluntly state that companies ignoring family work as a resource to develop key competencies are depriving themselves of a potentially huge source of necessary skills.

To enable employers to tap the family as 'a place to learn' and to make use of it when implementing personnel policies, they need clear and unambiguous tools for identifying and evaluating family competencies. This is precisely the aim of the *Family Competencies Project* launched by the Catholic Employees' Movement and the German Youth Institute in collaboration with partners in The Netherlands (De Jong &

Van Doorne-Huiskes en Partners) and in Great Britain (Fair Play Consortium). The first step is a survey conducted among private and public employers: What are the noticeable changes concerning the required competencies of staff members? How are skills acquired outside work taken into consideration? Are skills acquired in family work considered? In the second step, the focus is on making not only companies, but also parents or mothers, understand how significant their family competencies actually are. A qualification handbook to take stock of one's personal skills — something particularly important when women wish to re-enter the labour market after taking a break to look after children — and a comparison of the skills presently in demand with those presently in supply, help make the 'market' for family competencies more transparent. As a third step, a presentation folder for companies will help to raise their awareness of the competencies acquired in family work.

It goes without saying that the project *Family Competencies as a Potential in Innovative Personnel Development* will trigger a long-overdue re-orientation — not only in business, but also on the part of parents or mothers. Whether it has a lasting effect will be demonstrated by how many or how few mothers applying for a job actually get back into the labour market — something that could well be dependent upon their replying to the personnel manager's question, "So you just were at home for the past few years and did nothing?" by answering with something more assertive and professional than a timid, "Yes, I just was at home."



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A great deal of additional information on the European Union is available on the Internet. It can be accessed through the Europa server (<http://europa.eu.int>).

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