



**FamiliesAndSocieties**



# Vulnerability and the future of families with children in Europe: Nine questions and corresponding answers

prepared by Bernhard Riederer



Linnaeus Center on Social Policy and Family Dynamics in Europe, SPaDE



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## **Introduction: Nine questions on the future(s) of families with children**

### **The future(s) of families with children**

When we think about a “family”, a certain picture usually comes to our minds. This “family” may vary in details, but most frequently we think about two parents living together with their biological children (at least in the so-called Western world). Our “family” is imprinted from the “ideals” of romantic love and the nuclear family. Ideals seldom meet the reality. “[F]amilies with porous boundaries that allow a wide range of extended family and members of the community to contribute to caregiving and other responsibilities of family life were the historical norm“ (Parke, 2013, p. 5). The nuclear family itself is no universal form of human living but rather an exception in human history. In Europe, it has never been the most prominent arrangement before the economic recovery after World War II and the subsequent growth of the 1950s and 1960s (Mitterauer & Sieder, 1989; Sieder, 1987). For the first time in history, wealth allowed members of *all* societal classes to marry and start a family. A male breadwinner could afford a living for his wife and their children. But times have changed quickly. Liberalisation of norms, different ideals of love and sexual freedom as well as female emancipation challenged the existing ideal. Both women and children became more independent of the “patriarch” who was the boss within the home and represented the family outside. The rising female labour force participation was important. It was fuelled by both increasing freedom and female education on the one hand as well as deteriorating real wages on the other. One income was often no longer enough to provide for a family. The period characterised by high marriage and birth rates, few divorces, and a low prevalence of non-traditional family forms already ended about fifty years ago (Oláh, Richter, & Kotowska, 2014). Families have changed as their (societal) environment did.

Families will most likely also change in the future. For instance, demographic trends will affect families’ lives in many ways (cf. OECD, 2011; 2012). Ongoing urbanisation will increase the number of children that are growing up in unnatural environments. Ageing may support intergenerational solidarity (availability of grandparents) but also foster intergenerational conflicts. While the average number of children is not expected to change much, postponement of births to higher ages is expected to continue. It can bring some women to ages where fecundity decreases significantly. Women might thus have an increasing demand for assisted reproduction technologies (ART). Immigration to Europe may change the composition of family configurations in some countries though many immigrant groups will adapt to prevalent family forms. Family dissolution may bring about rising numbers of single-parent families though re-partnering may also become more common. These examples show only a fraction of plausible changes that European societies and families may experience in the future. Other societal developments and their impact on families’ lives ranging from economic developments and the labour market to

gender issues or cultural aspects have not even been mentioned so far. Families will change and because the family builds the core of human society this is of huge relevance for those who administer and govern European societies. The present book explores relevant future developments and aims at contributing to the political debate on the future of families in Europe.

Existing forward-looking analyses refer to many different aspects such as economic development, societal change, environmental issues, global governance or territorial governance (Boitier et al., 2013). Uncertainties of future developments partly also result from the interdependency of these developments. The outcomes of these processes may be quite different. A recent foresight research project considered scenarios of a “collapse” and a “perseverance” as well as a scenario of a “metamorphosis” (FLAGSHIP, 2015). While the first scenario sketches the worst thinkable case, the second one describes a future under the assumption that present-day trends will continue and chosen political paths will be followed persistently. The third scenario finally is a vision of a “sustainable future”. Cornerstones of this scenario are a new system of production and consumption as well as a model of inclusive development involving a socially responsible information technology transition (FLAGSHIP, 2015).

Two foresights focused explicitly on families. Four distinctive scenarios were developed within the framework of the OECD’s *International Future Programme* (OECD, 2012): (1) a scenario of “sustainable growth” combining a high stability of economic growth with slow adoption of human-centric scientific and technological innovation, (2) a scenario characterised as “innovative but featuring a fragmented society” where rapid innovation meets a low stability of economic development, (3) a scenario called “back to basics” with slow adoption of innovation and a low stability of economic growth and (4) the “golden age” scenario with rapid innovation and stable economic growth. Experts of the *FamilyPlatform* project (Kapella, de Liedekerke, & Bergeyck, 2011) also developed four different future scenarios: *Scenario 1* is characterised by equal opportunities, open migration, diversity in education and values as well as a co-existence of private and public care. *Scenario 2*, on the contrary, shows increasing inequality, extreme positions in values, no or only very selective migration as well as a privatisation of care and education systems. *Scenario 3* is similar to the second one. Nevertheless, according to the third scenario diverse values are accepted in society. In addition, it allows for open but limited migration. In *Scenario 4*, diverse values are also accepted. Migration, however, is restricted. Furthermore, equal opportunities exist at a low level. Public care systems for all target basic needs and a rigid form of public education offers basic education. Additional education or care can be bought by the rich on free markets.

Facing all the uncertainties of future developments in different societal areas and given the different scenarios already developed in previous research, we started our own work by identifying the most important challenges for families and policy-makers in the future. After the identification of one key aspect, we focused on this

central topic and tried to find out more about its present state and its likely development. We explored other societal developments that influence its future change and discuss respective policy implications. It turned out early that this key aspect is vulnerability as it shapes the future well-being of families and particularly the children raised within those families. Indeed, addressing vulnerable family constellations in order to prevent or at least reduce the societal reproduction of vulnerability is maybe the greatest challenge for family law and social policy. In the present book, we will therefore mainly focus on future vulnerability and thus future well-being of families with children.

## **Nine questions, their relevance, and this book**

The main part of this book is organised in three sections and each of its chapters wants to contribute to an answer on one question about the present and particularly the future of families in Europe. The first part is “setting the scene”. It gives an overview over the contemporary situation (existing problems of families) and present as well as future challenges for policy-makers, establishes the vulnerability of families and children as a crucial aspect, and finally discusses the vulnerability of different family types. Consequently, the following questions will be treated in chapters one to three: What will be the most important topics for the future of families in Europe? What is vulnerability and why is it important? Which family types are and will be particularly in danger of living in vulnerable situations? In particular for the design of efficient (preventative) policies, it is essential to understand vulnerability in detail and to comprehend it in all its facets. Furthermore, knowledge about most family types concerned will allow future policies to focus on specific risk groups and their main challenges.

The further two sections of the main part concentrate on the future. Chapters 4 to 6 cover the future of the vulnerability of families with children in general. Chapter 4 presents expert estimates to answer the question how vulnerability of families with children will develop in the future in Europe. Doing so, the answer will differentiate between different European regions and different dimensions of vulnerability. Chapter 5 aims at the identification of the most important factors that might drive the vulnerability of families with children and their well-being. Going into detail, analyses will show which factors (or subcomponents of factors) seem to be relevant for different dimensions of vulnerability. The identification of factors important for vulnerability development would possibly allow to react to changing circumstances, thereby steering against a potential increase of family vulnerability in the future. Finally, the sixth chapter asks “What policies will be relevant to stop intergenerational vulnerability reproduction?” Social risks are still passed on from one generation to the next. Our societies are not equal with regard to children’s opportunities and future options. Mitigating the reproduction of vulnerability within the family is thus a priority for European Union if it wants to reach its goal of bringing millions of people out of poverty and social exclusion and fostering future economic (and social) prosperity.

Building the final section of the book's main part, Chapters 7 to 9 cover specific issues of particular relevance. They all focus on trends and developments we could observe during the last years and that are assumed to continue or be liable to recur. Having discussed in previous chapters that union dissolution is an important factor in child vulnerability and that single-parent families are perceived to be the family type with highest vulnerability risks, Chapter 7 focuses on the implications of increasing union dissolution and re-partnering trends for future family size and distribution of family types. Chapter 8 discusses a very current topic by asking how an increase in asylum seekers and refugees may affect vulnerability of families in the future. Chapter 9 considers a final crucial theme: gender equality. What may be future consequences of the ongoing "gender revolution"? We will argue that policies should be in accordance with existing gender attitudes to effectively hinder vulnerability. Last but not least, we demonstrate in a simulation model with an artificial population that both fertility and well-being can be higher in more gender equal societies. After the main part with its three sections, a final chapter with closing remarks will summarise main results and draw some conclusions for policy-makers.

### ***FamiliesAndSocieties*: the research behind this book**

The results presented in this book are part of the outcomes of the large-scale EU Seventh Framework project "Changing families and sustainable societies: Policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations" (*FamiliesAndSocieties*). The objectives of the project included the investigation of the diversity of family forms, relationships, and life courses in Europe, an assessment of the compatibility of existing policies to ongoing family changes, and contributions to evidence-based future policy-making. Within the project research was organised in twelve interrelated work packages that focused on different topics. The issues addressed comprise new family configurations and life goals, new gender roles, new meanings of children, the development and spread of artificial reproductive technologies, implications of the changes in the family life course for sustainable societies, inequalities in children's life chances, childcare arrangements and their consequences, intergenerational links, migrants and social inclusion/exclusion, and analyses of crucial family-policy issues in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

One of the twelve work packages addressed possible futures of the families in Europe. Just like the past, the future will also bring unexpected and unforeseeable occurrences and developments. As nobody can precisely answer the question what the future will bring for families and children, scientists, policy-makers and societies as a whole should be prepared for different futures. Thus, the main objective of this work package was to inform policy-makers about possible developments and their potential impact on family needs and family well-being in the long run. In

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<sup>1</sup> Reports summarising the key findings of research on all of these topics can be found on the project's website: <http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu>.

order to meet this objective, several closely interrelated foresight activities were conducted. Our research scheme included qualitative as well as quantitative methods (for details see Riederer et al., 2017; for conceptual issues di Giulio et al., 2013).

*Qualitative research* exploited the knowledge of experts and comprised discussions in a stakeholder workshop (Philipov et al., 2014) as well as focus groups conducted in six European cities (Mynarska et al., 2015; Riederer et al., 2017). In the *workshop* conducted in Tallinn, Estonia, in January 2014, 25 stakeholders and 12 project participants from different European governmental and non-governmental institutions discussed four pre-selected topics: (i) gender relationships, (ii) child-care arrangements, (iii) economic (in)security and (iv) intergenerational linkages in the family. These topics oriented themselves on the main topics of the *FamiliesAnd-Societies* project and were decided upon in several discussions among work package participants and external colleagues who shared their experience from previous research projects on families. The stakeholders were asked to generate ideas in response to four questions specified for each one of the four topics (for details, see Philipov et al., 2014). Across all 16 questions the stakeholders shared more than 100 relevant issues. Subsequent analyses of these issues lead to the emergence of core themes that have permeated the discussions.

Six *focus group discussions* with policy-makers and civil society actors engaged in family-related issues were conducted between November 2014 and June 2015. We invited practitioners dealing with general family-related issues as well as representatives of organisations dealing with families and children's needs. The central topic of focus group discussions was the future of vulnerable families with children. This focus was chosen because vulnerability issues permeated all the different discussions during the workshop. The focus groups took place in Austria (Vienna), Poland (Warsaw), Spain (Madrid), Sweden (Stockholm) and Switzerland (Bern). These five countries were selected to represent distinctly different welfare regimes and family policy models. In addition, the selection of countries also offers some variation with respect to cultural background, distribution of family types and economic situation. To provide further insights, another focus group in Brussels (Belgium) was designed to also include experts and stakeholders at EU level. The number of the focus group participants varied between six and nine informants in each city. Altogether, 44 participants took part in the organised discussions. Discussions themselves lasted between 90 and 110 minutes (for further information see Mynarska et al., 2015, and/or Riederer et al., 2017).

*Quantitative research* activities included two online questionnaire studies (Riederer, Philipov, & Rengs, 2017) and two simulation studies (Winkler-Dworak et al., 2015). Both online questionnaire studies were drawing upon the outcomes of the prior focus group discussions. One online survey was addressing family experts (scientists and practitioners) while the other one was directed at parents in general. The *expert survey* focused on future societal developments and their impact on vulnerability of families with children. The *family questionnaire* additionally included

assessments of the present situation of parents, policy measures that could improve their lives and worries about their children's future. First, between December 2015 and March 2016, we collected 176 opinions and views from experts all over Europe (29 countries). The majority of participants in the expert questionnaire study came from an academic background (61 per cent). Almost one-fifth of participants worked for NGOs. Ten experts (six per cent) saw themselves as policy-makers. Around 13 per cent of participants did not assign themselves to one of these three sectors. These experts worked for administrative authorities, regional or (inter)national organisations, in the health sector, in the educational sector or in the private sector (business, industry or banking). Some of them did research or were involved in policy areas but they were mainly practitioners. Data collection with the family questionnaire started in late March 2016 and ended in early June 2016. In total, 1,370 people submitted answers. Respondents who were not yet parents (pregnancies) or who did not live in Europe were excluded from the analyses, resulting in a sample including 1,343 parents living in 22 different European countries.<sup>2</sup>

Microsimulations and agent-based models focused on consequences of changing family structures and gender roles (Winkler-Dworak et al., 2015; 2017). Gender roles were subject to change during the last decades. Simulations using an agent-based model (ABM) were aimed at explaining transitions from a traditional regime, characterised by a dominance of the male-breadwinner model (stage 1), to an intermediate regime showing a conflict between individual desires on the one hand and societal expectations and general conditions on the other hand (stage 2) to, finally, a regime of advanced gender equity at the household level and at the institutional level (stage 3). The model investigated an artificial population of agents who derive utility from consumption and from meeting their individual fertility intentions while explicitly addressing the dynamic effects of gender equity on fertility and well-being. In parallel to the development of gender roles, marriage rates declined and divorce rates increased. Using microsimulation techniques, implications of increasing union dissolution and re-partnering rates on family formation and future fertility levels were assessed for Italian, British and Norwegian birth cohorts. The microsimulation approach employed used estimates obtained with real-world samples to simulate artificial populations allowing for an assessment of future developments.

The answers given to the outlined questions on the future(s) of families with children are mainly based on these research activities. Qualitative research covered a bulk of research questions and captured subjective views of experts in detail, thereby showing a broader and at the same time very nuanced picture. It allowed to describe uncertainties regarding the future and to explore existing ambivalences in assessments of trends. Qualitative research, however, usually does not allow for a

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<sup>2</sup> Nine out of ten respondents, however, came from one of three countries only: from Portugal, Spain or Germany. Therefore most of the analyses with family questionnaire data were done separately for these countries (for further information on samples see Riederer, Philipov, & Rengs, 2017, and/or Riederer et al., 2017).

generalisation of findings which are moreover often ambiguous. In contrast, quantitative methods yield very clear outcomes due to their precise (numeric) results. In addition, influences of subjectivity are less likely in quantitative research. However, a rather precise research question and highly standardised analyses have to be conducted to minimise subjective influences and to get numeric results. This also limits possible outcomes. Regarding the foresight activities of the *FamiliesAnd-Societies* project, qualitative research primarily aimed at exploring possible challenges for the future of families in Europe (and policy-makers) while quantitative research focused on specific aspects highlighted in the qualitative parts. In sum, qualitative and quantitative approaches complemented each other (Riederer et al., 2017).

The chapters of the present book are based upon previous reports and working papers. Contents have been copied and shortened, partly revised and extended, and reorganised to give well-founded answers to nine important questions. References to working papers will be made at the beginning of each chapter in footnotes.



## Part I: Setting the stage

The first part of the present book is setting the stage for the analyses in the other parts. It focuses on the past and the present to prepare the basis for all following analyses that are referring to the future. After identifying the most important topics, it gives an overview over prior research to summarise existing knowledge.

*What will be the most important topics for the future of families in Europe?*

In the stakeholder workshop, more than 100 issues were covered by the participating discussants. The following paradigms were found to be particularly important: (1) vulnerable families, (2) family well-being from a child-focused perspective, (3) policy inclusion of all family forms, (4) mainstreaming family and gender, (5) reconciliation of professional work and family life, and (6) new gender roles. All these aspects entered the following research activities in which vulnerability served as a guiding concept.

*What is vulnerability and why is it important?*

Vulnerability can be defined in multiple ways. In the scientific literature, each discipline has its own accentuation of the term. We describe vulnerability as multi-dimensional concept comprising at least four dimensions: (a) *economic* vulnerability referring to poverty and economic hardship; (b) *psychological* vulnerability including strong feelings of stress, anxiety or depression; (c) *social* vulnerability comprising aspects such as stigmatisation, discrimination and a lack of social support; (d) *physical* vulnerability resulting from health problems or disabilities.

Existing evidence demonstrates that in Europe, the age group most concerned by economic vulnerability are children. If the European Union wants to reach its Europe 2020 target in reducing poverty and social exclusion, improving the situation of (families with) children has to be a top priority. In the past, the development of economic vulnerability has varied across Europe. While it could be reduced in some new eastern European member states, it increased in (mainly southern European) countries that were hit hardest by the economic crisis. In most member states, however, economic vulnerability of families has remained rather constant. Advances in the reduction of vulnerability were small. Although preliminary overviews are given, more research and better data are needed to assess developments in other than economic vulnerability dimensions and the highly relevant issue of vulnerability reproduction within families (intergenerational transmission of risks).

*Which family types are and will be particularly in danger of living in vulnerable situations?*

In focus groups, some informants argued that there is no family configuration that invariably causes vulnerability. There was, however, a general consensus that some types are more “at risk”: single parents and families with many children (large families) were perceived as most vulnerable. These families may face a higher risk because the reconciliation of work and family is particularly challenging for them. The ability to combine family life with paid employment was identified to be decisive for family well-being. In addition, there are family types often fighting against specific vulnerabilities due to stigmatisation (e.g., families with dependent members, immigrant families, and same-sex families).

# 1 What will be the most important topics for the future of families in Europe?

Before starting analyses of the future(s) of families in Europe, it is highly relevant to identify the most important aspect(s) of future family life development. For this reason expert discussions organised in a stakeholder workshop were conducted. Stakeholders came from different institutions, including both governmental and non-governmental organisations. The present chapter gives a synthesis of the thoughts debated in this workshop.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.1 Vulnerability and the focus on the child

The two most prominent issues discussed were vulnerable families and child well-being or family well-being from a child's perspective. First of all, the discussions included numerous references to various types of *disadvantaged families*. These are families who face difficulties in everyday life, and who are hindered from fully participating in society. These disadvantaged families are diverse: they may face problems related to poverty, migration, ethnicity (such as that of the Roma), culture or sexual orientation (e.g., same-sex couples). Families living in poverty are disadvantaged because their lack of financial resources may deprive them of fundamental human rights, such as the ability to maintain normal housing conditions or their children's participation in education. Families of migrants can be disadvantaged, especially those who come from a different cultural environment, because they may be socially excluded or have insufficient social contacts. In addition, migrant workers are more susceptible than local workers to losing their job when a firm is downsizing. Members of disadvantaged families have reduced chances of finding a job. Same-sex couples are stigmatised and thus disadvantaged.

The term *vulnerability* allows to subsume all these kinds of families since "being vulnerable" refers to a situation with an increased risk of becoming disadvantaged. For instance, a family in which the adults are unemployed is vulnerable because long-term unemployment can put the family at risk of poverty. Looking at vulnerability is crucial because risks may turn into reality in the future and the number of disadvantaged families may increase. Thus, vulnerability means a potential future disadvantage. Throughout this book and in general discussions, vulnerability often refers to those who are at risk of being disadvantaged as well as those who are already disadvantaged (as current disadvantages may be prolonged in the future).

From a medium- to long-term forward-looking perspective, a crucial problem that vulnerable families face is the *reproduction of vulnerability within families*. This problem refers to the fact that children raised in disadvantaged families as adults often start families of their own that are fighting against their vulnerability.

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<sup>3</sup> This chapter summarises Philipov et al. (2014).

Children living in poor families may be deprived of an adequate education because the parents are unable to provide them with the necessary resources. Because of their family's low income, the children may need to start working earlier in life. Thus, they become accustomed to poverty in their youth, and when they reach the age of young adulthood, they might maintain a style of living that corresponds to a culture of poverty; i.e. their aspirations in life will be influenced by poverty rather than by more conventional modes of living. Families of immigrants who are socially excluded may continue to live in closed social groups. They are likely to have problems integrating into the local society. The reasons for social exclusion might include adherence to traditional customs from the place of origin which are not in alignment with those of the culture of the native population. For example, migrant families may follow the male-breadwinner model, and the women in the family may not invest in continuing education or engage in the labour market. The gender roles associated with these models may be reproduced in the children of such families as well.

In short, poverty frequently reproduces poverty, and social exclusion frequently reproduces social exclusion. This reproduction continues across generations: younger generations who grow up under the restrictions imposed by vulnerability eventually replace their parents' generation. Without external support, these families may be unable to overcome their disadvantages, which may include poverty, social exclusion, or relative deprivation. In the decades to come, such a cycle might undermine policies aimed at reducing poverty and fighting social exclusion. Therefore, in a forward-looking perspective it is important to consider how this vicious cycle can be broken. It may be possible to do so in the medium to long run, and most likely with the change of generations, as the subsequent generation may prefer a set of norms and family relationships that differ from those they grew up with. This explicitly refers to children, their well-being and their future chances.

*Child-related issues* and the position of the child in the family were most frequently mentioned during the workshop. Topics comprised, among others, the relationship between parents and child(ren), childcare, education, child participation, and child protection. For instance, discussants considered living with both parents to be a right of the child. Traditional gender stereotypes frequently favour the mother over the father. Thus, the father's participation in the child's life may be hindered. This is most evident after divorce, when custody arrangements are made. Furthermore, parent-child relationships will become more diverse as new family constellations become more common. This diversification requires flexible policy arrangements.

Flexibility was also essential in discussions about childcare and the existing diversity of care arrangements. Concerns raised in this respect involved the quality of care (and carers), the availability of care incl. flexible scheduling (24-hour-a-day availability) as well as the possibilities of public childcare, neighbourhood-organised care and child-minders. Also related to childrearing and childcare—but maybe less thoroughly recognised in family policy—are issues of education. Education

plays a crucial role in child development. Concerns raised during discussions were similar to those regarding childcare, mentioning the quality of education (incl. those of teachers), access to contemporary methods of education (incl. information technology), and access to schools for children living in remote regions.

Regarding child participation, experts emphasised that the children should be heard themselves. They have their own opinions and preferences that should be respected by parents and also influence decision-making. Finally, child protection includes the relationship between parents and child(ren) but also goes well beyond it. It comprises issues related to domestic violence against children, child abuse and bullying as well as child exploitation. Although these forms of violence are legally regulated and sanctioned in European countries, they nonetheless persist and can lead to appalling physical and moral injustices.

## 1.2 The necessity of the inclusion of all family forms and family mainstreaming

Considering the diversity of potentially vulnerable families, two important aspects with regard to policy development have to be emphasised: the inclusion of all family forms in family policies and the strategy of family mainstreaming.

Experts suggested that policies will be less effective if they focus mainly on a typical family form and thus disregard the broader spectrum of *new family arrangements*. It was expected that new living arrangements such as unmarried cohabitation, single parents and same-sex couples will become more frequent in the future than they are today. Therefore, these families will need more policy support, and appropriate policy adjustments will become increasingly necessary. It was also anticipated that some traditional family-related practices and stereotypes will give way to modern family relationships built on increased gender equality and mutual respect. Such a transition requires special attention. The changing position of the father in the family may raise specific needs for new policy arrangements. Consequently, the impact of existing policies on families has to be analysed. A broad circle of policies impacts on the well-being of the family as a union and of the single individuals building it. It is therefore a topic that has to be mainstreamed across diverse policies. *Family mainstreaming* encompasses the main activities and features of a family, which include caring and support, as well as affiliation with and affection for family members.

In addition, the stakeholders frequently discussed issues of personal autonomy and family relations. Individual personal autonomy is a value that has become widespread among Europeans, and in families it is associated with the transition from a traditional single-breadwinner family model to a more egalitarian division of labour within the family and at work. The experts proposed some ideas that may appear petty, such as the suggestion that couples have two separate bank accounts as well as a joint one. However, it is characteristic of such courses of action for ascertaining equality, like gender mainstreaming, that such minor details can be

crucial in securing the personal autonomy of each family member. In principle, gender mainstreaming and family mainstreaming should be separated from each other. Nevertheless, both have to be considered together sometimes.

### **1.3 New gender roles and the reconciliation of professional and private lives**

Gender roles and work–family reconciliation are topics vividly discussed by scholars and policy-makers. Regarding *new gender roles*, stakeholders noted that females have started a transition which is still underway today. In the future, the men may be the ones to change. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of stressing the role of the father in the family in light of the transition many families are making from a traditional single-breadwinner model to one in which both partners work. Men have to find their place in the home and re-define themselves as fathers. Fathers must develop their own approach to parenting (and they must be permitted to do so by the mothers). The share of men who take paternity leave is increasing. After separation or divorce, fathers are becoming more active, and many fathers remain positively involved in rearing their children, in addition to providing financial support. Nevertheless, up to now mothers still have to fight that fathers do some family work in many societies—especially if the children are young.

The situation of families with small children in which the parents are separated requires specific attention. Traditionally, kids stay with the mother. Often children are deprived of the ability to maintain close contact with their fathers. As a result, many fathers and children suffer from being separated. Fathers may find it difficult to find part-time work, especially if they have higher-level positions in companies and institutions. However, when more fathers become single parents, fathers have to develop more childcare skills, and they may experience work–family conflicts.

The *reconciliation of professional and private lives* is a central issue that is always raised when families are considered in contemporary discussions. The question of work–life reconciliation permeated the vast majority of the debates during the workshop. It is closely connected to the other topics discussed above, in particular to gender and family mainstreaming. We will return to this topic repeatedly.

### **1.4 Six important issues and one key concept**

Summarising the current chapter, the discussions with stakeholders allowed to identify the following particularly important themes: (1) vulnerable families, (2) family well-being from a child-focused perspective, (3) policy inclusion of all family forms, (4) mainstreaming family and gender, (5) new gender roles, and (6) reconciliation of professional and family lives. The importance of these issues to the future development of families in Europe is paramount. Increasing family diversity and more gender-egalitarian partnerships are trends on the rise, and should be included in thoughts about the future development of the family. All these aspects

will again be discussed in the course of this book. Among these central themes there is one, however, that permeates all relevant areas: the concept of *vulnerability*.

Families may be disadvantaged (and thus in vulnerable states) for several reasons. The disadvantage could refer to experiencing economic problems such as material deprivation and/or unemployment but also to a variety of other aspects. For instance, stakeholders also extensively discussed the situation of families from different cultural environments who may experience social exclusion, stigmatisation and/or deprivation of human rights. The increasing diversity of family types may result in new family configurations being at different risks. Vulnerable family configurations mentioned during the workshop included also single-parent families or same-sex couples with children. Successful work–family reconciliation can counterbalance vulnerable situations.

Particular attention was given to children and their well-being. Child well-being is associated to prominent issues like the parent–child relationship or childcare and education of children. In this context, however, the reproduction of vulnerability was again identified to be an especially important issue. Children that live and become socialised in vulnerable families may get accustomed to the problems experienced by the family and accept them as normal in their own lives. The ongoing reproduction of vulnerability within families raises the question of how to break this cycle of reproduction—which was maybe even the main concern from the point of view of policy-makers.

All these issues require policy attention. The topic of vulnerable families, reproduction of vulnerability within the family, and ways towards breaking the cycle of this reproduction will be the main theme of the rest of the present book. The upcoming two chapters will explain vulnerability in more detail and focus on vulnerability in families and particularly vulnerable family types, respectively.

## 2 What is vulnerability and why is it so important for the future of families?

Having identified vulnerability as central issue for the future of families with children, vulnerability shall be explained and explored in more detail. The present chapter discusses mainly insights from the literature but does also refer to research activities conducted in the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1 Vulnerability as a multidimensional concept

In general, vulnerability can be broadly described as “the capacity to be wounded” (Patterson, 2013, p. 1). It implies a certain “lack of resources” or “social weakness” (Hanappi, Bernardi, & Spini, 2015, p. 2). Vulnerability itself is not inevitably connected to manifest consequences but often remains a latent condition until critical events, chronic stress, or pressures from outside reveal the limits of available resources (ibid.). As such it combines “the possibility of a certain harm and a kind of inability to deal with it” (Zimmermann, 2017, p. 1). In the literature, many dimensions of vulnerability have been discussed (cf. Radcliff et al., 2012; Roelen, Long, & Edström, 2012). There are families with children who are at risk of poverty, and families who experience a lack of social support in daily life. Some families suffer from problems related to stress or from health problems. In other families the children experience a negative relationship with their parents (e.g., because of a lacking sense of security, conflicts between the parents, or domestic violence). While psychologists often use the term “vulnerability” in conjecture with stress, depression, and anxiety, demographers or sociologists frequently link it to uncertainty in life, labour market risks and income inequality (cf. Hanappi et al., 2015). The precise meaning varies in accordance with the main focus of the discipline (Zimmermann, 2017).

The term “family vulnerability” can also be understood in different ways. Hansen (1965), for instance, concludes that studies on families under stress define the vulnerable family as one “which lacks ability to influence the action of its members (i.e., lacks ‘behavioural influence’) in such a way that even under stress they remain together and continue to share and satisfy role expectation” (ibid., p. 202). What is meant here is basically “family vulnerability to stress”. Other authors refer to “family vulnerability to alcoholism” (e.g., Petrakis et al., 2004), “family vulnerability to schizophrenia” (e.g., Wahlberg et al., 1997) or “family vulnerability to disability and dependence” (e.g., Amendola et al., 2011). This list is probably endless. There are numerous sources of vulnerability and also as many ways in which people may be (at risk to be) wounded. Some of the concepts mentioned also include inheritance

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<sup>4</sup> This chapter is an extended revision of the corresponding chapter in Riederer et al. (2017). Section 2.1 is based on earlier discussions on definitions of vulnerability first described in Mynarska et al. (2015). Specific analyses were exclusively produced for this book.

of vulnerability. Inheritance may be biological-genetic, genetically mediated or socially transmitted by parents. With regard to both families and the future, child well-being is particularly important. For many authors “childhood vulnerability” refers to poverty (e.g., Chao & Willms, 2000) but the term is defined and used in a variety of ways as well (cf. Cheney, 2010). It can also be linked to ideas of insecurity and dangers in child development, child education, child protection, and children’s rights (Andresen, 2014). As childhood vulnerability is also a multidimensional construct, it should at least refer to material, social, and emotional needs of children (cf. Radcliff et al., 2012). *Material needs* include needs for money, home and shelter to live, health care, education, and food. While *social needs* comprise aspects like mentoring, support, and social networks, the term *emotional needs* primarily covers the needs for care and love (Holand, Lujala, & Ketil, 2011; Lerner & Trivedi, 2013). Serving as a general concept, family vulnerability has to be defined broadly. It should include vulnerability of children as well as several dimensions of vulnerability.

Experts in focus groups discussed different potential sources of *family vulnerability*. They identified seven—at least partly intertwined—aspects. The *first* aspect referred to economic hardship and poverty. It includes insufficient housing and a low living standard. With regard to the future, economic uncertainty and instability were emphasised. At subjective level, the fear about one’s own future is present. The *second* aspect comprised resource problems hindering social participation and other issues of social exclusion, and in particular a lack of social networks resulting in missing support from friends or family. Going beyond the previous one, the *third* aspect includes problems due to stigmatisation and disapproval from the society—reflected in discrimination by institutions and legal regulations in extreme cases. The *fourth* aspect combines time pressure, overwork, being overburdened, and feelings of stress leading to various negative consequences including health problems, depression, and anxiety as well as behavioural and educational problems of children. The *fifth* aspect addresses a lack of family stability and the risk of divorce, focusing on particularly difficult situations for children (traumatic experiences, fighting parents etc.). The *sixth* aspect comprises all kinds of health problems, physical disadvantages, and in particular disabilities. Finally, the *seventh* aspect discussed was violence—often related to abuse of alcohol and other substances. As vulnerability is multidimensional (Roelen et al., 2012), it can also be defined as a complex phenomenon comprising (a) financial problems, (b) social exclusion, (c) a lack of social support from personal networks, (d) stigmatisation, (e) difficulties arising from poor physical or mental health, and (f) being a victim of crime (especially family violence). Though vulnerable families are often confronted with many challenges at the same time—for example, people with disabilities often suffer from financial vulnerability (Batavia & Beaulaurier, 2001), and families lacking financial resources often perceive strong emotional and social pressures, too (Holand et al., 2011)—just one of these aspects is sufficient to describe a family as being vulnerable.

In the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project, we started with an open understanding of family vulnerability. Even if we had to narrow down the definition for specific research activities, we always defined vulnerability as a multidimensional concept. In line with prior research, we summarised the various aspects of vulnerability under four dimensions, viz.: *Economic vulnerability* refers to financial aspects. It covers poverty and economic hardship, e.g., the inability to pay for necessities, a low standard of living and limited access to public services. *Psychological vulnerability* includes strong feelings of stress, anxiety or depression. Such problems for children and families might be attributable to parents who are overburdened because of multiple workloads and conflicts between duties, or to conflicts within families, to child neglect or domestic violence. *Social vulnerability* comprises aspects such as stigmatisation, discrimination, and a lack of social support. These three dimensions cover almost every aspect of vulnerability mentioned in the focus group discussions as well as in the literature. In every step of our research, we included at least these three dimensions. *Physical vulnerability* resulting from health problems or disabilities was partly omitted in the analyses because factors such as future economic or cultural developments in Europe are not assumed to affect it directly. However, it should be noted that physical problems are of high relevance exactly because they often trigger economic, social, and psychological problems (Batavia & Beaulaurier, 2001; Olsson & Hwang, 2003).

## 2.2 Past and present vulnerability of families and children in Europe

Vulnerability is a complex theoretical construct. It is extremely challenging to measure the economic, psychological, and social dimension of vulnerability. International comparisons are usually based on economic vulnerability alone. The European Union uses the concept of “being at risk of poverty or social exclusion” (AROPE) to evaluate vulnerability. This refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty *or* severely materially deprived *or* living in a household with very low work intensity.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, material needs are the key indicator of vulnerability.

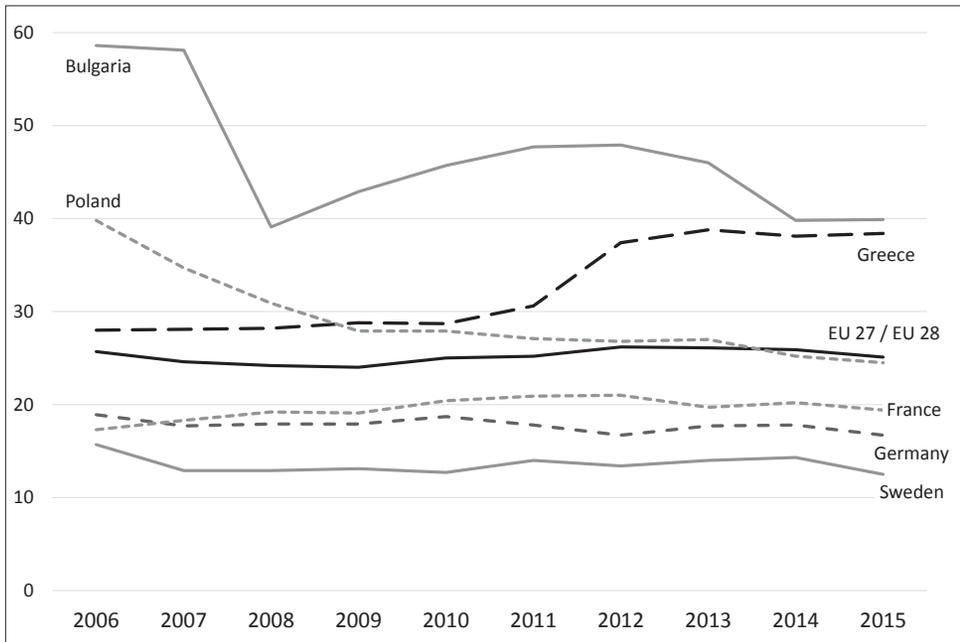
If we look at the aggregate of the populations of EU Member States, one-quarter of them are currently at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2016b). This is approximately the same share of people as ten years ago. Ignoring individual entries into and exits from poverty, the overall share of people being at such risk has thus remained rather constant. The same is true with regard to the target group of the current research, *families with children*. In each year of the period 2005–

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<sup>5</sup> “Social exclusion” in AROPE is *not* equal to the concept of “social vulnerability” defined above. The AROPE concept does not cover all aspects of social exclusion but refers primarily to enforced lacks in terms of resources not allowing full social participation (problems of affordability). For more information see Eurostat (2012).

2015, the share of households with dependent children<sup>6</sup> at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the European Union was between 24 and 26 per cent. Although this rate was stable for the European Union, it changed remarkably in single member states. Figure 1 demonstrates this by presenting the development of households with dependent children at such risks for six selected countries.

**Figure 1: Shares of households with dependent children at risk of poverty or social exclusion (%)**



Source: Eurostat (2016b; data from EU-SILC 2006–2015).

In some countries there was a huge decline over the last decade (in the Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovakia) while in other countries, mostly those affected most by the economic crisis of 2008, shares of families with dependent children at risk increased (in particular in Ireland, Cyprus, Greece, and Malta). Together, a deterioration of the situation of families with children in some of the old Member States of the European Union and improvements in several of the new ones led to a more or less constant aggregate share of households with dependent children who are at risk of poverty or social exclusion between 2005 and 2015. In most countries, risks remained quite stable over time anyway.

<sup>6</sup> The concept of “dependent children” includes all individuals below age 18 and even older individuals until age 24 if they are economically inactive and living with at least one parent.

Another aspect that did not noticeably change over time is the higher risks of children aged 16 or below compared to other age groups (cf. López Vilaplana, 2013). Minors may be exposed to vulnerability most frequently. Within Europe, however, the share of children affected by poverty and exclusion risks varies dramatically across countries. While every second child is at risk in Bulgaria, it is only one in ten in Norway. Low shares of children at risk can also be found in other northern (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) as well as in a number of western European countries like the Netherlands or Switzerland (less than 20 per cent). Poverty and social exclusion among children is much higher in most southern European countries where shares of children at risk lie around 30 per cent—with a remarkable increase in the last decade in Greece from about 25 to almost 40 per cent. In some eastern European countries, about half of children are hit by poverty and exclusion (e.g., in Bulgaria, Macedonia or Romania, cf. Eurostat, 2016b; Eurostat, 2017b).

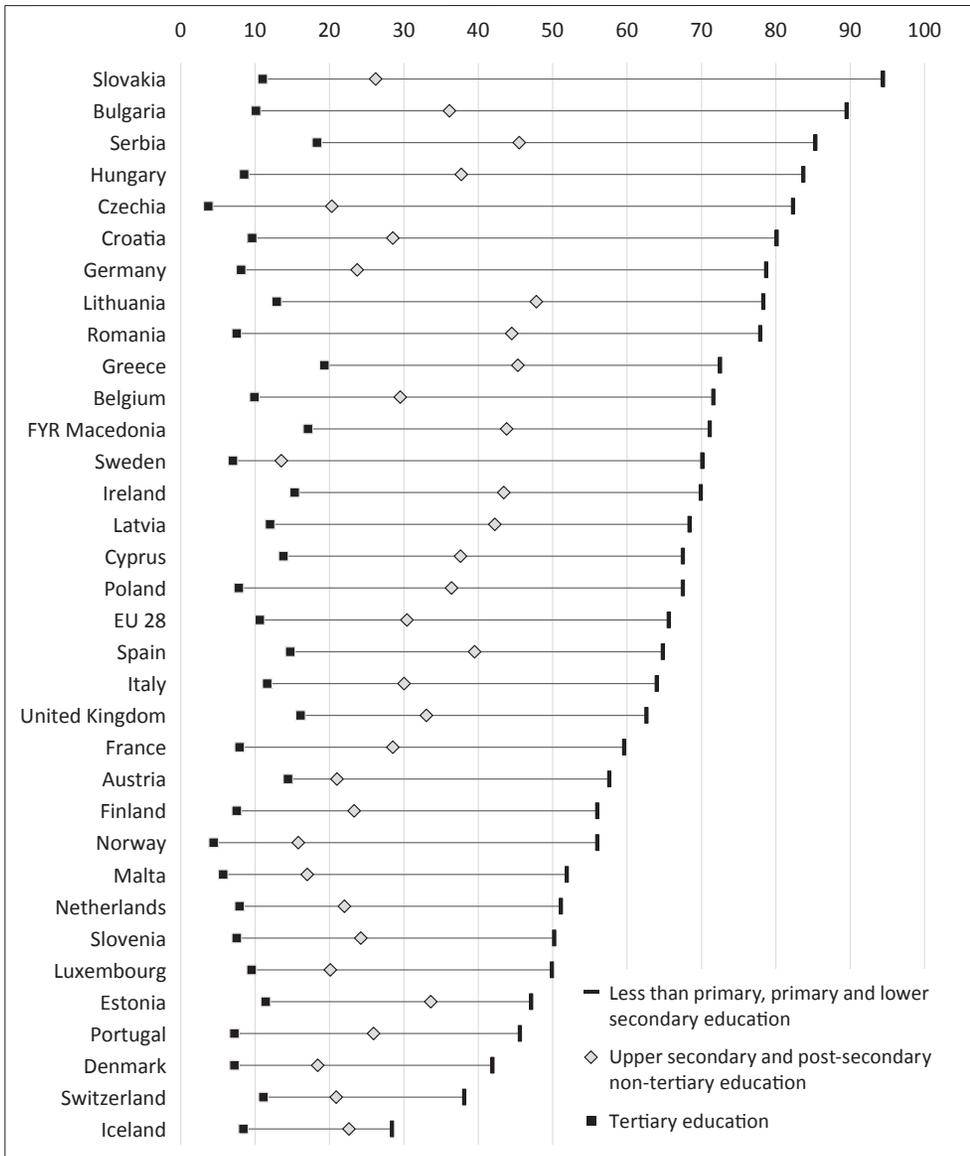
Figure 2 shows the shares of children and young people at risk of poverty or social exclusion all over Europe in 2015. In addition, the figure differentiates by parental education. Highest risks show children of less educated parents in Slovakia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Hungary, Czechia, Croatia, Germany, Lithuania, and Romania. In these countries between 78 and 94 per cent of children from parents with less than upper secondary education are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Lowest risks have those with highly educated parents (tertiary education) in Norway and Czechia (4 per cent), followed by Malta, Sweden, Portugal, Denmark, Germany, France, Poland, Iceland, and Romania (6 to 8 per cent). In all countries, higher parental education reduces risks for children dramatically. The difference in poverty risks is smallest in Iceland where it amounts to 20 percentage points (28 vs. 8 per cent) and largest in Slovakia with 83 percentage points (94 vs. 11 per cent). For the European Union as a whole (EU-28), the share of young people at risk lies between 11 per cent for children of highly educated parents and 66 per cent for those of less educated parents (a difference of 55 percentage points).

So far, we have not discussed other aspects than economic vulnerability. Indeed, international comparisons are often restricted to an analysis of this dimension. Nevertheless, it is possible to get a glimpse of an impression regarding the other dimensions of vulnerability in Europe as well. In recent years, the questionnaires of the *European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions* (EU-SILC) include special modules that are useful to give us an idea. With respect to psychological and social vulnerability, questionnaires on “well-being” (2013) and “social participation” (2006) as well as “social and cultural participation” (2015) seem to be promising.<sup>7</sup> In 2017, there will also be a part on “children’s health”. Table 1 gives an overview over potential indicators for all three dimensions of vulnerability using results obtained with the special module of 2013 indicating psychological and social vulnerability.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information see <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/income-and-living-conditions/data/ad-hoc-modules>.

**Figure 2: Children below 18 at risk of poverty or social exclusion by parental education (%)**



Source: Eurostat (2017b; data from EU-SILC 2015).

**Table 1: Vulnerability of households with dependent children (%)**

| Vulnerability:                         | economic                              |  | psychological                              |                             | social                         |                                 |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Data refer to<br>2013, 2014<br>or 2015 | at risk of<br>poverty or<br>exclusion | unable to face<br>unexpected<br>expenses | meaning of<br>life: life not<br>worthwhile | seldom<br>or never<br>happy | having<br>no one<br>to rely on | low trust<br>in other<br>people |
| <b>Central western Europe</b>          |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Austria                                | 19.1                                  | 25.5                                     | 2.1  | 5.4                         | 2.2                            | 14.2                            |
| Belgium                                | 20.8                                  | 29.8                                     | 4.5  | 4.5                         | 7.1                            | 13.7                            |
| Germany                                | 16.7                                  | 31.9                                     | 5.5  | 9.2                         | 4.2                            | 19.7                            |
| France                                 | 19.4                                  | 39.0                                     | 2.8  | 7.6                         | 6.6                            | 23.6                            |
| Luxembourg                             | 21.2                                  | 24.7                                     | 0.9  | 4.4                         | 15.0                           | 16.9                            |
| Netherlands                            | 15.4                                  | 22.7                                     | 0.6  | 3.2                         | 4.1                            | 2.1                             |
| Switzerland                            | 15.8                                  | 27.2                                     | 1.0  | 4.9                         | 2.8                            | 10.5                            |
| <b>Western Europe</b>                  |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Ireland                                | 27.2                                  | 55.1                                     | 2.4  | 5.7                         | 3.3                            | 12.2                            |
| UK                                     | 27.4                                  | 48.2                                     | 3.0  | 7.8                         | 6.7                            | 15.6                            |
| <b>Northern Europe</b>                 |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Denmark                                | 13.4                                  | 28.3                                     | 1.2  | 7.0                         | 2.3                            | 1.5                             |
| Finland                                | 13.0                                  | 30.6                                     | 0.4  | 2.5                         | 1.6                            | 2.3                             |
| Iceland                                | 12.3                                  | 38.7                                     | 1.0  | 5.3                         | 3.2                            | 4.2                             |
| Norway                                 | 11.4                                  | 14.2                                     | 0.6  | 6.4                         | 3.4                            | 3.2                             |
| Sweden                                 | 12.5                                  | 16.3                                     | 1.9  | 6.0                         | 2.3                            | 4.2                             |
| <b>Southern Europe</b>                 |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Cyprus                                 | 28.4                                  | 62.3                                     | 3.8  | 14.9                        | 5.7                            | 30.9                            |
| Greece                                 | 38.4                                  | 54.4                                     | 5.7  | 35.3                        | 10.7                           | 25.3                            |
| Italy                                  | 31.7                                  | 41.0                                     | 1.9  | 12.6                        | 12.4                           | 11.6                            |
| Malta                                  | 23.9                                  | 23.0                                     | 1.2  | 10.3                        | 3.6                            | 9.2                             |
| Portugal                               | 27.1                                  | 41.3                                     | 2.1  | 13.4                        | 11.5                           | 20.0                            |
| Spain                                  | 32.9                                  | 41.6                                     | 1.5  | 6.7                         | 4.3                            | 9.2                             |
| <b>Central eastern Europe</b>          |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Czechia                                | 15.0                                  | 38.9                                     | 2.8  | 9.5                         | 2.4                            | 15.0                            |
| Hungary                                | 31.1                                  | 77.0                                     | 3.4  | 12.1                        | 2.4                            | 20.2                            |
| Poland                                 | 24.5                                  | 40.1                                     | 2.6  | 8.1                         | 2.7                            | 13.0                            |
| Slovenia                               | 15.5                                  | 40.5                                     | 1.1  | 5.5                         | 2.0                            | 6.2                             |
| Slovakia                               | 20.4                                  | 37.2                                     | 2.4  | 7.2                         | 1.1                            | 12.7                            |
| <b>Baltic Countries</b>                |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Estonia                                | 20.7                                  | 36.3                                     | 1.7  | 11.9                        | 3.0                            | 12.5                            |
| Latvia                                 | 27.8                                  | 59.3                                     | 2.0  | 20.3                        | 8.7                            | 6.1                             |
| Lithuania                              | 27.2                                  | 53.4                                     | 2.8  | 9.7                         | 2.2                            | 10.5                            |
| <b>South eastern Europe</b>            |                                       |  |  |                             |                                |                                 |
| Bulgaria                               | 39.9                                  | 49.1                                     | 10.2                                       | 23.5                        | 4.7                            | 36.1                            |
| Croatia                                | 25.5                                  | 58.3                                     | 5.3  | 9.9                         | 9.4                            | 21.9                            |
| Romania                                | 40.9                                  | 51.1                                     | 3.2  | 23.6                        | 5.4                            | 9.7                             |
| Serbia                                 | 40.2                                  | 43.1                                     | 7.2  | 18.2                        | 12.9                           | 40.5                            |
| EU 28                                  | 25.1                                  | 40.5                                     | 3.1  | 10.2                        | 6.1                            | 14.8                            |

Source: Eurostat (2016b; 2017c; data from EU-SILC 2013–2015).

The first columns of Table 1 present the newest available data on economic vulnerability (2015 for all countries except Switzerland where numbers refer to 2014). The first indicator used is the already discussed share of households with dependent children at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The second one gives the percentage of households that reported their inability to face unexpected expenses. For the majority of countries, the share of potentially vulnerable families is somewhat larger if we define economic vulnerability by the second indicator. Between 11 and 41 per cent of households with dependent children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion while between 14 and 77 per cent cannot afford unexpected expenses. Even in some northern European countries with very low poverty risks like Denmark or Finland, almost one-third of families seem to be unable to face unexpected expenses.

The next two indicators are suggested to measure aspects of psychological vulnerability. The first one gives the share of people (from households with dependent children) that reported not seeing any meaning of life (values between 0 and 3 on a scale from 0 to 10; 0 means that life is not worthwhile at all). The second indicator reports the share of people who have seldom or never been happy during the last four weeks. Such items are also included in well-known and frequently used depression scales (e.g., in the Center of Epistemological Studies Depression Scale, CES-D).

It seems that psychological vulnerability of people living in households with dependent children also varies considerably across Europe. According to the first indicator (meaning of life) between 0.5 and 10 per cent of people living in households with dependent children are at risk of suffering from psychological problems. According to the second indicator (unhappiness) the shares vary between 2.5 and 35 per cent across Europe. Figures for the European Union (EU-28) amount to 3 and 10 per cent, respectively. Psychological vulnerability among families seems to be high in countries like Bulgaria, Greece or Cyprus and very low in countries like Finland, the Netherlands or Luxembourg (see Table 1).

Indicators for social vulnerability of families available in SILC are restricted to measuring lack of social support. Table 1 gives the share of people living in households with dependent children who do not have anyone at all to rely on in case they need some help. In addition, the table gives the share of those that reported low trust in other people (values between 0 and 3 on a scale from 0 to 10; 0 meaning no trust at all). On the one hand, this indicator measures a basic feeling of uncertainty and insecurity in everyday social life. On the other, it may also indicate social cohesion in the respective society. According to these indicators, social vulnerability is extremely low in northern European countries (values between 1.5 and 4.2 per cent) and rather high in some southern and south-eastern European countries. In Serbia, for instance, 12.9 per cent of people living in households with dependent children have no one to rely on and 40.5 per cent do not really trust other people. War experiences may have left their marks here. Figures for the European Union (EU-28) amount to 6.1 and 14.8 per cent, respectively (see Table 1).

Summing up, vulnerability of families seems to be particularly low in some northern (e.g., Norway) and high in some southern and south-eastern European countries (e.g., Bulgaria, Greece). This basic pattern holds with regard to all three dimensions of vulnerability indicating once more that problems in one dimension may often go hand in hand with vulnerability in others. More research using better indicators for psychological and social vulnerability is needed to shed more light on this and related issues.

### **2.3 Vulnerability reproduction and intergenerational mobility**

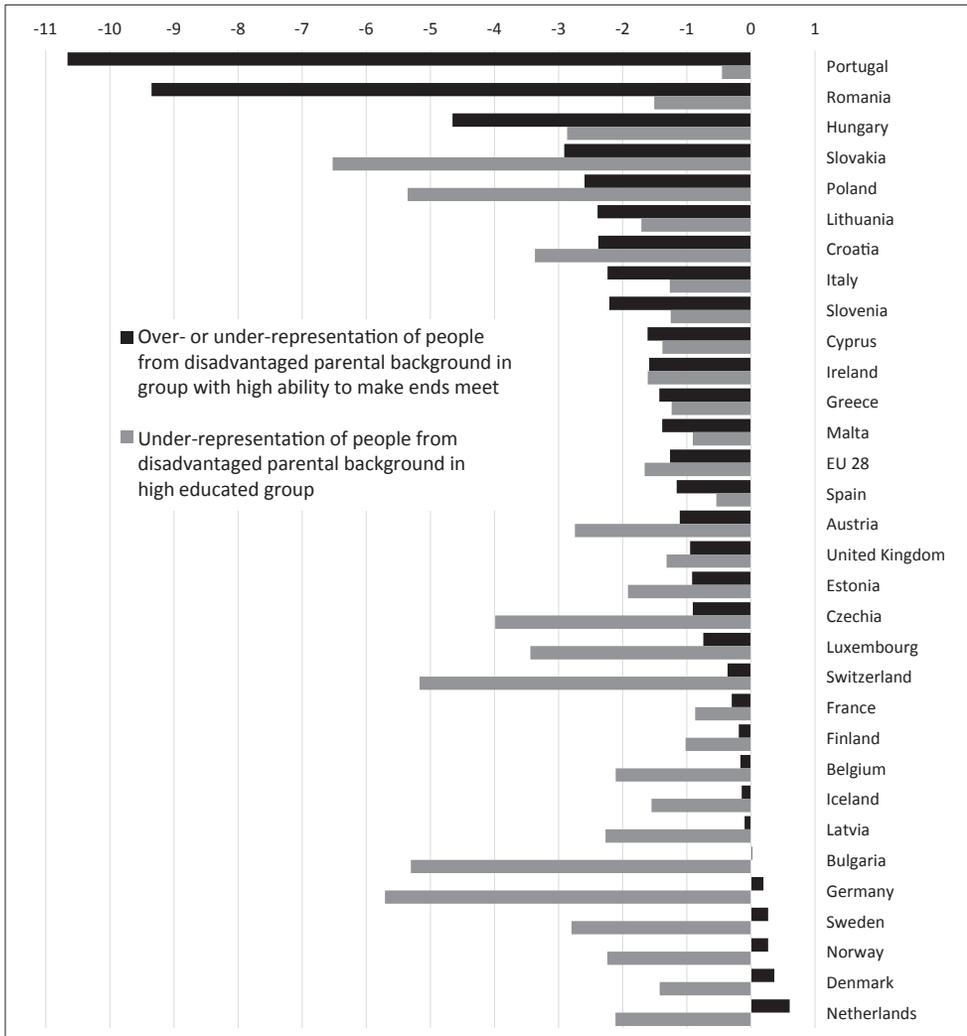
Vulnerability is often passed on from parents to their children. Individuals who grow up in families where members suffer from vulnerability are at risk of starting families of their own that are affected by vulnerability as well. The discourse of intergenerational transmission of vulnerability within families in the literature is highly intertwined with intergenerational transmission of class and education. Using EU-SILC 2011 data on 27 European countries, Bellani and Bia (2016) found that childhood poverty reduced probabilities of completing secondary education and thus has a detrimental effect on income as an adult. Even in their most conservative scenario, growing up poor decreased later income on average by five per cent which in turn lead to a poverty risk that was higher by four percentage points. In general, lower intergenerational mobility is associated with higher inequality (Causa & Johansson, 2010; Corak, 2013).

Because education is so relevant for (economic) vulnerability, the reproduction of educational inequality is an important aspect of intergenerational transmissions. The literature on the development of educational opportunities is inconclusive (cf. Breen & Jonsson, 2005; Shavit, Yaish, & Bar-Haim, 2007). While some authors argue that educational inequality still persists in most countries (e.g., Pfeffer, 2008; Shavit & Blossfeld, 1993), others find a decline for the differences in educational opportunities (e.g., Ballarino et al., 2009; Breen et al., 2009; Esping-Andersen & Wagner, 2012). The chances of children from working-class households attaining a high-school diploma or a university degree have improved in western societies in recent decades, but not as strongly as might have been expected (Müller & Kogan, 2010). The most convincing explanation may be the following: education has become affordable for more and more people thanks to lower fees and the extended provision of scholarships. With better educated populations and technological development, however, societal standards have also changed. Inequality is reproduced at other educational levels nowadays than in the past. The declining of educational inequalities at lower levels has not avoided distinction at higher levels (Shavit et al., 2007; Esping-Andersen & Wagner, 2012; Blossfeld, Blossfeld, & Blossfeld, 2015). In the past, especially Nordic countries showed high levels of intergenerational mobility (Corak, 2013). By contrast, southern European countries appeared to be rather immobile (Causa & Johansson, 2010).

In 2012, in European countries between 39 (Finland) and 71 (Czechia) per cent of non-students aged 35 to 44 years and between 44 (Ireland) and 71 (Czechia) per cent of non-students aged 25 to 34 years completed an educational level equivalent to that of their parents. The share of people showing upward mobility, meaning that the educational attainment of children was higher than that of their parents, varied between 54 (Finland) and 18 (Czechia) per cent for non-students aged 35 to 44 years and between 45 (Ireland) and 17 (Czechia) per cent for non-students aged 25 to 34 years (data from PIAAC 2012 as presented in OECD, 2015a, p. 86). These numbers demonstrate rather huge differences in educational mobility across European countries. With regard to (economic) vulnerability, however, intergenerational immobility in education is less problematic in countries with highly educated populations than in those with less educated populations. In Finland (90 per cent), Ireland (86 and 90 per cent), and Czechia (96 and 95 per cent) the shares of adults within these age ranges who completed at least upper secondary education are rather high. Especially in southern Europe, the percentage of adults within these two age groups who completed upper secondary or tertiary education is comparatively low. In both Italy and Spain, for instance, only 65 per cent of 35 to 44 year old non-students have completed at least upper secondary education. Their upward mobility (36 and 45 per cent), however, is relatively high.

The EU-SILC questionnaire included a special module on “intergenerational transmission of disadvantages” in 2011. Figure 3 uses this information to give a further glimpse on vulnerability reproduction in Europe from a comparative perspective. This time, two indicators are used for this endeavour. The first one is the “ability to make ends meet”. People indicated whether their household can make ends meet with great difficulties, with some difficulties, with difficulties, fairly easily, easily or very easily. The same question was asked with regard to the household of their parents at the time respondents were around 14 years old. The second indicator is one’s own and parental education (low, medium, high; same categories as in Figure 2). All analyses are restricted to people being between 25 and 59 years old at the time of the interview who were living in households with dependent children. Black bars in Figure 3 indicate the degree of inequality in financial ability (to make ends meet). It is highest in Portugal where the shares of those with parents with financial difficulties amounts to 58 per cent in household with (some or great) financial difficulties but only to 5 per cent in households with high ability to make ends meet (easily or very easily). In case of equal capabilities and equal chances, there would be no difference between the two shares and the ratio given in Figure 3 would be zero. The high negative number presented in the figure, however, indicates that children from disadvantaged households are under-represented in households with high financial ability. Grey bars in Figure 3 indicate the degree of inequality in education that is rather low in Portugal as the share of children from less educated parents amounts to 98 per cent of less educated but also to 67 per cent of highly educated people.

**Figure 3: Intergenerational mobility and equality in financial ability and education**



**Note:** Regarding the ability to make ends meet we focus on people whose parents had great or some difficulties to make ends meet when they were 14 years old. Group SQ comprises those who have great or some difficulties themselves (no mobility, status quo). Group UM comprises those who can make their ends meet easily or very easily (upward mobility). Regarding education we refer to people with parents of low educational status (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education). Group SQ comprises less educated people (no mobility, status quo). Group UM comprises those with tertiary education (upward mobility). The relative ratios shown are computed as follows: the difference between the shares of group SQ minus the shares of group UM is divided through the share of group UM. Negative coefficients demonstrate to what extent people with disadvantaged background (parents) are underrepresented in advantaged groups (highly educated or those without financial difficulties, respectively). For instance, in the European Union as a whole (EU-28), 86.4 per cent of people with less education had parents with low education (no mobility, status quo). On the other hand, 32.5 per cent of highly educated people had parents with low education (upward mobility). In case of total equality both shares should be the same. The resulting ratio  $(32.5-86.4)/32.5 = -1.7$ .

**Source:** Eurostat (2017a; data from EU-SILC 2011).

In Figure 3, we can identify at least four groups of countries. The first one comprising only Portugal and Romania is the smallest one. These are countries characterised by high inequality transmission with regard to financial ability but low inequality transmission regarding education. The second group including Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, and Croatia is characterised by above-average levels of inequality transmission in both, financial ability and education. The third group with medium levels of inequality transmissions comprises countries like Italy, Slovenia, Ireland, Spain, and Greece. Finally, there is a large group of countries with low levels of inequality transmission in ability to make ends meet and higher levels of inequality transmission in education. This group consists of central European countries that are often characterised by highly stratified school systems (cf. Riederer & Verwiebe, 2015) and high levels of inequality in wealth (but not income) as well as northern European countries with very high shares of tertiary educated populations.

The usual way of presenting social mobility is showing the share of people who experienced it. The indicators published by Eurostat (2017a) or the OECD (2015a) follow exactly this procedure. This share, however, is highly dependent on the share of disadvantaged parents in a society and can thus be misleading. To reveal the influence of parental status on the later success of their children and to be able to compare two countries with two totally different starting points, it is necessary to compare the educational success or economic ability of children from disadvantaged households with those from advantaged parental households. Whelan, Nolan, and Maître (2013), analysing data from EU-SILC 2005, demonstrated such effects of parental background on the economic vulnerability of adult children. In all ten European countries under study except Denmark, children of parents in elementary occupations were characterised by higher risks of economic vulnerability than children of parents with highly skilled non-manual occupations. In addition, adults who had experienced bad economic circumstances in their family of origin as teenagers were at higher risks of economic vulnerability in all countries considered. For instance, 7 (11) per cent of those reporting good childhood economic circumstances but 15 (38) per cent of those reporting bad childhood economic circumstances suffered from economic vulnerability in Denmark (Ireland) in 2005 (Whelan et al., 2013).

Another important aspect of the discourse on intergenerational transmission of vulnerability within families are effects of the family of origin on one's own parenthood (including also the intergenerational transmission of divorce). McLanahan and Percheski (2008) argue that family structure affects parental resources that in turn influence the quality of parenting and thus child outcomes. For instance, divorce might be intertwined with educational attainment and poverty as children living in single-parent families seem to be disadvantaged in several ways: they show more behavioural and psychological problems, lower educational attainment, lower economic status as young adults and more often unstable relationships and problems with family formation (see Bernardi & Radl, 2014; Bernardi, Härkönen,

& Boertien, 2013; Härkönen, 2014; McLanahan, 1985; 2009). Emotional or psychological vulnerability might thus lead to economic vulnerability and further emotional/psychological vulnerability. Research has clearly demonstrated that instability of relationships seems to be passed on: the experience of parental divorce promotes dissolution of one's own partnership in the future (e.g., Amato, 1996; Gähler & Härkönen, 2014). As a result vulnerability in several dimensions reproduces vulnerability in several dimensions in the next generation.

## **2.4 Vulnerability matters**

Although the Europe 2020 target on poverty and social exclusion states that at least 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty and social exclusion, the absolute number of EU citizens living in vulnerable circumstances has increased by approximately 5 million since 2008. Advances in the reduction of vulnerability remain small (cf. Eurofound, 2015). Especially the high rates of child poverty are a persistent challenge for European social politics. Another uncompleted mission concerns the intergenerational reproduction of vulnerability. As long as disadvantages are transmitted from parents to their children, the fight against vulnerability cannot be won and the fairy tale of equal opportunities for everyone remains an illusion. Vulnerability matters for the future of children, families, and European societies.

Putting all discussed findings together, results on past and present vulnerability reflect historical developments. In many eastern European countries, levels of vulnerability of families are still high although their situation has improved during the last decades. Substantial economic and social changes after the fall of the Iron Curtain have left their marks on these societies and social inequality within them (Förster, Jesuit, & Smeeding, 2003). Furthermore, economic vulnerability has been increasing in some countries suffering directly from the economic crisis due to rising unemployment or fiscal austerity (cf. Rissi, 2015; Whelan & Maître, 2014; Whelan, Russell, & Maître, 2015). In most EU Member States, economic vulnerability of families has remained rather constant during the last decade. Higher levels of economic vulnerability often go hand in hand with higher levels of psychological and social vulnerability. However, more and better data are needed to be enabled to measure and discuss the development of these dimensions of vulnerability. The same is true for vulnerability reproduction.

### **3 Which family types are and will be particularly in danger of living in vulnerable situations?**

As vulnerability of families with children is the main topic of the present book, this chapter tries to identify those family types that are most vulnerable at present and will probably also be most vulnerable in the future. Therefore, it mainly exploits findings of the focus groups but also makes use of results from a literature review, the stakeholder workshop, and the family questionnaire.<sup>8</sup>

#### **3.1 Present and future vulnerability of families – an overview**

Family configuration, i.e., the size and composition of a family, also affects the risk of vulnerability (e.g., Andriopoulou & Tsakoglou, 2011; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005; Vandecasteele, 2011). First of all, family size greatly influences the risk of poverty (Avramov, 2002; Radcliff et al., 2012). The higher the number of children, the higher is usually the financial burden of the household, and thus the need for both parents to engage in paid work. At the same time, however, more children require more time for care which may lead to the need for one parent—usually the mother—to dedicate more of her time and energy to childcare and to reduce or even give up her paid working time. With reduced income or even only one earner, financial problems can easily arise. Thus, households with three or more children have a higher risk of deprivation (e.g., Finnie & Sweetman, 2003; Fusco, Guio, & Marlier, 2010; Riederer & Wolfsbauer, 2011). Since a large number of children does not only result in higher pressure on income but also in higher pressure on time and opportunity, these families are more often exposed to multiple deprivation than the average two-parent family. A higher number of children raises the level of stress experienced by parents. Heads of large families show lower satisfaction with living conditions (Avramov, 2002).

However, the situation is often even more problematic for single parents (Graaf-Zijl & Nolan 2011, p. 29). Separation from a partner is one of the main life events leading to poverty, and thus to economic vulnerability (Callens & Croux, 2009; Vandecasteele, 2011; 2015). One-parent families are more often economically inactive, face higher risks, are more dependent on public support and are less satisfied with their living conditions than other household types (Avramov, 2002). In Europe, the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion mounts to almost 50 per cent among solo parents with dependent children (López Vilaplana, 2013). This household composition can be a major factor for low work intensity and in-work poverty in the absence of adequate support services, especially for solo mothers who are susceptible to negative income effects of divorce (Vandecasteele,

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<sup>8</sup> This chapter combines content from Mynarska et al. (2015), Riederer et al. (2017), and Philipov et al. (2014).

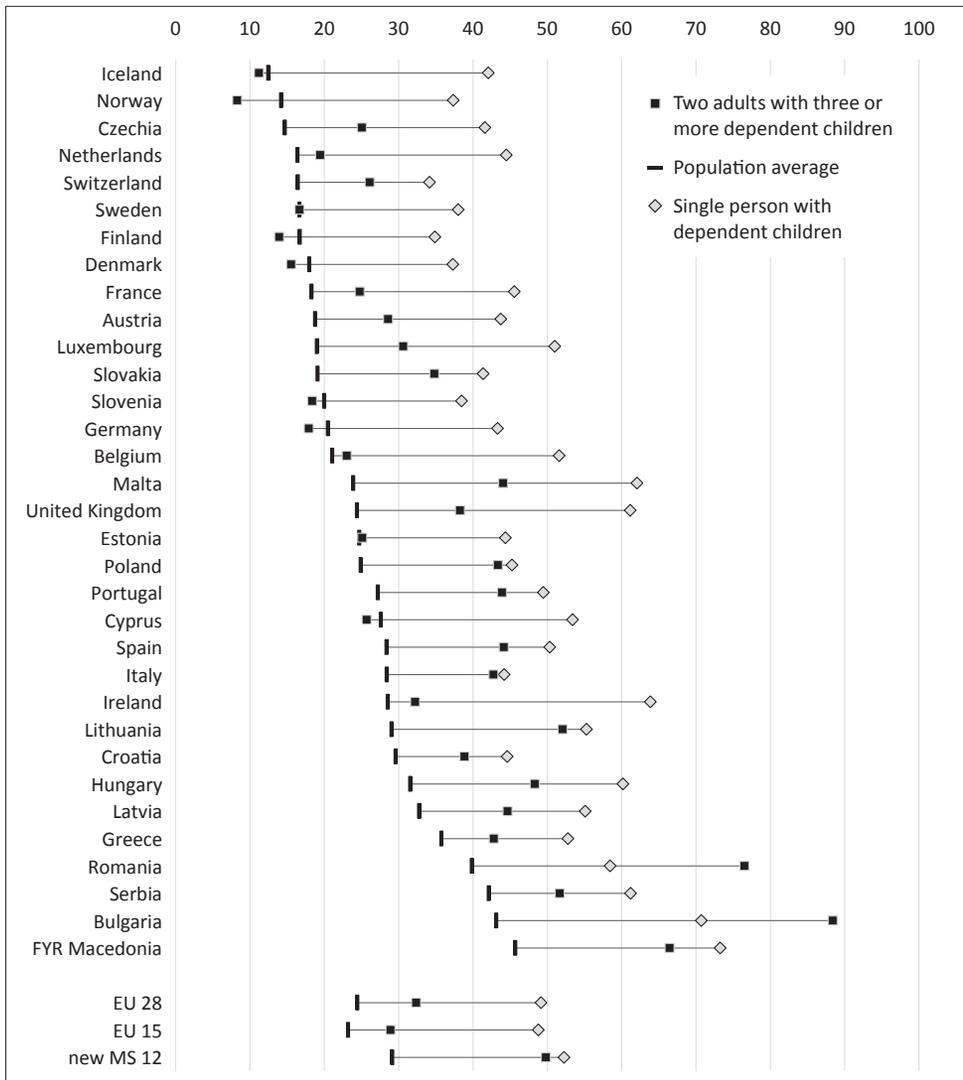
2011, p. 248). While two-parent families pool their income and have an opportunity to share various responsibilities and burdens, a single parent has to cope with all difficulties alone (Fusco et al., 2010; Holand et al., 2011). As solo parenthood is most commonly related to the parents having separated, it has to be noted additionally that parental conflict and family disruptions trigger also social and psychological vulnerability of parents and children (Gilman et al., 2003; Prevoo & ter Weel, 2014; Riggio, 2004). The situation of both, single-parent families and large families with three or more dependent children has even deteriorated during the recent economic crisis (Eurofound, 2015).

Figure 4 uses latest available EU-SILC data to demonstrate economic vulnerability of single-parent families and large families with three or more children. Across Europe, single-parent households clearly are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than the average population. In most countries, they are also at higher risks than large families. Only in Romania and Bulgaria large families are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than solo parents. (This might be related to sizeable Gipsy communities in these countries and their social vulnerability.) Interestingly, poverty risks are not above average for large families in Nordic countries (Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark), Slovenia, Germany, and Cyprus. Experts participating in our focus group in Stockholm argued that the Swedish welfare state offers strong support and that large families in Sweden are increasingly realised by parents who can afford raising a high number of children.

Besides the size and the composition of the household, specific family characteristics can also influence the risk of vulnerability. Ethnic minorities and immigrant families suffering from a lack of (language) skills or labour market discrimination are frequently mentioned in this respect (e.g., IOM, 2015; Juang & Alvarez, 2010). Moreover, families with disabled family members are considered vulnerable (e.g., Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). Research shows that bad health and disability trigger the risk of entering poverty (e.g., Fusco et al., 2010; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005). Families with disabled individuals might also suffer from more strained emotional relationships due to the demands of care (Olsson & Hwang, 2003). Finally, same-sex couples with children are also mentioned as a vulnerable family type, albeit because of social exclusion or stigmatisation rather than economic hardship (Goldberg & Smith, 2011).

Experts participating in the stakeholder workshop and discussants in focus groups mentioned all these family types. In the following, we will exploit their conversations to discuss vulnerability of these families in more detail. Results from the family questionnaire will furthermore shed some light on the situation of large families, their needs and sorrows.

**Figure 4: Shares of different household types at risk of poverty or social exclusion in Europe (%)**



**Note:** The rate shown is the average rate across the three years from 2013 to 2015 (2013–2014 only if data for 2015 not available).

**Source:** Eurostat (2016b; data from EU-SILC 2013–2015).

### **3.2 The multidimensional vulnerability of single-parent families**

In the discussions with experts, single parenthood was the family constellation most unanimously seen as vulnerable, combining many aspects of vulnerability: economic hardship, difficulties combining work and childcare, being overburdened by childcare responsibilities, stress and negative consequences for health, stigmatisation, social exclusion due to a lack of social network, a lack of emotional support of a partner, and a lack of support in case of various life events (e.g., illness).

The first issue is the economic dimension: there is only one provider, who alone has to combine paid work and family tasks. As he or she is the only one to care for the child (children), it is not possible to work long hours, work intensity needs to be limited or one may end up in “precarious jobs”. In extreme cases, a single parent might have to leave the labour market altogether. Consequently, they would no longer be able to meet the financial needs of their family. In most cases, the single parent is female. For women, there is a twofold effect of material hardship. First, the gender pay gap suggests that women tend to earn less than men. As a single mother may have even less earning capacities than other women, her assets may be limited, which could negatively affect her family’s living arrangements. The responsibility for raising children alone creates significant barriers to higher-wage employment. Meanwhile, noncustodial fathers often make lower contributions in both money and time to the well-being of their children than they would if they lived with their children.

Experts in focus groups perceived raising a child being much more demanding and stress-related for single parents compared to the two-parents setting. As solo parents need to combine work and childcare on their own, they feel overburdened and pressured, being solely responsible for creating a proper environment for their children. The informants noted that solo parents are likely to cut back on their leisure time, social life, or even sleep to fulfil their responsibilities towards their children. Consequently, they may feel socially excluded due to a lack of time for socialising and network building. Moreover, the issue of stigmatisation was mentioned in Spain, where—as the informants noted—single motherhood is still not fully approved in some areas.

The situation of single parents carries, of course, all possible risks related to raising children: a child may get ill, may develop some serious health problem, might experience problems at school, etc. All those problems are much more severe for solo parents because of the limited resources they have. A difficult situation might become dramatic for a single parent. For instance, the informants repeatedly remarked that solo parenthood is especially challenging if a child is ill or disabled. A single parent is facing tremendous difficulties then: he or she is not being able to work, without sufficient income, required to stay at home most of the time to look after a child and lacking partner’s practical and emotional support. Such “combined

vulnerability” is particularly challenging and puts a family in an extremely difficult position.

### 3.3 Large families: many children=many challenges

Large families were also often mentioned in focus group discussions. Experts usually agreed that having many children might expose a family to vulnerability.<sup>9</sup> The informants discussed several dimensions of vulnerability that large families are exposed to (the need for sufficient housing, accumulation of breaks in employment for mothers, stigmatisation), but economic demands were central.

First, with a larger number of children also the costs of living are higher. This is not only an issue of food and clothing or other daily products but just as much of having sufficient living space and being able to cover the costs of education for a larger number of children. Financial consequences are linked to the mother’s labour market situation and retirement funds. With more children, a woman usually stays out of the labour market for a prolonged time. In some cases she might need to become a stay-at-home mother entirely, as with a larger number of children the costs of childcare are too high. The loss of a second earner has a negative impact on the financial situation of the family. It also impairs the mother’s situation: having been outside the labour market for a longer period, she might face difficulties in returning to paid work, apart from the prospect of low pension at retirement.<sup>10</sup>

Second, large families are sometimes confronted with stigmatisation, families with many children often being portrayed as “social welfare scroungers”. Some poor families with many children might actually avoid asking for financial support because they fear that social workers would consider them as irresponsible parents who are not able to fulfil their parental roles. Consequently, their children might be taken away from them and put into foster homes or put up with foster parents. Finally, the topic of “combined vulnerability” is also an issue for large families. Some traumatic life event might be particularly difficult when there are many children in the family. In this case, there is not one child suffering but many children.

Analysing the subsample of parents participating in the family questionnaire who have at least three children, we could assess the situation of large families living in Portugal, Spain and Germany. In general, parents from large families clearly articulated room for improvement: only 17 per cent of Spanish parents, 31 per cent of Portuguese parents and 35 per cent of German parents agreed that their country was child-friendly. In Spain, almost 90 per cent of parents from large families disagreed that parents were able to adjust their working hours to meet family

<sup>9</sup> Experts in Sweden constituted an exception here as they noted that in Sweden having many children is more common among wealthy families who can afford it. Indeed, large families do not show higher rates of poverty or social exclusion than the average population in Nordic countries (see Figure 4).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, women who leave the labour market to take care of their children might face problems at retirement age in any family constellation and also in case of separation from the partner.

needs. The same holds for comparable 82 per cent in Portugal. Even in Germany, the share of parents disagreeing with this amounted to 58 per cent. A significant part of respondents reported not having enough time for their children (34 per cent in Portugal, 29 in Spain, 19 in Germany). Feeling a shortage of time for children was highly relevant for worries perceived by parents. Furthermore, the majority of parents agreed that their family life too often interfered with other areas of life (professional work, friends, sports, cultural activities etc.)—in particular in Portugal (78 per cent) and Spain (71 per cent), but also in Germany (55 per cent). In addition, parents of large families in all three observed countries found it very expensive to raise children.

### 3.4 Orphans, families with dependent members, and other risk groups

In the focus group discussions, *orphans* and adoptive or *foster families* were also mentioned as particularly vulnerable. Even though children with no biological parents (or with parents deprived of their parental rights) constitute a relatively small group, they are in a very difficult, particularly demanding situation. Their vulnerability may primarily refer to psychological and social aspects. Foster parents may not always be suitable for taking care of children. In addition, the situation of minor refugees coming to a foreign country without parents may be extremely vulnerable.

Rather specific family types are those resulting from divorce or *separation and the respective consequences*. Single parenthood is only one family type resulting from breaking up with one's partner. There are also other family configurations that result from separation/divorce: it brings the topics of shared (physical) custody and "patchwork" families. These families also face difficulties with childcare arrangements as the needs of different actors (ex-partners, current partners, children from other relationships) have to be coordinated. Families on the verge of divorce are also vulnerable and require additional attention with respect to the children. Children are faced with traumatic experiences, witnessing their parents' problems and fights, and they are usually left alone with their fears and worries.

The situation of *immigrants* was generally discussed with different intensity and with different connotations in different countries, clearly reflecting differences in migration patterns between them. Experts, however, noted that, for instance, single parents or large families of migrant origin might be in a particularly difficult situation, mostly because of problems in finding jobs (especially when poorly educated), having lower income and due to lack of social network. The issue of problems related to local language was also mentioned in the context of raising children (e.g., not being able to help children with school homework). Some experts furthermore emphasised the difficult situation of children whose parents are illegal immigrants ("sans-papiers"; i.e., they do not have a residence permit). It is important to

note that even if immigrant families (and certain ethnic and culturally defined sub-groups) are not poor, families who differ culturally from the local population are often not fully accepted, and they can even be segregated in ways that make it difficult for them to find a job or access housing.

Different forms of *dependency* in the family are also very important factors increasing vulnerability, as experts noted. These refer to situations when a family member is disabled or chronically ill, when there is an elderly person in need of care, but also to extreme cases of families with an alcoholic or a drug addict. Nonetheless, disability—especially a child’s disability—was central for experts. It was frequently named as a factor which further increases duties and stress for parents and thus vulnerability for those families already being in a difficult situation (single-parent families, large families etc.). Parents who raise a disabled child on their own might not be able to enter the labour market at all, becoming fully dependent on alimonies or social assistance in worst case.

Finally, there were two family types rarely mentioned spontaneously by experts in focus groups that were mostly discussed in reaction to moderator’s question: non-married *cohabiting parents* and *same-sex families*. In general, cohabitation was not an issue. Nonetheless, some aspects related to legal regulations as well as social stigmatisation might still pose a challenge in specific cases—for instance, if a mother dies before the fatherhood was legally established. The situation of same-sex families was perceived as vulnerable in terms of social stigmatisation. This stigmatisation might affect parents, but also children raised by same-sex parents are at risk of being bullied at school. Some experts also admitted that same-sex couples have to cope with legislative limitations, mostly with respect to parental rights and adoption. But gay and lesbian couples also have to deal with family rejection and may have less support from their own relatives, neighbours and friends.

### **3.5 Families in situations making them vulnerable: work–family reconciliation as central problem**

In focus groups, experts’ opinions reflected issues known from the scientific literature to a large extent. They discussed various aspects and dimensions of vulnerability (economic hardship, social exclusion, stigmatisation, lack of stability, etc.). Indeed, vulnerability can be understood in different ways. As a multidimensional construct, the term refers to economic, psychological, social and physical (health) outcomes. Being vulnerable thus means to be at risk due to a lack of resources that does not allow to deal with one (or more) specific problem(s). As many different kinds of problems may trigger vulnerability, families and family types who suffer from it include a broad variety of families ranging from single-parent families to families with dependent family members and from large families to same-sex couples with children.

Discussing vulnerability of families, a very important point has to be made explicit. Some of our experts argued that *no* family configuration causes vulnerability

inevitably. There are no “vulnerable families” per se. The term *families in situations in which they are vulnerable* would probably be more adequate. In addition, vulnerability may often rather be a temporary phenomenon and not a persistent state—as some demands of parenting decrease when children grow older or if a better (paid) job or sources of support are found. Nevertheless, there was a general consensus that some family types are more “at risk” of being vulnerable. In line with the existing literature (e.g., Avramov, 2002) and available statistics (see Figure 4), experts mentioned in particular solo parents and large families. Across Europe, single-parent households clearly are more at risk of poverty or social exclusion than the average population. In many (though not all) countries, this is also true for large families with three or more children.

In debates about families and family types, experts presented different reasons for which families might need more attention and support. Overall, however, the ability to combine family life with paid employment was identified to be decisive for family well-being. Problems with reconciling work and family and a heavier burden of parents in different life situations were repeatedly mentioned as central for vulnerability in (almost) all family types. Work–family reconciliation covers economic, social as well as emotional dimensions. The inability to reconcile the two spheres of life is likely to lead to serious economic problems. Parents can get trapped in precarious jobs or they may feel forced to limit their working hours which, in turn, substantially reduces their income. In extreme cases, they might need to leave the labour market altogether. Consequently, they would no longer be able to meet the financial needs of their family. Being out of the labour market can also reduce the social contacts parents have, limiting their social embeddedness. Facing substantial difficulties regarding the reconciliation of work and family, parents might also choose to greatly reduce quality time with their offspring for the sake of economic safety but this may have a negative impact on the relations with their children and on the children’s emotional well-being. Finally, problems with the reconciliation of work and family life are also related to time pressure and high stress levels. Indeed, the link between paid work and family life was central throughout the discussions with the experts. Vulnerable families with children seem to be those families in which parent(s) cannot adequately combine both central areas of life.



## Part II: The future of vulnerability of families with children

The second part of this book focuses on the *future* of vulnerability of families with children. It covers three questions:

*How will vulnerability of families with children develop in the future in Europe?*

In an expert survey, we collected 203 assessments of future vulnerability development. The survey distinguished between economic vulnerability (referring to financial aspects and poverty risks), psychological vulnerability (summarising feelings of stress, anxiety, or depression) and social vulnerability (comprising stigmatisation, discrimination and a lack of social support). For all three dimensions experts predicted increases in the near and far future. The most pessimistic predictions were those regarding psychological vulnerability. Eight out of ten experts thought that the share of families whose members suffer from psychological vulnerability would increase in the next five years (2015–2020). Three-quarters of respondents expect the extent of psychological vulnerability to grow further between 2020 and 2050.

*Which factors might drive the future of families with children and their well-being?*

Both the expert questionnaire and the family questionnaire asked for opinions on the relevance of a list of factors whose selection was based on the focus group results. Summing up, parents responding to the family questionnaire thought, on average, that changes in family policies and in the reconciliation of family life and professional work would be most important for the future well-being of families. For participating experts, on the other hand, economic development was most relevant. This assessment of experts, however, does not primarily refer to GDP growth but to (un)employment and inequality in earnings. While the economic development and changes in family policy were both linked to all three dimensions of vulnerability for the experts, other forces such as the development of work–family reconciliation and changes in gender roles were perceived to be relevant to two or one dimensions only.

*What policies will be relevant to stop intergenerational vulnerability reproduction?*

We are just starting to appreciate which policy interventions will most effectively prevent the bestowal of parents' vulnerability on their children. Education, parental leave, and direct support for families are all meant to be helpful but their effect on the reproduction of vulnerability is by no means clear. Participants in focus groups strongly emphasised the importance of education. Education, however, was broadly defined and also included education and advice for children, parents and other important societal actors, in particular employers. For the experts in our questionnaire study, the following four policy measures were of outstanding relevance: (1) providing flexible, affordable childcare options for preschool children, (2) organising assistance for children with special needs, (3) making employers aware that it makes sense to care for the work–life balance of their employees and (4) providing education for all children already at an early age. In line with the experts, parents also emphasised the necessity of “making employers aware that it makes sense to care for the work–life balance of their employees” and “assistance for children with special needs”.

## 4 How will vulnerability of families with children develop in the future?

The present chapter offers the average estimates of experts regarding the future development of vulnerability of families with children in Europe. The data used were collected in the *FamiliesAndSocieties* expert questionnaire, an online survey that was conducted solely for this purpose. Experts' estimates of future vulnerability development were done for single countries. Nevertheless, they are shown aggregated for Europe in total, by European region and by type of expert (practitioners vs. scientists).<sup>11</sup>

### 4.1 Economic, psychological, and social vulnerability of families in Europe until 2050

Figure 5 displays the estimates of the experts regarding the future development of the shares of vulnerable families with children. The results are shown separately for the three distinguished dimensions of vulnerability. Respondents could state whether they expected the share of vulnerable families to strongly decrease, moderately decrease, slightly decrease, stay roughly the same, slightly increase, moderately increase, or strongly increase between 2015 and 2020 and between 2020 and 2050, respectively. In general, the results must be characterised as rather pessimistic: while all three options to express increasing shares were used (two of them frequently), not a single expert assumed that vulnerability was going to strongly decrease. Even expectations of moderate decreases were rarely reported. Altogether, it seems that experts see vulnerability on the rise.

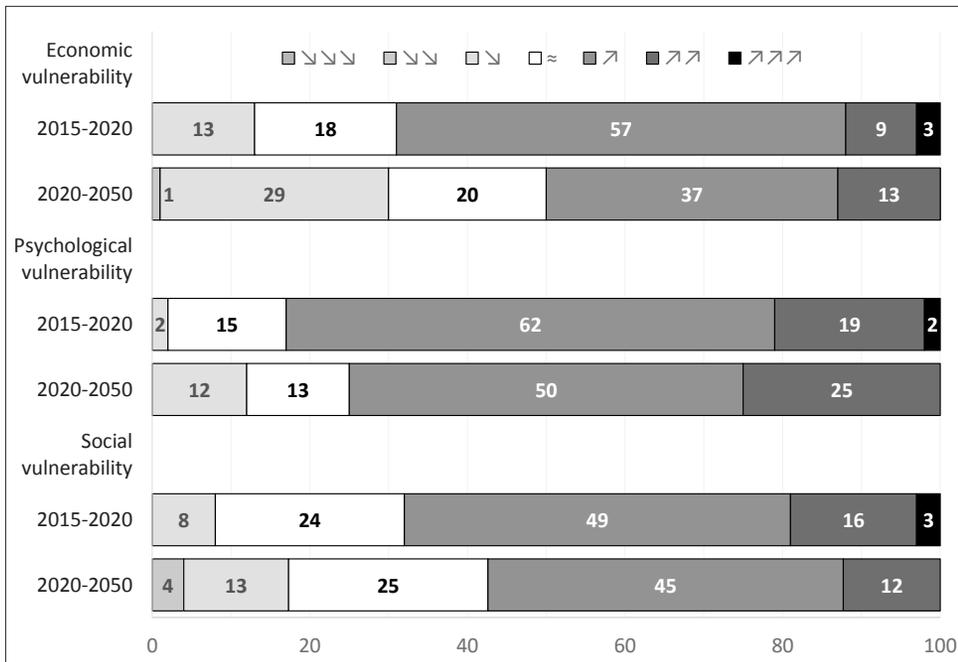
More than two-thirds of the experts predicted *economic vulnerability* to increase in the next few years and about half of them stated that the share of families affected by economic vulnerability would further increase in the period from 2020 to 2050. Participants expecting the share of families hit by economic vulnerability to decline within the next few years were the minority. Only 13 per cent reported that economic vulnerability—in their opinion—would decrease until 2020. At least 30 per cent, however, stated that it might do so afterwards.

Even more pessimistic are predictions regarding *psychological vulnerability*. Eight out of ten experts thought that the share of families whose members suffer from psychological vulnerability was to increase during the next five years. Three-quarters expected the affectedness of families by psychological vulnerability to grow after 2020. Only two per cent of the experts estimated that psychological vulnerability would decline until 2020. At least twelve per cent predict a shrinking share of families affected by psychological vulnerability between 2020 and 2050.

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<sup>11</sup> For details—including a list with names of many participating experts—see Riederer, Philipov, and Rengs (2017). The present chapter mainly reproduces contents of this working paper.

**Figure 5: Estimating the future development of the share of vulnerable families with children**



**Note:**  $N_{\text{economic vulnerability}} = 76$ ,  $N_{\text{psychological vulnerability}} = 52$ ,  $N_{\text{social vulnerability}} = 75$ . This figure differentiates between estimates that the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (⤵⤵⤵), moderately decrease (⤵⤵), slightly decrease (⤵), stay roughly the same (≈), slightly increase (↗), moderately increase (↗↗), or strongly increase (↗↗↗).

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

Regarding *social vulnerability*, the results are similar to those with economic and psychological vulnerability but slightly more optimistic. For the period between 2015 and 2020, for instance, 57 per cent of the experts supposed the share of vulnerable families with children to rise, 24 per cent thought it would not change and eight per cent expected it to decrease.

## 4.2 Differences between assessments made by practitioners and scientists

Table 2 differentiates between assessments made by practitioners and scientists, respectively. For these analyses, the scale indicating future developments of shares of vulnerable families was collapsed indicating only decreases, stability and increases. Differences between assessments made by practitioners and scientists are small. Nevertheless, compared to scientists, a larger share of those directly working with families expected increases in social vulnerability in the short run (until 2020) and increases in psychological vulnerability in the long run (until 2050).

**Table 2: Estimating the future development of the share of vulnerable families with children: assessments of practitioners and scientists in comparison**

### (a) Numbers of experts (in absolute figures)

| Development of...    | Economic vulnerability |    |    | Psychological vulnerability |   |    | Social vulnerability |    |    |
|----------------------|------------------------|----|----|-----------------------------|---|----|----------------------|----|----|
|                      | ↘                      | ≈  | ↗  | ↘                           | ≈ | ↗  | ↘                    | ≈  | ↗  |
| Type of expert       |                        |    |    |                             |   |    |                      |    |    |
| <b>2015–2020</b>     |                        |    |    |                             |   |    |                      |    |    |
| Experts (total)      | 10                     | 14 | 52 | 1                           | 8 | 43 | 6                    | 18 | 51 |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 4                      | 3  | 17 | 0                           | 5 | 28 | 2                    | 4  | 21 |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 6                      | 11 | 35 | 1                           | 3 | 15 | 4                    | 14 | 30 |
| <b>2020–2050</b>     |                        |    |    |                             |   |    |                      |    |    |
| Experts (total)      | 23                     | 15 | 38 | 6                           | 7 | 39 | 13                   | 19 | 43 |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 7                      | 6  | 11 | 2                           | 2 | 29 | 5                    | 7  | 15 |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 16                     | 9  | 27 | 4                           | 5 | 10 | 8                    | 12 | 28 |

### (b) Share of experts (in per cent)

| Development of...    | Economic vulnerability |    |    | (N)  | Psychological vulnerability |    |    | (N)  | Social vulnerability |    |    | (N)  |
|----------------------|------------------------|----|----|------|-----------------------------|----|----|------|----------------------|----|----|------|
|                      | ↘                      | ≈  | ↗  |      | ≈                           | ↗  |    | ↘    | ≈                    | ↗  |    |      |
| Type of expert       |                        |    |    |      |                             |    |    |      |                      |    |    |      |
| <b>2015–2020</b>     |                        |    |    |      |                             |    |    |      |                      |    |    |      |
| Experts (total)      | 13                     | 18 | 68 | (76) | 2                           | 15 | 83 | (52) | 8                    | 24 | 68 | (75) |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 17                     | 13 | 71 | (24) | 0                           | 15 | 85 | (33) | 7                    | 15 | 78 | (27) |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 12                     | 21 | 67 | (52) | 5                           | 16 | 79 | (19) | 8                    | 29 | 63 | (48) |
| <b>2020–2050</b>     |                        |    |    |      |                             |    |    |      |                      |    |    |      |
| Experts (total)      | 30                     | 20 | 50 | (76) | 12                          | 13 | 75 | (52) | 17                   | 25 | 57 | (75) |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 29                     | 25 | 46 | (24) | 6                           | 6  | 89 | (33) | 19                   | 26 | 56 | (27) |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 31                     | 17 | 52 | (52) | 21                          | 26 | 53 | (19) | 17                   | 25 | 58 | (48) |

**Note:** This table differentiates between estimates that the share of vulnerable families will decrease (↘), stay roughly the same (≈), or increase (↗) between 2015 and 2020 or 2020 and 2050, respectively.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

### 4.3 Are there regional differences across Europe?

Further analyses differentiated between expertises according to six different regions of Europe. The six regions are central western Europe (Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands), the German-speaking countries (Austria, Germany, and Switzerland), western Europe (Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the United Kingdom), northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden), southern Europe (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain), and eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovenia). Some regions comprise more countries than others to guarantee case numbers that were high enough for the analyses conducted. Results show that the general tendencies expected do not differ between them. For each region, a majority of participants estimated the shares of vulnerable families to increase. Nevertheless, Figure 6 reveals also some interesting differences.

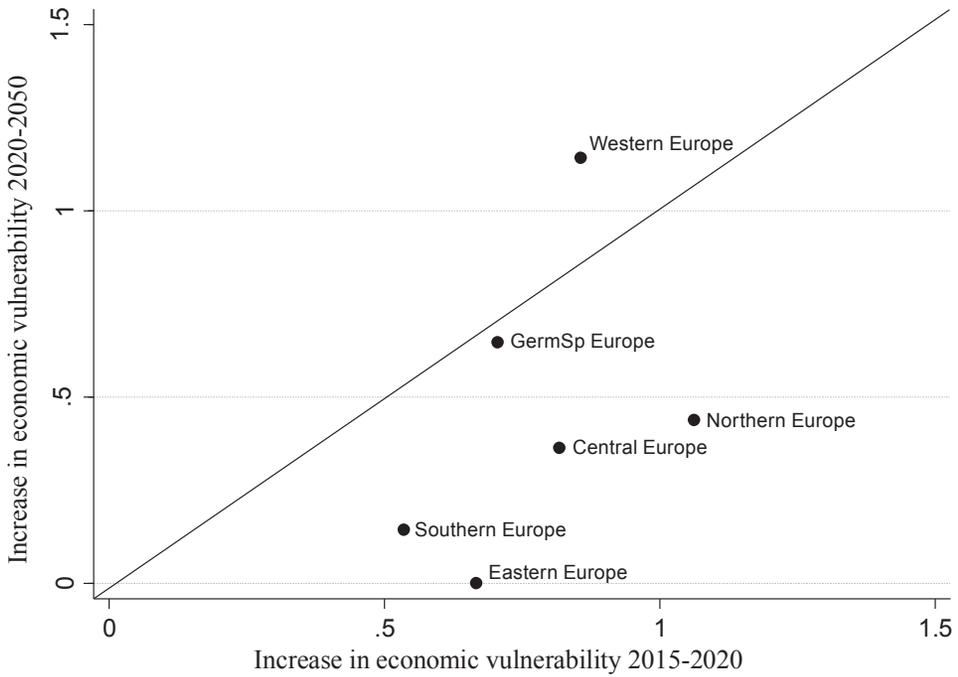
The graphs in Figure 6 show average estimates of future vulnerability of families with children for both periods, from 2015 to 2020 and from 2020 to 2050. The original 7-point rating scale ranges from -3 (strong decrease) to +3 (strong increase of vulnerability). Panel (a) refers to future economic vulnerability, panel (b) to future psychological vulnerability, and panel (c) to future social vulnerability. As almost all values presented in the three graphs are positive, it indicates once more that experts expected increases in vulnerability. Expected *increases in economic vulnerability* are smallest for southern and eastern European countries and highest for northern (short run) and western European countries (long run). In countries where economic vulnerability of families is already high, potential for additional growth is clearly smaller than in countries with currently low levels of economic vulnerability.

On the whole, experts expected larger increases of vulnerability in the short run than in the long run. Therefore, most points in the three panels of Figure 5 are below the respective diagonal. In particular for eastern European countries, vulnerability increases were clearly expected for the near future but not necessarily for the years until 2050. With regard to economic as well as social vulnerability, average estimated long-term development of vulnerability after 2020 is nearly zero for eastern countries (no increase, no decrease). Only psychological vulnerability was also expected to further increase in the long run. *Psychological vulnerability* seems to be expected to increase all over Europe.

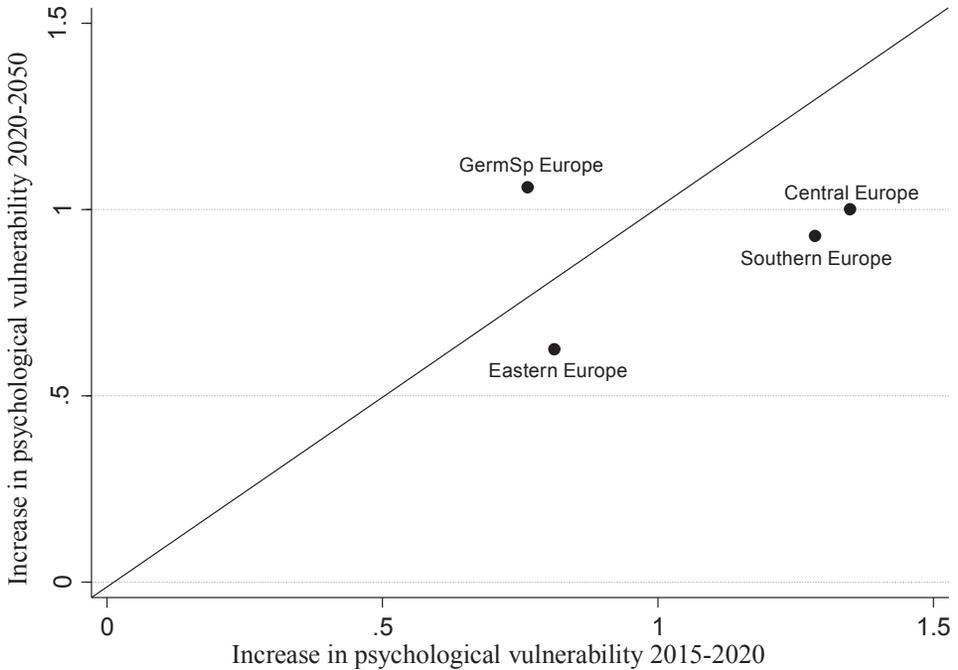
With regard to *social vulnerability*, clear increases in both, the short and the long run are expected for western and central European countries. On the opposite, expected short and long run increases in social vulnerability are rather small for northern European countries characterised by strong welfare states and inclusive societies. Though the difference is very small, it is interesting that increases in social vulnerability are expected to be even a little bit larger for the period from 2020 to 2050 than from 2015 to 2020 for southern European countries.

**Figure 6: Estimating the future development of vulnerability of families with children**

## (a) Economic vulnerability

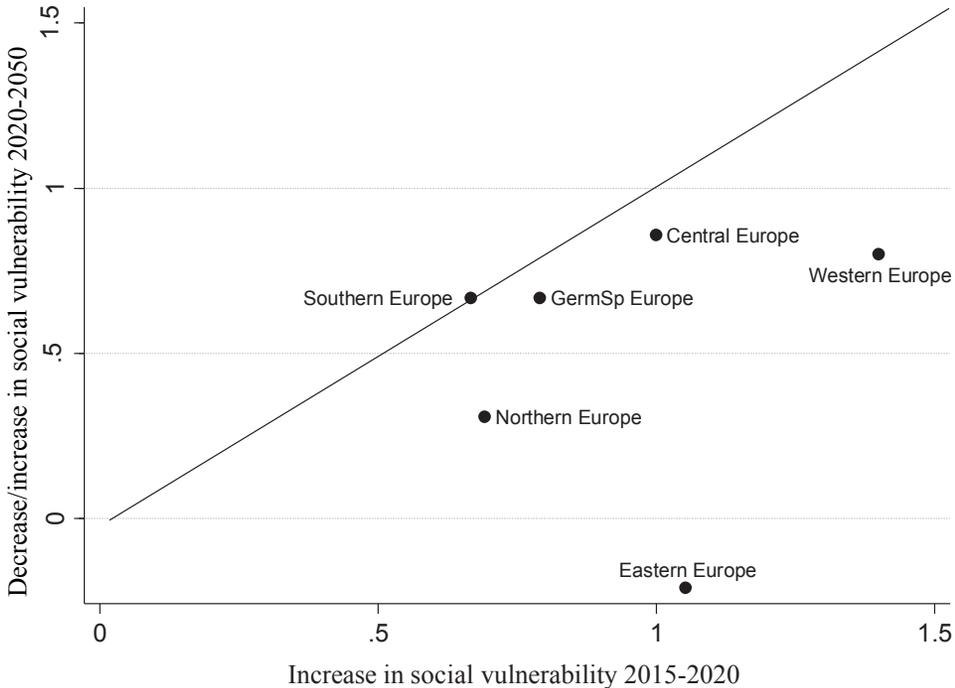


## (b) Psychological vulnerability



**Figure 6 continued: Estimating the future development of vulnerability of families**

(c) Social vulnerability



**Note:** The figures give average ratings for European regions. The original 7-point rating scale ranges from -3 (strong decrease) to +3 (strong increase of vulnerability). That all mean values shown in the graph except one are positive indicates that, on average, experts expected vulnerability to grow in all six regions. Only social vulnerability in eastern European countries was not assumed to further increase between 2020 and 2050. *Central western Europe* comprises Belgium, France, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands; *German-speaking Europe* Austria, Germany, and Switzerland; *western Europe* Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the United Kingdom; *northern Europe* Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; *southern Europe* Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain; and *eastern Europe* Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Slovenia. Average ratings for psychological vulnerability development are not shown for northern and western Europe due to low case numbers of expert estimates (for more detailed information see Table A.2 in the Appendix).

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

#### 4.4 Increases in vulnerability of families with children are expected all over Europe

First, these results clearly indicate that the majority of experts did not believe that the situation of families with children will improve in the near future. The majority of respondents assumed that—irrespective of the specific dimension of vulnerability considered—shares of families with children affected by vulnerability would be increasing in Europe. While this is not desirable from the perspective of

European societies in general and European politics in particular, expected increases should nevertheless not be overly dramatised either. Only very few experts expected strong future increases of vulnerability. Figure 5 showed that most respondents assumed the future to bring slightly increasing shares of vulnerable families with children.

Second, the results remind us again that vulnerability of families goes well beyond poverty and social exclusion. Psychological vulnerability increases were expected to be larger, on average, than increases in other vulnerability dimensions. In addition, psychological vulnerability will—according to experts—further increase all over Europe between 2020 and 2050. In particular practitioners expected such a long term development—i.e., people who directly work with and for families. This result can be interpreted as a hint that (future) well-being of families is not only dependent on income and wealth. Factors that should be relevant for future vulnerability development are discussed in the next chapter.

## 5 Which factors might drive the vulnerability of families with children and their well-being?

As Parke (2013, p. 17) notes, “families are embedded in a variety of other social systems, including extended networks of relatives and informal community ties such as friends and neighbours, work sites, and social, educational, and medical institutions.” There are broader social systems (community, economy, policy) that are affected by change and development themselves and have a large impact on family life. Corresponding to societal developments, the family as an institution is not static but steadily evolving and adapting to external circumstances (*ibid.*, p. 11). In this chapter, we will therefore focus on developments in other societal spheres and their influence on families in the future.<sup>12</sup>

### 5.1 Main forces driving vulnerability

The scientific literature focuses mainly on economic vulnerability and the poverty risk in particular. It is therefore not surprising that factors related to employment dominate the discourse. In addition, employment is also linked to other vulnerability dimensions. For instance, job loss is one of the most important reasons for entering poverty (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005; Riederer & Wolfsbauer, 2011; Vandecasteele, 2011). Prolonged periods of unemployment furthermore often lead to a loss in self-esteem and impair psychological well-being. Stigmatisation might also come into play. Among the employed, work intensity of the household is decisive for poverty risks (Fouarge & Layte, 2005; Fusco et al., 2010; Riederer & Wolfsbauer, 2011). Parents’ weak labour market attachment may result from missing support. A lack of childcare options might force parents (especially mothers) to leave the labour market, impairing their material situation (e.g., Baum, 2002; Eurofound, 2013; Keck & Saraceno, 2013).

Importantly, the situation of potentially vulnerable families is moderated by the macro-level context. The level of long-term poverty varies considerably between different welfare state regimes (Fouarge & Layte, 2005). Also, it has been found that risks of vulnerability linked to certain factors vary across countries (Fusco et al., 2010). For instance, the relationship between being unemployed and being at risk of poverty varies between countries according to their level of economic development and institutional setting (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005; Moller et al., 2003). Finally, cultural factors matter greatly. For instance, gender roles that prevail in a society influence women’s position in the labour market determining their economic situation (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Pfau-Effinger, 2000). And social exclusion and stigmatisation are strongly linked to values and norms shared in a given

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<sup>12</sup> This section combines insights of Mynarska et al. (2015) with findings of Riederer, Philipov, and Rengs (2017) using the summarising description of results from Riederer et al. (2017).

society (Musterd & Ostendorf, 2005). Identifying macro-level factors that will shape family futures was thus a central aim of our research.

In focus groups, participating experts were encouraged to talk about various—cultural, social, institutional, economic—changes that might be particularly favourable or unfavourable for the vulnerability of families in the future. In their discussions, they named a number of societal forces they considered crucial for the well-being of families with children. These forces can be crudely subsumed under four more general headings: (a) economic development, (b) changing gender roles, (c) work and family reconciliation, (d) general cultural and social change. In discussing these four issues, experts repeatedly referred to policies that might compensate for or modify consequences of certain developments. For instance, childcare support can facilitate female labour force participation (issue (b)) by enabling women to reconcile work and family life (issue (c)). In the expert questionnaire, we thus included (e) family policy as an additional factor driving the future of family vulnerability.

## 5.2 Economic development

Economic changes and turbulences at the macro level are clearly linked to the economic situation of families and influence the risk of poverty. Experts identified several mechanisms that play a role here. First of all, an economic crisis will be linked to high *unemployment*. If one or even both parents are out of work, this will obviously put a family in danger. Usually two incomes are (and will be) necessary for providing good living conditions to a family. Thus, unemployment may be the most important factor jeopardising the situation of all families. Moreover, different types of jobs are necessary (i.e. those requiring high qualifications, but also jobs that do not require specialised skills), so people of different social strata, with different levels of education and with various levels of qualification can be certain to be able to sustain their families. Indeed, all these jobs must be sufficient to earn a living. Youth unemployment is another relevant factor. It is likely to delay entry into adulthood and family formation. In that sense, it can prevent young people from forming their families and from having the number of children they want.

Other consequences of an economic crisis are related to taxation and welfare state provision. Discussants noted that a severe crisis can be a serious threat to the entire welfare system. Shrinking tax revenues could make it impossible to support families in need and be detrimental to the whole public sector. But economic development is also relevant for societal solidarity and tolerance. Battles about the allocation of scarce resources between societal subgroups could increase vulnerability of families substantially. In situations of economic tensions, traditional political ways of thinking (or even extreme right and/or left positions) may gain in popularity. Last but not least, economic instability might lead to emotional problems in families. With an economic crisis, families might face financial difficulties that they are not prepared to deal with. As a result of unemployment, they may have

problems to pay their mortgages or monthly bills. This can cause much emotional distress and influence the well-being of families in this dimension as well.

Although economic circumstances are fundamental for well-being of families, experts argued that we should not limit our thinking to positive effects of economic growth and thus oversee potential problems. For instance, strong economic growth may raise environmental concerns. Moreover, family well-being is not only about a good economic situation, but about a general quality of life. High economic development could bring more pressure and stress to families if it is not accompanied by more general changes in the culture of workplace<sup>13</sup>, in lifestyle and so forth.

**Table 3: Expected effects of economic development on future vulnerability of families**

| Link between drivers and future vulnerability of families with children (share of vulnerable families in 2050) | Economic vulnerability | Psychological vulnerability | Social vulnerability |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <i>r</i>               | <i>r</i>                    | <i>r</i>             |
| Real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita   | -.06                   | .06                         | <b>-.40</b>          |
| Unemployment   | <b>.75</b>             | <b>.81</b>                  | <b>.67</b>           |
| Inequality in earnings   | <b>.77</b>             | <b>.77</b>                  | <b>.77</b>           |
| N  | 76                     | 52                          | 75                   |

**Note:** Experts assessed whether the driver and thus the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (-3), moderately decrease (-2), slightly decrease (-1), stay roughly the same (0), slightly increase (+1), moderately increase (+2), or strongly increase (+3). Shown are Pearson correlation coefficients between these two assessments, respectively. All coefficients with absolute values larger than .40 are printed bold. For instance, the correlation coefficient of -.40 in the upper right indicates “The higher GDP per capita is expected to be, the lower is on average the expected share of families with children affected by social vulnerability in the future (in 2050).”

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors’ own computations.

Building upon these insights from focus group research, participants of the expert questionnaire study were asked to estimate the future development of specific drivers and their impact on the future development of vulnerability. With regard to economic development, the drivers chosen were the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, unemployment, and inequality in earnings. Table 3 gives the corresponding results showing how estimates of their development were linked to estimates of their impact on vulnerability. Two out of the three drivers subsumed under economic development show strong associations with economic vulnerability: rises in unemployment and in inequality of earnings were assumed to raise the share of vulnerable families. Looking at the mean ratings (not shown in the table), experts on average assumed only a very small increase in unemployment ( $m=.16$ ) but a

<sup>13</sup> Using the label “culture of workplace” we take up an expression that was used by our participants in focus groups. It concerns organisational culture, i.e. the behaviour of individuals within organisations, such as management styles, as well as values, beliefs, norms and habits shared by the employees. But it also relates to a more general working atmosphere, shaped by various institutional, legal and cultural factors.

clearer one in inequality of earnings ( $m=.88$ ) leading to corresponding increases in future shares of economically vulnerable families ( $m=.32$  and  $.78$ , respectively).<sup>14</sup> Both drivers are also assumed to strongly affect psychological and social vulnerability. The higher unemployment and the higher earnings inequality, the higher will be economic, psychological and social vulnerability. Surprisingly, the estimated development of real GDP per capita was not linked to expected changes in economic vulnerability. There was only a medium correlation between this driver and social vulnerability indicating the higher the GDP, the lower increases in future social vulnerability.

### 5.3 Changing gender roles

From the discussions with experts we could see that changing gender roles are generally perceived as a critical force shaping modern societies. In relation to family well-being, women's labour force participation is often seen as the key factor. On the one hand, *female employment* positively affects family income, social embeddedness, financial stability for women in general and single mothers in particular, as well as women's independence. Women's full-time employment is beneficial to a family's financial situation as families are better off with two incomes. Employment gives women access to social networks which might be important for the family well-being as well. In addition, women become more stable and financially independent which is extremely important in case of divorce or widowhood, but also with regard to their future pensions. If a woman did not work, or limited her working hours substantially, her own and her children's financial situation might deteriorate if they were left on their own. Last but not least, economic activity and financial independence empowers women to make their own life choices.

On the other hand, possible problems with women's labour force participation comprise the double burden of professional work and family work, the pressure to be good in both roles and possible negative effects upon children's well-being in case of absent mothers. Women are put under a huge pressure nowadays: they should be wonderful, caring mothers, but are also expected to work full-time and actively engage in their job. As there is still no full equality within families and women are mostly responsible for providing care at home, women often suffer a stress-related double burden balancing work and family responsibilities. Regarding the situation of children in the context of mothers' time in employment, experts can hold quite different positions.<sup>15</sup> Some experts were worried about the necessity of maternal fulltime employment in case of a separation referring to wants and needs of children. One discussant was especially concerned about working mothers of

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<sup>14</sup> Experts assessed the developments of drivers on 7-point rating scales ranging from "strongly decrease" (-3) to "strongly increase" (+3). Immediately afterwards, they indicated the probable effects of these developments on future shares of vulnerable families with children using the same 7-point rating scales.

<sup>15</sup> For more details see Mynarska et al. (2015) and/or Riederer et al. (2017).

young children (age 0-3). In his/her opinion, the child might not be attached to its mother if she is absent resulting in a weak emotional bond and a lack of a feeling of safety.

Importantly, also the *role of fathers* has to be acknowledged as men's role in modern societies is currently changing and will probably do so in the future as well. As women enter employment in increasing numbers, fathers' involvement in family issues becomes of uttermost importance. Fathers' contribution to childcare can make it easier for mothers to work, improving the financial situation of families. Thus it seems feasible for both parents to sustain their professional careers without any harm on their children. In addition, fathers themselves will profit from intensified contact to children as stronger emotional bonds with them will be established. There may be furthermore a trend of higher involvement of fathers in childcare after parents' separation. Under the assumption of increasingly more egalitarian gender roles, both parents are (or will be) expected to take full responsibility for their children after relationship break-up. This might take the form of children's "alternating residence", i.e., living one week with the mother and one week with the father. Such literally shared custody would have both advantages and disadvantages for the well-being of children and parents. On the positive side, children have contact with both their parents and their material situation is better, since both parents have the economic responsibility for them. It may make it easier for a separated couple: even though they are solo parents, they share responsibilities and consequently they can more easily combine childcare with employment. As for disadvantages, alternating households might be difficult when a child starts school and the solution limits parents' mobility. It may also lead to increasing conflicts between parents as they need to make various efforts to get this arrangement work. Not all fathers, however, will be willing to get involved and to take responsibility for a family. In particular less educated men seem at risk of being somehow "left behind" while women become more educated, more self-confident, active and enterprising. This might culminate in a "masculinity crisis" due to changes in gender roles.

Again, three drivers were chosen to represent changes in gender roles in the expert questionnaire: female labour force participation, the share of men engaged in childcare, and the frequency of arrangements of shared physical custody of a child after divorce. Changes in gender roles, it seems, were only perceived to be important for psychological vulnerability (see Table 4). While an increase in female labour force participation was assumed to lead to an increase in the shares of vulnerable families, an increase in male engagement in childcare was assumed to counterbalance this negative effect.<sup>16</sup> That female participation in the labour market is not expected to reduce future economic vulnerability of families is surprising. This may however be due to the fact that mothers often work part-time and/or in badly paid jobs in many countries. Improving the reconciliation of work and family life might allow women to work fulltime, start a career and reach better paid positions.

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<sup>16</sup> For more detailed results see Riederer, Philipov, and Rengs (2017).

**Table 4: Expected effects of changes in gender roles on future vulnerability of families**

| Link between drivers and future vulnerability of families with children (share of vulnerable families in 2050) | Economic vulnerability | Psychological vulnerability | Social vulnerability |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <i>r</i>               | <i>r</i>                    | <i>r</i>             |
| Female labour force participation  | .04                    | <b>.54</b>                  | .01                  |
| Share of men engaged in childcare  | -.23                   | <b>-.40</b>                 | -.08                 |
| Frequency of arrangements of shared physical custody (with alternating residence) of a child after divorce     | -.10                   | .23                         | -.06                 |
| N  | 76                     | 52                          | 75                   |

**Note:** Experts assessed whether the driver and thus the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (-3), moderately decrease (-2), slightly decrease (-1), stay roughly the same (0), slightly increase (+1), moderately increase (+2), or strongly increase (+3). Shown are Pearson correlation coefficients between these two assessments, respectively. All coefficients with absolute values larger than .40 are printed bold.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

## 5.4 Work and family reconciliation: work-related issues

Experts emphasised that the possibility of successfully reconciling paid work and family responsibilities is fundamental for family well-being. The main topics of focus group discussions were childcare arrangements, the role of fathers, and the culture of workplace. As we already discussed the role of fathers, this chapter focuses on workplace issues. Childcare will be discussed in a later chapter on policies.

A group of factors, all of them related to work and family reconciliation and highly important for the well-being of families, concerns the *culture of workplace*. The culture of workplace comprises the organisational culture, i.e., management styles and values, beliefs, norms and habits shared by the employees as well as the more general working atmosphere, both shaped by various institutional, legal, and cultural factors. Childcare arrangements will not be sufficient if the culture of workplace is not favourable to families. With long or unpredictable working hours, parents will not be able to reconcile their parental and work roles in a satisfactory way. Children might suffer because their parents will be absent a lot, coming back from their occupations overworked and stressed. This will, of course, also impact on the parents' health and well-being. Experts in focus group discussion emphasised the role of employers and/or managers. Their attitudes towards parents were said to influence the situation of families to a great degree. It largely depends on employers, for example, whether parents are able to occasionally leave work earlier to be there for their children. It also depends on organisations whether they increase job flexibility and allow parents to take advantage of new technologies. Some employers would only care about how much time their employees spend at work, instead of looking at productivity. Productivity could often be achieved in a more flexible and family-friendly way, for instance by tele-working from home.

**Table 5: Expected effects of changes in employment factors affecting work–family reconciliation**

| Link between drivers and future vulnerability of families with children (share of vulnerable families in 2050) | Economic vulnerability | Psychological vulnerability | Social vulnerability |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <i>r</i>               | <i>r</i>                    | <i>r</i>             |
| Job demands (in terms of longer working hours and more work commitment)  | .37                    | <b>.75</b>                  | <b>.48</b>           |
| Frequency of flexible working arrangements (such as telecommuting, working from home, flexi-time etc.)         | .23                    | -.06                        | -.11                 |
| Work-related geographical mobility of parents  | .28                    | <b>.45</b>                  | .33                  |
| N  | 76                     | 52                          | 75                   |

**Note:** Experts assessed whether the driver and thus the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (-3), moderately decrease (-2), slightly decrease (-1), stay roughly the same (0), slightly increase (+1), moderately increase (+2), or strongly increase (+3). Shown are Pearson correlation coefficients between these two assessments, respectively. All coefficients with absolute values larger than .40 are printed bold.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

In the expert questionnaire, employment factors affecting work–family reconciliation were covered by the following indicators: job demands, the frequency of flexible working arrangements, and work-related geographical mobility of parents. Table 5 shows that participating experts did not believe that the frequency of flexible working arrangements will affect future vulnerability of families. The development of future job demands, however, was assumed to be strongly linked to future psychological vulnerability and moderately to future social vulnerability. On average, experts expected that increasing job demands would amplify vulnerability of families with children. Furthermore, greater geographical mobility would contribute to an increasing share of families affected by psychological vulnerability.

## 5.5 General cultural and social change

The heading already gives an indication that a broad bulk of rather different developments may be subsumed under it. Indeed, a broad range of general changes in social norms and values were mentioned by experts in focus group discussions. They are considered in this section. However, there is one major topic linking all of them: the society and the relations between people building it. Various aspects that are associated with relations between people are important for the well-being of families. These include relations between community members, neighbours, friends, within couples and families as well as relations between generations.

Even if a family faces economic vulnerability, health problems, or any traumatic experiences, their situation can be improved by others who can provide invaluable *support and assistance* in difficult times. The resilience of any family

strongly depends on having close ties with other people. Some experts, however, argued that social ties are getting weaker nowadays. They perceived it as a negative side effect of individualisation processes: if people focus mainly on their own goals, they are less interested in other people. People would increasingly function as independent entities rather than as a family unit. Without close social contacts and kin support, however, a nuclear family lacks a safety net in case of any problems and a loose relationship between partners poses a direct threat to emotional well-being of a family.

**Table 6: Expected effects of cultural change on future vulnerability of families**

| Link between drivers and future vulnerability of families with children (share of vulnerable families in 2050) | Economic vulnerability | Psychological vulnerability | Social vulnerability |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <i>r</i>               | <i>r</i>                    | <i>r</i>             |
| Acceptance of the pluralism of family forms  | .11                    | .02                         | -.17                 |
| Strength of personal relationships   | -.16                   | <b>-.66</b>                 | -.15                 |
| Demands of parenting (i.e., the effort expected of a good parent to make children grow up safe and happy)      | .17                    | .16                         | .26                  |
| N  | 76                     | 52                          | 75                   |

**Note:** Experts assessed whether the driver and thus the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (-3), moderately decrease (-2), slightly decrease (-1), stay roughly the same (0), slightly increase (+1), moderately increase (+2), or strongly increase (+3). Shown are Pearson correlation coefficients between these two assessments, respectively. All coefficients with absolute values larger than .40 are printed bold.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

*Intergenerational relations* can be discussed from different perspectives. Focusing on help and support exchange between generations, the presence of grandparents might improve the situation of a family with children as they often are important providers of childcare, but it may also become an additional stressor in case of need for care in older ages. Considering the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the other, communication between generations is highly relevant. With respect to new information technologies, a knowledge gap between generations might make effective communication between them difficult.<sup>17</sup> With respect to parenting skills and traditions, young parents may be often unprepared if they cannot rely on grandparents. This last aspect is of particular relevance in societies with high normative standards in parenting.

Finally, another issue is the meaning and consequence of the *increasing diversity of family forms* observed in Europe. Again, experts revealed different views. While some experts diagnosed a possible clash between “old” and “new” values

<sup>17</sup> The internet was partly seen as a source of weakening ties between people. On the one hand it supports communication as new technology allows for sustaining contact even in case of substantial geographical distance between children, parents, and grandparents. On the other hand, however, it makes relationships more superficial.

and norms others think that both do co-exist and will so further on. While some praised increasing freedom and tolerance, a fraction of experts also feared that the “traditional” family might be valued less as the diversity of family forms increases. Other emphasised the importance of creating good conditions for all types of families.

The expert questionnaire included the acceptance of the pluralism of family forms, the strength of personal relationships, and demands of parenting to represent cultural change. Results include only one noteworthy finding (see Table 6): on average, experts expected that a weakening of personal relationships would increase future psychological vulnerability among families with children.

## 5.6 Family policy

In focus groups, experts repeatedly referred to policies that might compensate for or modify consequences of societal developments. The mostly discussed policy type was childcare support and its role for work–family reconciliation. The availability of *childcare* facilities is relevant for all families, but particularly for solo parents. Opening hours are pivotal for the ability to combine employment with parenthood: short, inflexible opening hours might make it impossible for parents to work full-time, impairing the financial situation of a family. Long and flexible opening hours should be accompanied by a high quality of childcare. Parents will not be willing to leave their children for long hours in a facility where a child is not well cared for. Again, this will impact on the ability to combine work and parenthood. Moreover, childcare options should not be limited to preschool children as they play a pivotal role for older children as well. Especially in the case of vulnerable families, high-quality after- school care can improve children’s situation (e.g., their educational outcomes). If formal childcare is not available, the role of grandparents and other family members is crucial for the mother’s (or—in more general terms—the parents’) ability to reconcile work and family duties. Grandparents and the extended family might be important particularly for vulnerable families, especially single parents.

In the expert questionnaire study, we considered three measures of family policy: access to childcare, financial support to families, and government support for parents who want to reorganise their workload when they want to dedicate time to parenting. All three measures show considerable associations with future vulnerability development in at least one dimension (see Table 7). First, experts assumed that lower future financial support by governments would contribute to an increasing share of families affected by economic, psychological and social vulnerability. Second, an improved access to public childcare would reduce future economic, psychological and social vulnerability of families with children. Third, an increased government support to parents who want to reorganise their workload were expected to decrease the future share of families with children suffering from social vulnerability.

**Table 7: Expected effects of changes in family policy on future vulnerability of families**

| Link between drivers and future vulnerability of families with children (share of vulnerable families in 2050)   | Economic vulnerability | Psychological vulnerability | Social vulnerability |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
|  | <i>r</i>               | <i>r</i>                    | <i>r</i>             |
| Financial support to families (provided by national or regional governments)   | <b>-.63</b>            | <b>-.52</b>                 | <b>-.60</b>          |
| Access to childcare provided by the government   | <b>-.47</b>            | <b>-.46</b>                 | <b>-.65</b>          |
| Government support for fathers and mothers to reorganise their workload when they want to dedicate time to parenting (reduce worktime or temporarily quit their job) | -.31                   | -.23                        | <b>-.65</b>          |
| N  | 76                     | 52                          | 75                   |

**Note:** Experts assessed whether the driver and thus the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (-3), moderately decrease (-2), slightly decrease (-1), stay roughly the same (0), slightly increase (+1), moderately increase (+2), or strongly increase (+3). Shown are Pearson correlation coefficients between these two assessments, respectively. All coefficients with absolute values larger than .40 are printed bold.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

## 5.7 The insights gained in factors driving future vulnerability of families

In focus groups, participating experts identified a number of factors that may drive the future vulnerability of families with children. The identified factors referred to broader societal forces: the economic development and employment, the reconciliation of work and family life, changes in gender roles and broader cultural changes. In the literature, each of these societal forces is directly related to at least one dimension of vulnerability—and indirectly usually to more than one. For example, economic expansion and contraction affect inequality as well as unemployment and, thus, entries in and exits from poverty (e.g., Danziger, Chavez, & Cumberworth, 2012; Jonsson, Mood, & Bihagen, 2013; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005). Economic hardship in turn clearly fosters feelings of stress and lowers psychological well-being (e.g., Belle, 1990; Belle & Doucet, 2003) and there is a stigma related to poverty that triggers social isolation and depression (e.g., Mickelson & Williams, 2008; Reutter et al., 2009). To name another example, gender roles prevailing in society do influence the position of women both in the family as well as in the labour market (Esping-Andersen, 2009; Pfau-Effinger, 2000). Employed wives often perceive higher stress levels and lower psychological well-being because they usually still shoulder a larger share of family labour than their spouses (e.g., Allen et al., 2000; Mikula, Riederer, & Bodi, 2008). On the other hand, women who reduce their working hours or even leave the labour market suffer economically from the “care penalty” even in old-age (Evandrou & Glasser, 2003).

With regard to economic development, gender roles and work–family reconciliation, the focus group research is largely in line with the existing literature.<sup>18</sup> Going beyond this literature, however, it also gave the opportunity to think about links between these areas, existing challenges and possible future developments.

Most importantly, the experts expressed ambivalent opinions about the possible consequences of various future developments. For example, on the one hand, economic growth was perceived as necessary to sustain low levels of unemployment and to ensure decent levels of wages as well as substantial public support for families which reduce poverty and thus vulnerability. On the other hand, the experts also pointed out that economic development might bring more pressure to families if not being accompanied by more general changes in the workplace culture (e.g., if employers are not considerate of parental duties) and lifestyle in general (e.g., if individuals neglect interpersonal relationships because of too much focus on work). A similar ambivalence was visible in how the experts spoke of the increasing female labour force participation. On the one hand, higher engagement of women in paid work has a positive impact on family incomes and improves women's situation in terms of financial independence, also with regard to their future pensions. On the other hand, several experts pointed out that the pressures it imposed on women should not be overlooked. Without family-friendly workplaces and sufficient childcare, and without changes in men's roles women may run the risk of being overburdened, given increased pressure to do their best both in the role of a mother and of an employee. All ambivalences about possible economic and cultural developments need to be carefully considered, as they may require different policy measures. Even the most positive changes may raise new challenges for policy-makers.

In our expert questionnaire study, experts considered economic development to be most relevant for the vulnerability of families with children in the future. They assumed that economic development would not only affect economic vulnerability but also influence psychological and social vulnerability. However, it was not the development of GDP per capita that was perceived to be influential but rather the future development of unemployment and (in)equality in earnings. Family policies were also considered important for all three dimensions of vulnerability. Work-related work–family reconciliation issues (e.g., job demands) were expected to influence psychological as well as social vulnerability. The consequences of changes in gender roles and other cultural aspects for the vulnerability of families with children were not considered to be as important unless psychological vulnerability was addressed. At least in part, results also reflected the ambivalence of certain developments that was revealed in focus group. This was the case with findings for changing gender roles, for instance, where higher female labour force participation

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<sup>18</sup> The literature regarding broader cultural changes is a little bit more mixed. But claims about the disappearance of “the (nuclear) family”, rising problems in building up emotional bonds and a weakening of solidarity in societies in general have been continuously raised from the 1970s onwards (e.g., Claessens, 1979; Lasch, 1978).

was assumed to increase psychological vulnerability while at the same time higher engagement of fathers in childcare should reduce it.

To get a second assessment of the relevance of the five main forces assumed to drive future vulnerability, we included further questions in the questionnaires for experts and a very similar question also in the questionnaire for parents. Experts indicated the (relative) importance of each of these forces for future vulnerability by distributing 100 points among them. Parents were rated how important developments in these areas will be for the future well-being of families on 7-point scales. Results largely confirm the findings presented above. Both, experts and parents thought that each of the five forces had some relevance for the future vulnerability of families with children. Economic development was most important for all three dimensions of vulnerability for experts, followed by policy with regard to economic and social vulnerability. Though economic development was regarded as highly relevant by parents, family policy, and the reconciliation of family life and professional work were most important for them.<sup>19</sup>

## **5.8 Why experts expect increases in family vulnerability**

Expectations of experts themselves vary considerably.<sup>20</sup> This fact reflects the heterogeneity of European countries but also the uncertainty of future developments. Nevertheless, their average ratings make some trends for Europe visible that may be expected to form the future of families and their vulnerability. While experts participating in our questionnaire study did not believe in considerable changes in real GDP per capita or unemployment, they overall expected that inequality in earnings will rise in the future. The same is true for demands of parenting, job demands and work-related geographical mobility of parents. Experts also believed that female labour force participation in Europe will increase further, as well as the share of men engaged in childcare, the frequency of shared physical custody after divorce and acceptance of the pluralism of family forms. While financial support for families was assumed to decrease, other types of family policy may be enforced. Nevertheless, the expected changes in policies remained rather small on average.

In general, experts assumed that shares of families affected by economic, psychological and social vulnerability would increase in the future (see Chapter 4). Most pessimistic were expectations regarding the psychological vulnerability of families with children. According to our experts, an increasing inequality in earnings would affect all three dimensions of vulnerability under study. Higher female labour force participation would raise psychological vulnerability although the increase in male engagement in childcare would at least partly reduce it. Increasing job demands (longer working hours, higher work commitment etc.) and higher work-related geographical mobility of parents would both increase psychological

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<sup>19</sup> For detailed results see Riederer, Philipov, and Rengs (2017).

<sup>20</sup> For more information see Riederer et al. (2017).

vulnerability; the first one also social vulnerability. According to average expert estimates, other likely developments, such as more frequent arrangements of shared physical custody or a higher acceptance of diversity in family forms, would not be that relevant for vulnerability. Policies could have a strong impact, but assumed changes are small. Largely in line with the experts' overall assessments, these developments should lead to higher vulnerability, not only but in particular with regard to non-economic dimensions of vulnerability.

Although the outlook resulting from the expert questionnaire is, on the whole, rather pessimistic, policies could generally improve the situation of families with children. According to our experts, both financial support for families and better access to childcare could reduce all three dimensions of vulnerability while government support for fathers and mothers to reorganise their workload when they want to dedicate time to parenting (reduce worktime or temporarily quit their job) would at least reduce social vulnerability. This is good news: we can do something about it. Family policy is key to reducing poverty (e.g., Lohmann, 2009; Troger & Verwiebe, 2015) and to enhancing life chances of children in Europe in the future.

## 6 What policies will be relevant to stop intergenerational vulnerability reproduction?

Already the experts in the stakeholder workshop discussed child poverty and the goal of breaking the cycle of intergenerational transfers of social inequalities. When poverty limits opportunities related to educational performance and health outcomes, policies are needed to support marginalised families. Poverty affects the whole family environment, and must be treated as a family issue. The present chapter exploits findings from focus groups to identify relevant policy measures and results of online questionnaires to find out which of them might be most important.<sup>21</sup>

Experts participating in focus group discussion talked about policy measures which—in their opinion—would be crucial to prevent the reproduction of vulnerability from one generation to another. Three central aspects were identified as relevant for preventing the reproduction of vulnerability by the experts: education, reconciliation policies, and social services for the most disadvantaged families. The role of monetary transfers was discussed ambivalently by experts.

### 6.1 Education as “passport” to a better future

One key challenge for the future is to help vulnerable families not only temporarily—by mitigating the most urgent needs—but to improve their situation in a sustainable manner. Education is crucial in this respect.<sup>22</sup> Usually, we think of schooling when we think about education. Experts participating in focus groups, however, demonstrated that education can be defined very widely including education of children, parents, employers, and the society as a whole.

*Education of children (schooling)*: Especially early childhood education should support children from vulnerable families, providing them with the skills necessary for breaking the cycle of reproduction of vulnerability via educational careers. Access to and participation in early education programs are essential for fairness of chances. Better education later improves their position in the labour market when they enter adulthood. Another advantage of education may be that the more highly educated are often more open-minded such that vulnerability produced by stigmatisation might decline. Last but not least, education in schools offer also some protection and short-time escape from vulnerable environments at home. This argument is not only about serious conflicts or even violence at home. It is much broader. It is important that children are not confronted with their own situation

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<sup>21</sup> This section combines insights of Mynarska et al. (2015) with findings of Riederer, Philipov, and Rengs (2017) using the summary and adding complementary results from Riederer et al. (2017).

<sup>22</sup> The quote inspiring the heading of this section originates from the American activist Malcom X who said “Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

and/or problems all the time—that children also experience a world that is very different to their vulnerable environment.

The experts in our study furthermore discussed numerous characteristics of educational systems which are important for securing good education for all children and for reducing inequalities between them. Already at preschool level, formal childcare can provide good conditions for developing children's skills and making sure that they enter the school system with similar levels of cognitive competences. This will improve the situation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the same vein, adjusting the working hours at school so as to give children the opportunity to do their homework under teacher supervision could also be supportive. Teachers should react to children's needs, compensating for their weaknesses and promoting their interests and strengths. Furthermore, education should be extended to topics related to healthy lifestyles and an active living. In that respect some experts saw also a need for organising children's free time (including holidays). This would be particularly important for parents who cannot afford to pay for various leisure activities.

*Counselling parents (giving information and advice):* Some experts noted that young parents are not always ready for their parental roles because the modern world poses so many new challenges to them and role models are often missing. Experts thus diagnosed a need for various courses on general parenting skills (raising a child, taking care of it, etc.)—not only for parents already suffering from severe problems but as preventative action for all parents. In addition, parents should be informed about available sources of support in case of any problems in their family.<sup>23</sup> Finally, the informants emphasised that parents should also be educated with respect to their children's education. They should know how important education is and how to guide their children and encourage them to learn. Furthermore, it would be useful for young parents to learn more about what type of education offers the best employment opportunities.

*Sensitisation of employers/managers (raising awareness):* The aim of educating employers is quite different. However, experts agreed that it is of uttermost importance to influence the organisational culture in order to improve the situation of families. The key argument behind is that parents need time to be there for their children.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, employers and managers need to be “educated” about the relevance of family-friendly working environments. Many of them would not recognise that also investments in employees' private lives and personal development will pay off in a long-term perspective. Employers themselves would also benefit as job satisfaction improves employee loyalty and productivity.

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<sup>23</sup> Indeed, parents from large families participating in our family questionnaire study complained about an information deficit. Among Spanish parents, 77 per cent did not think that parents get enough information about benefits available to them (Portugal: 58 per cent, Germany: 50 per cent; for further information see Riederer, Philipov, & Rengs, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Most discussants referred to aspects of *time with/ for children* but one expert also noted, for instance, that day nurseries at the workplace would be of great help.

*Educating society (values, social skills):* This aspect concerns educating all members of the society: promoting certain values and teaching various (soft, social) skills. Given societal changes, experts acknowledged that people should learn how to work on having good interpersonal relations in their family and in the society at large. The importance of more empathy in social relations was mentioned, as was the need for promoting positive attitudes towards “family” in the society. Creating a “family-friendly” society was perceived as the very basic requirement for improving the situation of families and children.

## 6.2 Reconciliation policies, social services, and financial transfers

*Reconciliation policies:* Our experts perceived reconciliation policies as a central aspect of any political strategy to counteract vulnerability. In order to ensure a good future for children, parents need to be able to earn enough money for a decent living and at the same time to spend enough (high-quality) time with their offspring. Such policies have to improve availability, opening hours and quality of formal childcare. What experts really stressed, however, was that having time for children requires balancing paid work and caring for children, being there for them even though having to work. Policies have to accommodate to parents’ needs to care. Therefore, a higher flexibility of policy measures is called for, given an increasing diversity of family forms, cultural changes and new ways of living. This flexibility concerned a choice regarding time before returning to the labour market but also the availability of various childcare options (e.g., institutional childcare, nannies, or childcare facilities in companies). When creating care policies, one needs to consider the long-term consequences from various perspectives. For example, it is highly relevant to take into account the economic and welfare consequences of care leaves for the family and for the caring person, the consequences concerning gender equality and the costs for the welfare system.

*Social services:* Services supporting families are particularly important for those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. For instance, there cannot be any doubt about the relevance of services addressing special needs such as assistance to children or parents with disabilities. Furthermore, experts strongly advocated psychological support: mediation services for families with conflicts, counselling, or therapy for children and their parents, etc. The dominant theme in focus group discussions, however, touched upon how social support services could be improved to be more sensitive to people’s needs. The state should offer options and support families but not dictate people how they should live. Most of all, families in need should not be punished or stigmatised for their failures.

*Financial transfers:* Social benefits are necessary to address the most urgent needs of vulnerable families. They include direct as well as indirect transfers: tax policies (including VAT-related regulations to allow for lower food prices), direct

monetary transfers, investments in free health-care services etc. But overall, transfers and investments alone do not suffice to prevent or alleviate families' vulnerability, or the reproduction of vulnerability. Economic or financial support needs to be embedded in broad offers of education and in creating a family-friendly society. Otherwise, they could even be counter-productive regarding the reproduction of vulnerability: children may even get used to live on welfare provisions. Then, dependency on financial transfers from the government will be reproduced across generations as well.

### **6.3 The most relevant policy measures: commonalities and differences between experts and parents**

For the expert questionnaire, ten policy measures capturing the most important aspects discussed in the focus groups were selected to see how single measures are rated in comparison to each other and whether the result that educational measures are most important can be replicated. Parents were also asked how important these policy measures will be if governments want to reduce vulnerability in the next generations. Beforehand, it was explained that the next question will be about children who grow up in families where members suffer from vulnerability, i.e., from social risks and problems such as poverty, stress and depression and/or a lack of support by other people.

The ten policy measures considered were the following: (a) direct financial transfers to families in needs; (b) lower prices of food and other products of day-to-day importance; (c) providing information, counselling and coaching for families (parents and kids); (d) providing flexible, affordable childcare options for preschool children (age 0–5); (e) supporting mothers who want to leave the labour market to take care of their children; (f) organising assistance for children with special needs (e.g., migrant students with language deficits, disabled children); (g) investing in preventative actions with regard to problems with alcohol, drugs, or violence; (h) providing education for all children already at an early age (age 3–5); (i) organising education and mentoring for children after school and during holidays; (j) making employers aware that it makes sense to care for the work–life balance of their employees. Figure 7 gives the respective relevance ratings of experts (panel (a)) and parents (panel (b)). Please note that these results do not bear on representative samples for Europe and that the question wording slightly differed between the expert questionnaire and the family questionnaire. Therefore, only weak comparisons are possible and further studies will be needed. Nevertheless, our findings point in some rather clear directions.

*Experts:* Panel (a) of Figure 7 demonstrates that experts expected all ten measures to be important. Even the measure rated worst on average, i.e., supporting stay-at-home mothers, was at least not irrelevant for more than two-thirds of the experts. Nevertheless, there were marked differences in the degree of perceived

relevance as the shares of experts who thought that a specific measure was indispensable varied from seven to 37 per cent (lower prices of food and other products of day-to-day importance/ providing flexible, affordable childcare options for preschool children aged 0–5).

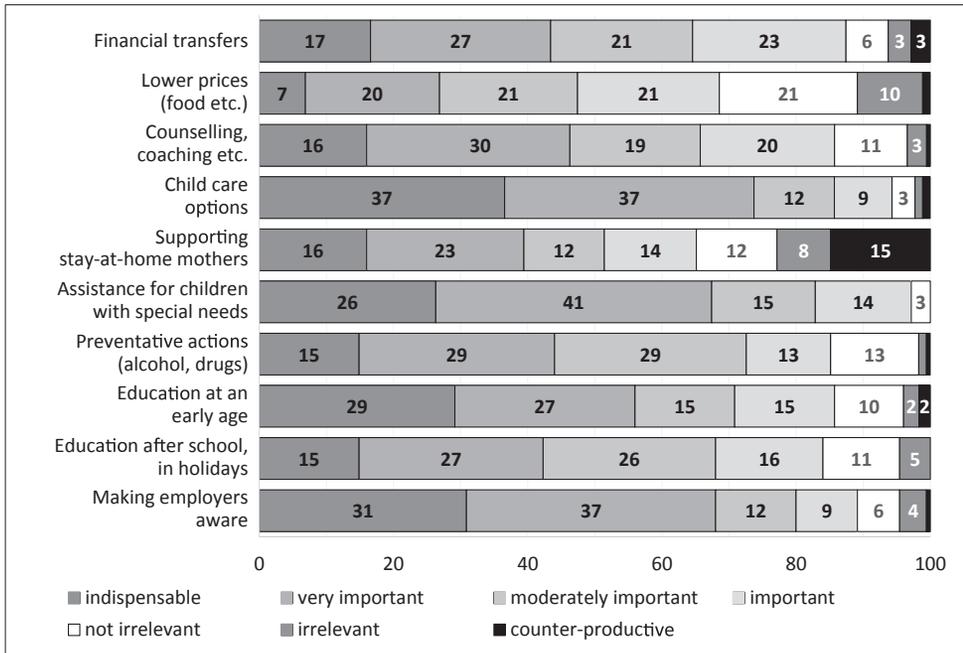
The three policy measures rated highest on average were (1) providing flexible, affordable childcare options for preschool children, (2) organising assistance for children with special needs and (3) making employers aware that it makes sense to care for the work–life balance of their employees. More than two-thirds of the experts thought that assistance for children with special needs and raising employers' awareness are indispensable or at least very important in preventing children from the intergenerational transmission of vulnerability. Nevertheless, the relevance given to childcare for preschool children was outstanding. Almost three-quarters of the experts thought that childcare options are either indispensable or very important. An additional twelve and nine per cent stated that childcare options are moderately important or important to stop the reproduction of vulnerability. Less than two per cent rated this factor to be irrelevant or counter-productive. A high importance rating could be also observed for (4) providing education for all children already at an early age. More than half of the responding experts believed that the provision of early education is indispensable or at least very important to stop the reproduction of vulnerability.

Two measures were clearly perceived to be of less importance in preventing children from inheriting vulnerability from their families of origin in Europe: *lower prices of food and other products of day-to-day importance* and *supporting mothers who want to leave the labour market to take care of their children*. There were somewhat polarised opinions with regard to both measures but especially regarding the support for stay-at-home mothers. One in six experts thought that supporting mothers wanting to leave the labour market is indispensable to stop the reproduction of vulnerability but almost as many considered this to be counter-productive. Indeed, this policy measure is characterised by ambivalence: staying at home means that mothers can spend more time with their children but might also increase financial insecurity of families and undermine the career prospects of mothers—who are also often role models for their children.

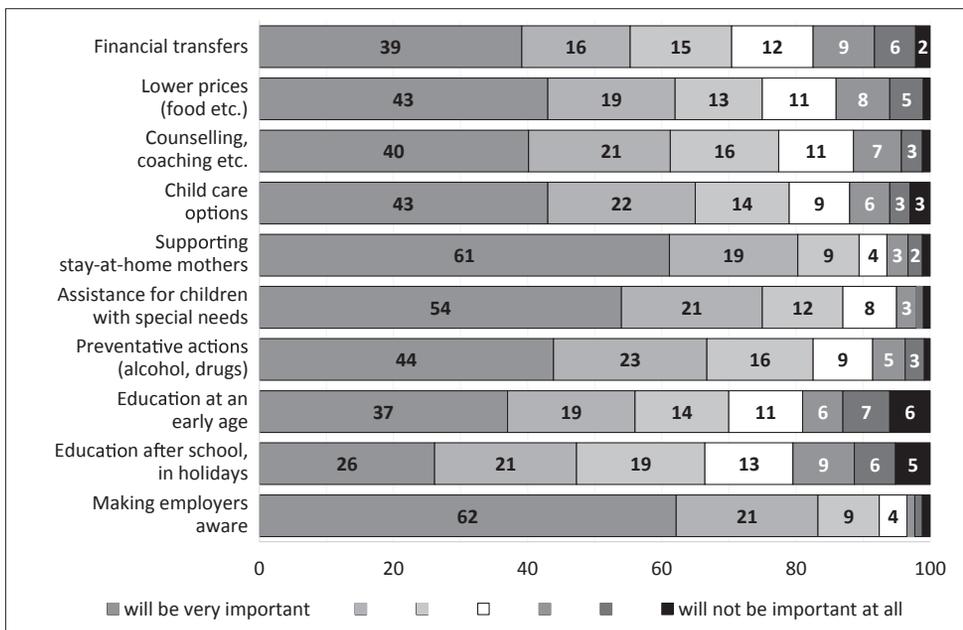
Regarding the emphasis on education in focus groups, it has to be noted that educational measures were rated differently. The two policy measures with highest relevance scores—childcare options and assistance for children with special needs—include at least some educational elements. The average relevance rating of early childhood education was also very high while those of education after school and during holidays were only at a medium level. The highly ranked raising awareness of employers refers to education in a broader sense. The only policy measure listed which referred to parents (providing information, counselling and coaching) was considered to be of medium relevance.

**Figure 7: Relevance of policy measures to stop the reproduction of vulnerability**

(a) Experts



(b) Parents



Source: FamiliesAndSocieties Expert Survey (N=175) and Family Survey (N=1,343), authors' own computations.

Interestingly, some *differences between practitioners and scientists* could be found: Support for stay-at-home mothers and the relevance of counselling and coaching for families were more important for practitioners than for scientists. Scientists, on the other hand placed slightly more emphasis than practitioners on education after school and in holidays, childcare for preschool children, education at an early age and financial transfers. Practitioners are directly working with vulnerable families. Furthermore, they are in part responsible for counselling and coaching. Thus, they may indeed perceive other aspects of vulnerability than scientists who are more involved in analysing abstract data and aggregated outcomes. While childcare was most important, and support of stay-at-home mothers least important, for scientists, practitioners considered assistance for children with special needs to be most important and lower prices of products needed for daily life to be least important.

*Parents:* Panel (b) of Figure 7 displays the detailed answers that responding parents have given. There is much coherence between experts and parents but also some disagreement. The responding parents perceived *raising awareness of employers for work–family balance* and *supporting stay-at-home mothers* to be of prime importance, followed by *assistance for children with special needs*. With regard to one of these policies, there is some discrepancy with assessments by experts. For experts, *support of stay-at-home mothers* was (on average) the least important of the ten displayed policy measures. It was a measure where some polarisation could be observed as a remarkable fraction of participants found that this measure is even counter-productive. Parents, on the other hand, were least convinced of educational measures (education after school, early schooling). Interestingly, educational policies were exactly those whose relevance for inhibiting the reproduction of vulnerability was emphasised most by experts in our focus group discussions.

The extent to which these differences between opinions of experts and families result from their different positions remains an open question. Differences will partly be due to differences in the sample composition of the two studies. While Spanish, Portuguese and German families dominate the family sample, the sample of experts is more heterogeneous. With regard to support for stay-at-home mothers, for instance, it is obvious that experts from northern Europe hold a different position than experts from other parts of Europe or parents from northern Europe.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, it seems plausible that the perspective of parents is different to the one of experts. While parents experience concrete needs in their daily life, experts usually adopt a more distant and forward-looking perspective. Financial support or staying at home, for instance, will solve problems of a family in the short run but not necessarily improve the situation of vulnerable families (as a large societal group) in the long run.

Finally, the result on education is only seemingly contradictory. While educational measures were emphasised by experts (in particular in focus groups), they

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<sup>25</sup> For details see Riederer, Philipov, and Rengs (2017).

were rated lowest by parents. Nevertheless, the views of experts and parents do not have to differ when it comes to education. The *relative ranking* of educational measures among all the other policy measures was lower with parents than with experts. Disregarding the other policies, however, the absolute ratings of parents and experts were very similar: both think that education is of great importance. In addition, education in broader terms was also perceived to be highly important by parents. In line with experts, the responding parents also emphasised the relevance of raising the awareness of employers.

## 6.4 Arguing for an integrated approach combining different measures

The present chapter dealt with policy measures that should be able to mitigate or even stop the reproduction of vulnerability within families. In the literature, family structure, family policy and educational policy are considered to be important determinants of societal inequality (cf. Huber & Stephens, 2014; McLanahan & Percheski, 2008; Solga, 2014). In focus groups, discussants primarily stressed the relevance of education to overcome social heritage. Indeed, education and childcare policies affect differences in intergenerational social mobility across industrialised countries (Causa & Johansson, 2010).

Our experts defined education very broadly, comprising education and counselling for children, parents and other important societal actors, in particular employers. They emphasised the significance of formal childcare and early childhood education for children from vulnerable families, so they are provided with the skills necessary for improving their position in the labour market when they enter adulthood. As parenting nowadays was seen as particularly demanding (due to the rapid social and economic changes), educational programmes for parents were regarded as essential to improve skills for communication and conflict resolution. Parents should also be educated about the importance of schooling for their children's future. As for employers, they should become aware of that it is worthwhile investing in their employees' well-being and supporting them also in their parental roles. In addition, experts recognised the relevance of work–family reconciliation policies as well as social services and financial support for those families with urgent needs. On the whole, findings from the expert questionnaire confirmed the results of focus groups. The policy measures identified as being of uttermost importance were the *provision of childcare options* for preschool children, *assistance for children with special needs*, *raising the awareness of employers* regarding the work–life balance of their employees, and providing *education for all children already at an early age*. In line with experts, parents also emphasised *raising the awareness of employers* regarding the work–life balance of their employees and *assistance for children with special needs*. But overall, all ten policy measures included in the questionnaires were assessed to be highly relevant to reduce the intergenerational reproduction of vulnerability within families.

Which policy is finally needed to reduce future reproduction of vulnerability? Experts emphasised the relevance of (early) education and reconciliation policies. But availability and affordability of quality childcare or support for early childhood development differ across Europe (Bouget et al., 2015) as well as the way how public policies “structure a child’s opportunities and determine the extent to which adult earnings are related to family background” (Corak, 2013, 80). Although childcare and education are on the political agenda for years (if not decades), existing (national) policies and current involvement of the European Union in education are usually characterised at best as “ambivalent and partly contradictory” (Agostini & Natali, 2015, 154). The rhetoric relevance of education and training has also not led to higher investments in education. Improvements of policies seem to be necessary to stop the reproduction of vulnerability within families. The arguments of focus group participants suggest that traditional education in a narrow sense might not be enough, that its contents matter and that education has to go beyond schools. Differences between experts and parents responding to the family questionnaire might also be a hint that the acceptance of policy measures among those who should make use of it might be crucial. Finally, non-educational policies were identified as relevant as well. An integrated approach combining different policy measures might therefore be an even better answer to future challenges regarding the reproduction of vulnerability.

## Part III: Specific issues

Contrary to the previous parts of this book, the chapters in the present one concentrate on consequences of rather specific factors for the future of (vulnerable) families in Europe: the trend of increasing union dissolution, consequences of refugee flows, and the ongoing “gender revolution”.

*What are the implications of increasing union dissolution and re-partnering?*

Microsimulation models for Italian, British, and Norwegian birth cohorts show that the share of mothers having a union disruption is expected to strongly increase for all three countries. Because single parenthood often entails vulnerability, this finding implies that vulnerability of families with children might increase as well. In addition, results demonstrate that the timing of union formation and separation is crucial for future fertility levels. If union dissolution becomes more common, particularly for childless women, the negative impact of union dissolution on fertility would still be reinforced even if all women were to re-partner.

*How will current and future refugee flows affect future vulnerability of families?*

Specific groups of immigrants usually face different kinds of problems while only the risk of social vulnerability due to small networks (or even isolation) is relevant to all of them. In particular the prevalence of non-marketable skills and language deficits add difficulties and avoid overcoming vulnerable situations. Refugees and unaccompanied minors frequently belong to the vulnerable group of immigrants. Experts assume that economic, psychological, and social vulnerability will increase due to current and future refugee flows in particular during the next five years (2015–2020). With regard to long-term consequences, a rise in social vulnerability seems most likely. As social vulnerability refers to stigmatisation, discrimination, and a lack of social support, this result might signal a warning that social cohesion in European societies may be at risk.

*What may be the future consequences of the ongoing “gender revolution”?*

Simulations based on an agent-based model demonstrated that higher gender equity is likely to result in lower levels of fertility first while very advanced societies can experience a slight upturn in fertility later on. In addition, higher levels of gender equity led to more consumption and higher well-being in our hypothetical society. In line with these findings, the results of a thought experiment incorporating all information gained in our research activities emphasised the importance of a good “gender regime policy fit”: to reduce vulnerability of families with children, policy measures have to meet the wants and needs of families which are dependent on the dominant gender role attitudes and the corresponding expectations within societies. Provided that there are no extreme economic developments, the future well-being of families with children might thus depend on the combinations of gender arrangements and types of family policy.

## 7 What are the implications of increasing union dissolution and re-partnering?

Partnership instability, single parenthood, and other family forms that result from parental separation were in the subject of several chapters of this book. In the present chapter, likely future developments in union dissolution and their consequences will be analysed in detail for three rather different European countries: Italy, Great Britain, and Norway. The microsimulation used to analyse past, present, and future trends builds upon estimations using existing datasets. They come from the household surveys on *Family and Social Subjects* 2003 and 2009 for Italy, the *Generations and Gender Survey* 2007/08 for Norway, and the *Centre for Population Change* GHS database and the *Understanding Society Survey* 2009 for Britain.<sup>26</sup> The microsimulation model generated hypothetical populations of women born between 1940 and 1979 with different union and childbearing histories (1,000,000 synthetic life courses for each of four cohorts under study).<sup>27</sup>

### 7.1 Partnership instability, fertility, and family types: theoretical background

European countries have witnessed significant changes in the pattern of family formation since the 1960s. Over the past few decades, men and women have been marrying less, and they have been cohabiting and divorcing more (Kiernan, 2004); they have also been having fewer children than their predecessors, and at older ages. Because of the decreasing stability of marriages and consensual unions, higher-order unions have become more widespread (Billari, 2005) and childbearing is no longer restricted to only one marital or consensual union (Kiernan, 1999; Pinnelli et al., 2002). While it is widely accepted among scholars that the educational expansion and postponement of childbearing have contributed to lower fertility rates and may do so in the future, the role of partnership instability for fertility is less clear.

Three mechanisms have been identified with regard to how union disruption might affect fertility. These three ways, however, have partly contrasting consequences for fertility. On the one hand, union dissolution reduces the opportunities for conceiving and bearing children. At the same time, however, it produces a pool of persons who may enter new partnerships and have additional children in step-families (Thomson et al., 2012). Union instability however may also lead to a delay of family formation, as many women and men are unable—or unwilling—to form a lasting union at younger ages, which is often seen as a precondition for parenthood (Basten, Sobotka, & Zeman, 2014, p. 60). It is the balance of these opposing forces

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<sup>26</sup> For Great Britain, data and estimates of Beaujouan et al. (2014; 2015) were used.

<sup>27</sup> This chapter gives an overview. Details of the microsimulation model were presented in Winkler-Dworak et al. (2015; 2017); its basic features were also shown in Riederer et al. (2017). Part of the results and additional figures were exclusively produced for this book chapter.

that influences not only future completed fertility levels and family size but also the diversity of family compositions as, in any case, union dissolution increases the heterogeneity of childbearing. Some individuals will have “additional” births after re-partnering while union dissolution curtails time in union and reduces fertility for others (van Bavel, Jansen, & Wijckmans, 2012).

Our research aimed to extend the understanding of the link between union dynamics and fertility and its change across recent birth cohorts. Childbearing was understood to be contingent on union status and stability while at the same time already born children affect union formation and dissolution. In order to evaluate the influence of cultural, institutional and legal context on the link between childbearing and partnerships, three countries characterised by different value systems—Italy, Norway and Great Britain—were compared to each other. Analysing the interrelationships of partnership and childbearing, the societal context is highly relevant as it likely affects the acceptance of unmarried births, divorces, single-parent families and patchwork families.

Although in many countries being in a marriage is still seen as the ideal setting to start and complete family plans (Barlow & Probert, 2004; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001), we have witnessed a change in the link between marriage, cohabitation and fertility (Perelli-Harris et al., 2010). Furthermore, countries differ greatly by the cultural, institutional and legal context in which childbearing takes place (Klüsener, Perelli-Harris, & Sánchez Gassen 2012; Perelli-Harris & Sánchez Gassen, 2012). For instance, while in Italy partnerships and childbearing are established in a traditional setting (Rosina & Fraboni, 2004), in Great Britain both unpartnered and unmarried births are frequent (Basten et al., 2014). In Italy, indeed, only slight increases of out-of-wedlock births and divorces have been observed—and this not until very recently (Meggiolaro & Ongaro, 2010; Basten et al., 2014). In Great Britain or Norway, by contrast, fertility outside marriage is socially accepted and union dissolution has become a common experience, especially for cohorts born after 1960 (Basten et al., 2014; Kravdal, 2008). Therefore it is reasonable (and likely) to observe a stronger negative effect of union instability on fertility in Italy than in Great Britain or Norway. The expected negative effect in Italy, however, may be mitigated by late union formation and childbearing. In Italy, fertility levels are generally low—also for those with an intact union during their childbearing years.

## **7.2 Family trajectories in Italy, Norway, and Great Britain**

Table 8 contrasts the family trajectories by age 40 of Italian, British, and Norwegian women, over the cohorts 1940–49 to 1960–69 (observed data). Overall, Italian women are more likely to remain un-partnered than British and Norwegian women, and the proportion and contrast has grown slightly in the last cohort. When there has been a first union, its issue differs widely across cohorts and countries.

**Table 8: Unions and births to Italian, British and Norwegian women born 1940–69 (observed data; %)**

| Country:<br>Birth cohort:    | Italy   |         |         | Great Britain |         |         | Norway  |         |         |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                              | 1940–49 | 1950–59 | 1960–69 | 1940–49       | 1950–59 | 1960–69 | 1940–49 | 1950–59 | 1960–69 |
| never in a union             | 5.4     | 5.7     | 9.3     | 3.1           | 4.0     | 5.3     | 4.0     | 3.1     | 3.6     |
| first union                  |         |         |         |               |         |         |         |         |         |
| intact                       | 88.0    | 83.8    | 77.0    | 73.8          | 66.4    | 57.0    | 74.1    | 66.0    | 54.7    |
| separated/no partner         | 5.1     | 7.7     | 9.2     | 8.2           | 9.3     | 11.3    | 10.4    | 11.3    | 10.4    |
| re-partnered                 | 1.6     | 2.8     | 4.6     | 14.9          | 20.4    | 26.4    | 11.5    | 19.7    | 31.4    |
| childless                    | 11.7    | 13.2    | 19.9    | 13.9          | 15.9    | 16.0    | 11.5    | 11.6    | 12.5    |
| 1st birth                    |         |         |         |               |         |         |         |         |         |
| before first union           | 3.3     | 3.3     | 3.2     | 5.6           | 6.3     | 9.4     | 11.3    | 10.6    | 8.5     |
| cohabiting first union       | .8      | 1.2     | 2.8     | .9            | 2.8     | 9.3     | 3.1     | 11.2    | 27.0    |
| married first union          | 83.7    | 81.0    | 71.9    | 76.6          | 68.4    | 55.7    | 72.0    | 60.6    | 38.1    |
| after first union            | .6      | 1.4     | 2.4     | 3.0           | 6.7     | 9.7     | 2.2     | 6.0     | 14.0    |
| 2nd birth                    |         |         |         |               |         |         |         |         |         |
| in 1st childbearing union    | 64.5    | 59.9    | 51.8    | 65.7          | 60.9    | 55.2    | 62.4    | 61.3    | 61.4    |
| after 1st childbearing union | .4      | .8      | .9      | 1.9           | 2.7     | 3.7     | 3.0     | 3.6     | 3.8     |
| 3rd birth                    |         |         |         |               |         |         |         |         |         |
| in 1st childbearing union    | 22.7    | 16.3    | 11.8    | 24.8          | 20.9    | 18.4    | 25.4    | 24.2    | 27.2    |
| after 1st childbearing union | .2      | .4      | .4      | 2.5           | 3.0     | 4.0     | 2.5     | 3.5     | 4.3     |
| 4th birth                    |         |         |         |               |         |         |         |         |         |
| in 1st childbearing union    | 6.9     | 3.5     | 2.0     | 7.3           | 6.1     | 4.8     | 6.8     | 4.2     | 5.7     |
| after 1st childbearing union | .1      | .2      | .2      | 2.0           | 1.8     | 2.0     | .8      | 1.4     | 1.8     |

**Note:** Shown are birth and union histories for women up to age 40. Cohorts refer to women born between 1940 and 1969. Numbers give percentages.

**Source:** Authors' analysis; data: FSS 2003/09 (Italy), GGS 2006/07 (Norway), Centre for Population Change GHS database 1979–2009, USOC 2009 (Great Britain).

The overall proportion of women separating is much higher in Britain and in Norway than in Italy, and even more so in the recent period (23 and 22 per cent against less than 7 per cent in the 1940–49 birth cohort, 38 and 42 per cent against less than 14 per cent in the 1960–69 birth cohort). Because of this, the proportion of women in intact unions at age 40 has gradually decreased and reaches 57 per cent in Britain, 55 per cent in Norway, and 77 per cent in Italy in the last cohort. Re-partnering, however, is much more widespread in Norway and Great Britain than in Italy.

In parallel, the number of women childless at age 40 remains relatively low in Norway (12 per cent), has increased slightly in Britain (14 to 16 per cent), but has jumped from 12 to 20 per cent in Italy. Again, the context of births differs widely between the three countries. First of all, while births outside a union or before the first union remain rare in Italy (slightly more than 3 per cent of all women experience this event), in Great Britain their level has passed from 5.5 to 9.4 per cent, while in Norway the share of first births before a first union even declined across cohorts. Births in cohabitation have not spread as much in Italy as in Great Britain or Norway, affecting less than 3 per cent of all Italian women compared to more than 9 per cent of British women born in 1960–69. In contrast, 27 per cent of their Norwegian peers born in the 1960s had their first birth in a cohabitation. Consequently, the proportion of births in married first unions has dropped much less in Italy than in Great Britain and in Norway, while already starting from higher levels: in the last cohort 72 per cent of women had their first baby in a marriage in Italy and around 56 per cent in Britain and only 38 per cent in Norway.

Differences in the context of first and further births act in accordance with the spread of separations and re-partnering, which is stronger in Great Britain and in Norway: many more births of all orders took place after the first union in these two countries, and also after the first childbearing union. Further births (of order 2+), already less frequent in Italy, remain extremely rare in step-families (less than 1 per cent for births beyond the first one over the three birth cohorts). Childbearing after the first fertile union seems to really make a difference in Great Britain, because while risks of further births tend to decrease in a first childbearing union, they tend to increase in subsequent ones. For instance, the share of women having a second birth in their first childbearing union passed from 66 per cent in the 1940–49 birth cohort to 55 per cent in the 1960–69 birth cohort, while it increased from less than 2 to almost 4 per cent after the first childbearing union in Great Britain. In Norway, the number of second or third births after the first fertile union rose similarly to Great Britain, yet the share of Norwegian women having a second or third birth in their first childbearing union remained quite stable across cohorts.

The next two sections both present results of the microsimulation model. The first section explores the impact of a union disruption on completed fertility levels. We consider only union transitions before the conception of a fourth child as we focus on union dissolution as interfering with childbearing. In particular, we inves-

tigate the timing of a first union and its separation (or stability) as well as the number of already born children or whether a woman was married or not. The second section gives insight into family types children are raised in.

### 7.3 Effects of union dissolution on family size

*Union stability:* Table 9 shows that Italian, British, and Norwegian women have less children when their first union is dissolved during their reproductive years (or at least until the conception of their fourth child). As expected, the difference between those who remained in their first union and others is larger in Italy than in Norway and Great Britain. Italian women who experience a union dissolution on average end up with half a child less at age 45 than their peers in an intact first union. The difference is stable across cohorts. Moreover, fertility patterns are slightly more dispersed in case of separation, with significantly elevated levels of childlessness.

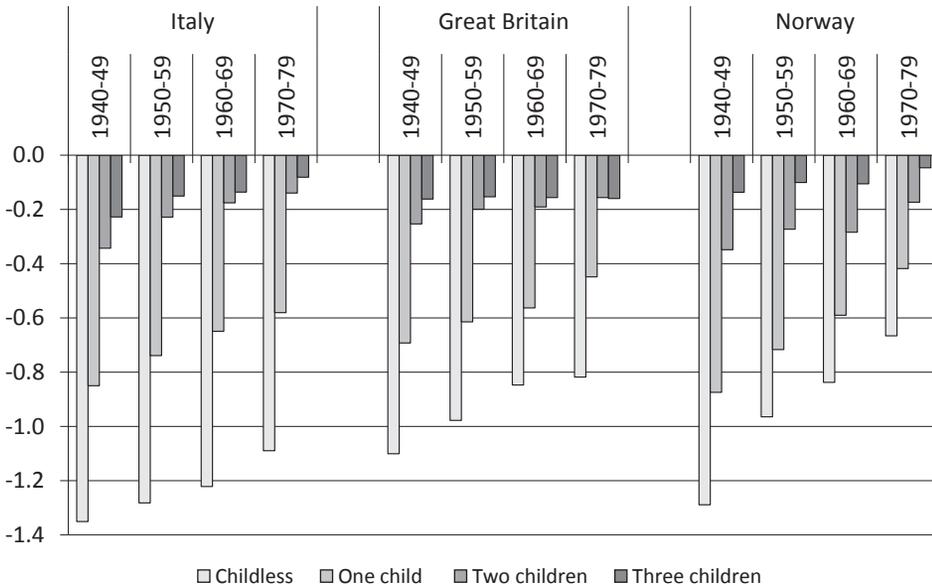
**Table 9: Simulated completed fertility at age 45 by union dissolution and cohort**

| Country:     | Italy  |           | Great Britain |           | Norway |           |
|--------------|--------|-----------|---------------|-----------|--------|-----------|
| First union: | intact | dissolved | intact        | dissolved | intact | dissolved |
| 1940–49      | 2.04   | 1.51      | 2.08          | 1.88      | 2.21   | 1.85      |
| 1950–59      | 1.91   | 1.39      | 2.02          | 1.77      | 2.20   | 1.82      |
| 1960–69      | 1.80   | 1.27      | 2.04          | 1.77      | 2.33   | 1.91      |
| 1970–79      | 1.74   | 1.22      | 1.95          | 1.65      | 2.18   | 1.80      |

**Note:** Estimates from life histories of 1,000,000 women in each cohort for each country generated by microsimulation.

*Union dissolution effects at different parities:* In general, union instability reduces completed family size. However, the effect of union dissolution lessens with an increasing number of children already born in the union (see Figure 8). Women dissolving their first union before a first birth occurs (if any) have about one child less than women whose first unions do not dissolve. This difference diminishes not only at higher parities (the higher the number of children already born) but, in contrast to the overall stable difference, also shrinks across cohorts. Compared to their predecessors, recent cohorts start their first unions more often as cohabitation, enter parenthood at later ages, and dissolve their unions more often childless. Hence, the timing of first births in relation to union formation and dissolution seems crucial for completed fertility levels.

**Figure 8: Simulated difference in number of children of dissolved unions to intact unions, by cohort and country**

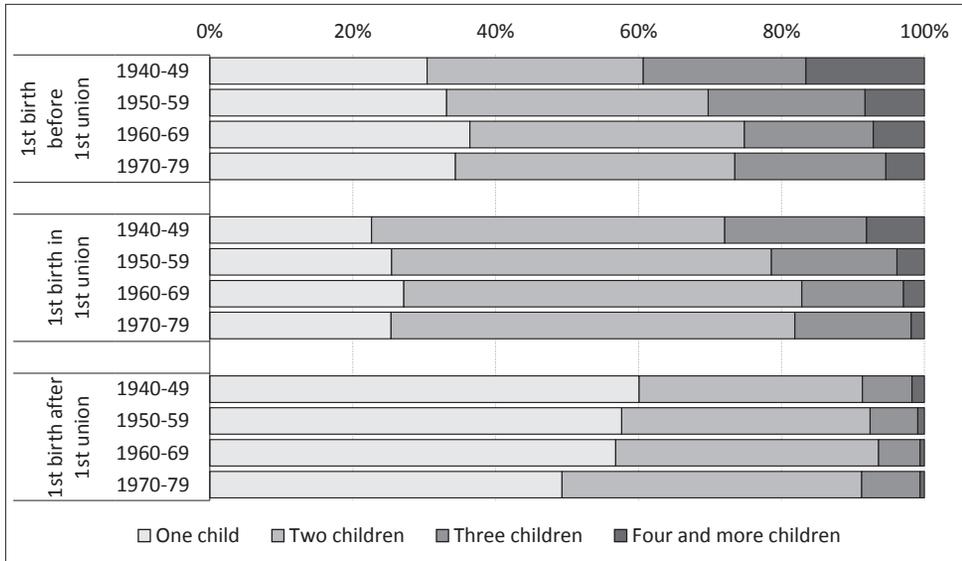


**Note:** Estimates from life histories of 1,000,000 women in each cohort for each country generated by microsimulation.

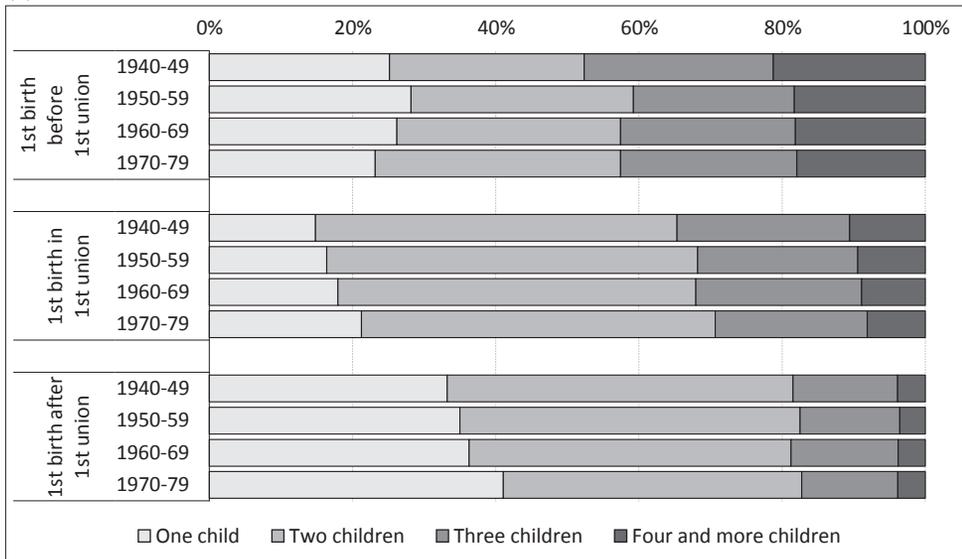
*Timing of first birth:* Figure 9 differentiates between populations by timing of first births in relation to the first unions: (a) women experiencing their first births before a first union, if any; (b) women having their births after entering into a first union; (c) women with first births after the first union dissolved. Compared to other groups, women with a first birth in the first union most often have two children. In contrast, women with a first birth after dissolution of the first union show higher shares with only one child. Furthermore, women with pre-union first births exhibit elevated shares with only one child but at the same time higher shares having four or more children. However, the simulated populations in Figure 9 differ considerably by the ages at which these first births occur, where populations with a first pre-union birth are on average 4 to 6 years younger (and increasing across cohorts) than populations with a first birth in the first union, and another 4 to 5 years younger than populations where the first births arrive only after the first union dissolved. The fertility differences between these simulated sub-populations can largely be attributed to the different ages at which these first births occur. However, in all countries the simulated number of births of populations with first births before or after the first union is considerably further reduced by factors other than the differences in the start of childbearing. For instance, if women with pre-union first births were not younger, they would on average have less children than those with first births in first union.

**Figure 9: Simulated number of children by union status at first birth**

(a) Italy



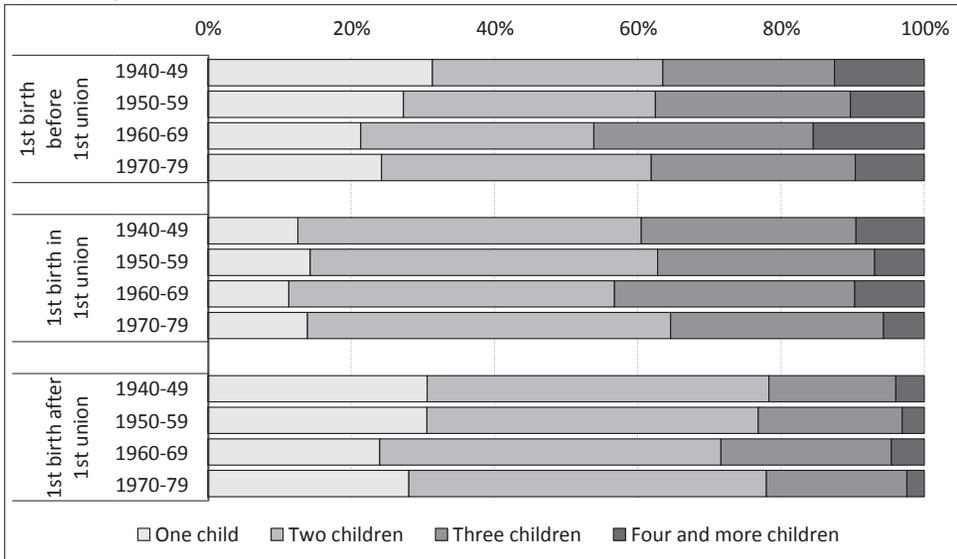
(b) Great Britain



**Note:** Estimates from life histories of 1,000,000 women in each cohort for each country generated by microsimulation.

**Figure 9 continued: Simulated number of children by union status at first birth**

(c) Norway



**Note:** Estimates from life histories of 1,000,000 women in each cohort for each country generated by microsimulation.

*Considering age and marriage:* A younger age at the entry into the first partnership (union formation) allows more time to re-partner and to have further children. Differences between women in stable unions and separated women are largest when the woman’s first partnership was established in her mid-20s. If union formation happened rather late, a separation does not matter that much for completed fertility. Differences are rather low after an age of 35 years at least. Furthermore, divorce has a larger negative impact on fertility than dissolution of unmarried cohabitation as the latter are on average dissolved at shorter durations than marital unions. Findings are similar for all cohorts and countries.

## 7.4 Re-partnering and family types

Union instability may also enhance fertility via re-partnering: union dissolution produces a pool of persons who may enter new partnerships and have additional children in stepfamilies. Indeed, we find that birth rates are elevated when the prospective child is the first or second in the new partnership. However, it is only if separation takes place after the second birth and if really all women re-partner that additional childbearing would (almost) compensate for births lost due to union disruption.

Indeed, childbearing across partnerships, though increasing across cohorts, is still rare in Italy, Great Britain, and Norway. According to our simulations for the

1970–79 birth cohort, only 2, 7, and 8 per cent of Italian, British, and Norwegian mothers with at least two children, respectively, are expected to bear these children in two or more partnerships. However, adding the shares of mothers with combinations of in- and out-of-union births, which might also be the result of childbearing with two or more non-coresiding fathers, significantly raises the latter figures to 11, 32, and 21 per cent for Italian, British, and Norwegian simulated family life courses, respectively.

Another family type draws the attention of policy-makers more frequently as it is often associated with increased vulnerability, namely single mothers. Lone motherhood might arise from non-union births or might be brought by union dissolution. Our simulations indicate an increasing prevalence of single motherhood across cohorts from 10 to 20 per cent for Italian mothers, and from around 30 to 40 and even 50 per cent for Norwegian and British mothers, respectively. Apart from the higher number of out-of-union births to British mothers, this dramatic increase across cohorts is largely driven by expanding union dissolution. In addition, the number of mothers experiencing more than one single-motherhood spell is expected to increase across cohorts from about four per cent of mothers in the 1940s birth cohort to ten and respectively 15 per cent for Norwegian and British mothers.

British data could furthermore be used to examine difference between women by education. Educational differences in family experience were relatively small for British women born in the 1940s. Disparities, however, are growing for more recent cohorts. On average, lower and medium-educated women experience(d) a stronger increase in births out of union and in cohabitation, a greater increase in union instability, more spells of lone parenthood and thus a longer overall time spent as lone mothers than more highly educated women. One might think that the differences across educational groups might be driven by differences in the timing of family formation. But even for the same age at first birth, the share of mothers that have always been partnered shrinks in particular in the low and medium educated groups of women. Among low educated mothers, the share of lone mothers who gave birth out of union and experienced a union dissolution rises nonetheless across cohorts.

## **7.5 Conclusion: Re-partnering only partly compensates effects of separation**

Family dynamics are changing in Europe with significant implications on the size and composition of families. In fact, a variety of family forms have emerged along the traditional nuclear family with children: unmarried co-residing couples with and without children, single-parent families, patchwork/blended families with children from more than one partnership, etc.

The microsimulation presented in this chapter studied the impact of changing partnership behaviours on completed fertility levels and its implications on the distribution of family forms over time. The effect of the increasing prevalence of union

dissolution on completed fertility levels was investigated for Italy, Norway, and Britain, three countries with different value systems. The estimated net effect of union instability was to decrease completed fertility on average by about 0.5 children for Italian cohorts, by about 0.2–0.33 children for British ones, and by about 0.4 children for Norwegian cohorts. But the magnitude of the difference depends on the timing of union formation, union type, and family stage separation. Moreover, the effect is not uniform across the population, as union dissolution will add additional children via re-partnering for some women, while it will curtail fertility for others, implying a more dispersed parity distribution.

The results of the microsimulation can be used to draw inferences on future fertility levels. If union formation and childbearing are delayed further, future fertility levels will decrease regardless of whether unions endure or are dissolved. Furthermore, if union dissolution becomes more common among childless women or women with one child, and if ages at first unions get closer to mid and late twenties, the negative impact of union dissolution on fertility might be reinforced. A continued increasing prevalence of more unstable unmarried cohabitations, which are usually dissolved at shorter durations, might imply lower parities at separations, but also allow more time to re-partner. Nonetheless, even if all women would re-partner the results of the microsimulation indicate that additional childbearing in subsequent unions would only partly compensate for the births lost due to union disruption.

These results have some implications for the future of families. If the share of mothers having a union disruption is expected to further increase across cohorts, vulnerability of families with children might also increase because single parenthood often entails vulnerability. Last but not least, the results once more emphasise the high relevance of education. Findings demonstrated that less educated women experience a stronger increase in union instability, more spells of lone parenthood, and thus a longer overall time spent as lone mothers than more highly educated women.

## 8 How will current and future refugee flows affect future vulnerability of families?

The present chapter discusses the vulnerability of immigrant families with children using insights from the literature, focus group discussions, and the expert questionnaire.<sup>28</sup> The main interest are the expected short- and long-term consequences of current and future refugee flows.

### 8.1 Vulnerability of immigrant families and children

Migration itself often improves the living conditions of people and does thus not necessarily lead to vulnerability. Nevertheless, missing knowledge of local context, insufficient linguistic skills, legal barriers, missing social networks, and other obstacles can lead to exclusion, segregation, and marginalisation (IOM, 2015). In focus groups, the situation of migrant families was discussed with different intensity and with different connotations in our research settings, clearly reflecting differences in migration patterns between the countries.

In *Stockholm*, being a migrant was not perceived as very problematic. Although it was noted that some immigrants might have lower incomes, it was emphasised that this is due to missing education and/or unemployment but not because of immigration per se. Experts agreed that the overwhelming majority of immigrants would adopt to Swedish lifestyles very well after a while. An establishment allowance and support programmes for refugees provide good incentives. Language deficits of immigrant families were highlighted as presenting a challenge for the child-care and education system (e.g., no equal chances when parents cannot help with homework in Swedish).

In contrast to the focus groups in Stockholm, the issue of migrants, and especially of refugees, was seen as difficult in the discussions in *Vienna* and *Bern*. In Austria, the situation of minor refugees without parents was portrayed as extremely vulnerable. Moreover, the issue of specific ethnic (migrant) communities was discussed and presented as a more general problem. One expert noted that some of these communities live somewhat separated from the rest of the society, with their own value systems, rules, and rituals. In Switzerland, refugee children arriving without parents and socio-economically disadvantaged immigrant groups were also mentioned. In contrast to immigrants from Germany, one expert assumed, those from southern Europe might be among the first who lose their jobs in case of another economic downturn. It was emphasised that early childhood education is especially important for the integration of foreign-language speaking children, also to avoid the reproduction of vulnerability across generations. In addition, specific

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<sup>28</sup> This chapter is a revised and slightly extended version of the corresponding chapter in Riederer et al. (2017). Focus group results have partly also been presented in Mynarska et al. (2015). Further analyses are presented in Riederer (2017; manuscript in preparation available from the author upon request).

challenges for schools were mentioned as some teachers are confronted with school classes primarily consisting of children with immigrant background. Two specific immigrant groups were only brought up in *Bern*: First, illegal immigrants without a residence permit who probably suffer from the highest vulnerability risks because they are not allowed to work and always in danger to be arrested. Second, expatriates who are usually well off in economic terms. Even this group may be confronted with specific aspects of vulnerability (e.g., a lack of social support in critical situations due to small private networks). Furthermore, children of expatriates show higher risks of social isolation. Extremely vulnerable cases are multi-located families in case of separation or divorce.

The focus groups in *Madrid* and *Warsaw* have in common that emigration was a main reference point of discussions on migration. In Spain, it was noted that young people migrate out of Spain, leaving their elderly parents behind. In Poland, experts discussed the situation of children who are left behind when one or both parents leave to work abroad. If one parent works abroad, this is associated with a difficult psychological situation with potential problems in the family which might lead to a divorce. If both parents work abroad and, for instance, the grandparents are looking after a child, legal problems add to the picture on top of all other problems (as grandparents are not the legal guardians).

Focusing on the European Union rather than single nations, the issue of migration was not discussed in detail in *Brussels*. Experts mentioned, however, that debates about large families are sometimes overlapped by discussions about migrant families and ethnic minorities (e.g., Roma families in eastern Europe). Some migrant communities were also related to traditional gender roles and missing education, thereby limiting personal freedom and well-being in particular for females.

Despite local differences, experts generally emphasised that a migration background might complicate already difficult situations. For instance, single parents or large families of migrant origin might be in a particularly difficult situation, mostly because of problems in finding jobs (especially when poorly educated), having lower income and due to lack of social network. Problems related to local language and context were discussed in many focus groups as well, also with regard raising children (e.g., not being able to communicate with teachers or to help children with school homework). As the focus groups were conducted before the massive inflow of people into Europe in late summer and fall 2015 (see Table A.1 in the Appendix), asylum seekers and refugees were not among the most prominent topics in focus group discussions. The so-called “refugee crisis” could not have been imagined by our participants. Asylum seekers and refugees are, however, a very specific group of immigrants.

Emigration is always a huge challenge as almost everything in life changes (climate, language, culture, social relations, status etc.). Every person emigrating perceives an affective loss (Carta et al., 2005). For the specific group of immigrants who are fleeing from danger, however, the psycho-social process of loss, grief and

change is even more complex. Specific stressors for forced migrants comprise traumatic experiences both in the country of origin as well as during an often difficult and risky journey. Children get often separated from their family. But even if parents are with them, they are frequently not able to care about the psychological demands of their children (e.g., Eide & Hjern, 2013; Pumariega, Rothe, & Pumariega, 2005). In addition, interviews with officials, waiting and living in refugee camps with restricted opportunities for privacy are a burden and often frustrating (Wenzel & Kinigadner, 2016). After a successful emigration, mental health problems, low living standards and problems with acculturation remain (Carta et al., 2005). Families and children of asylum seekers and refugees are usually in highly vulnerable situations.

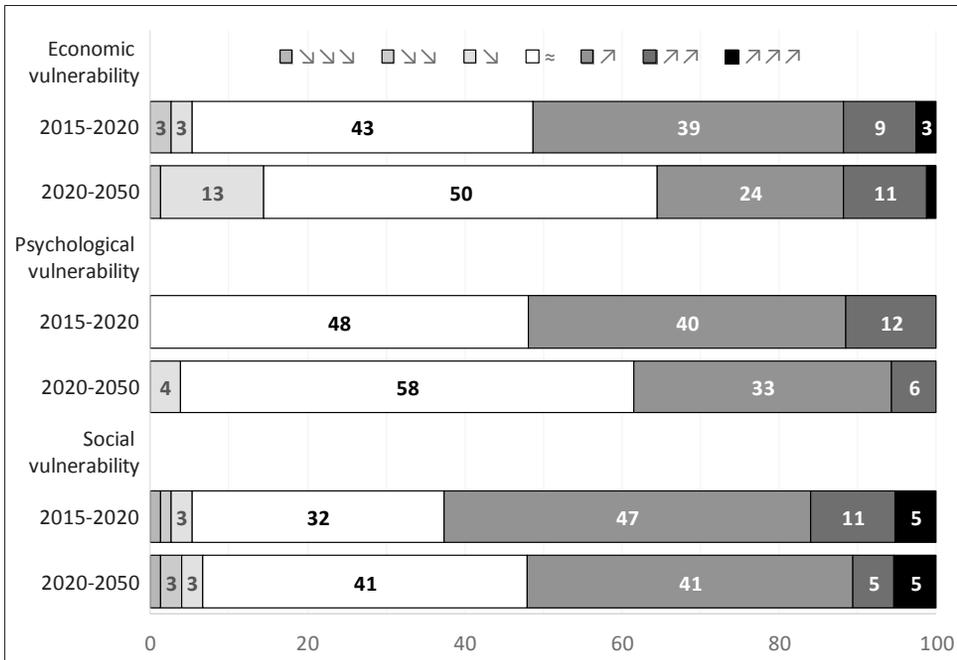
## **8.2 Expected consequences of refugee flows for future vulnerability of families with children**

The expert questionnaire has been conducted between December 2015 and March 2016 when the “refugee crisis” was a dominant theme in public discourse. Experts were requested to assess the effect of the current and future flows of refugees on future vulnerability of families with children. Results are represented in Figure 10. The figure differentiates between three dimensions of vulnerability (economic, psychological, and social) and two periods of time (2015–2020 and 2020–2050).

At least in the short run (until 2020) the majority of experts assumed increasing shares of vulnerable families. Nevertheless, a very large part of the experts did not think that the current and future refugee flows would affect the economic and psychological vulnerability of families with children, especially in the long run (until 2050). Summing up, between 43 and 58 per cent of respondents expected the share of families suffering from economic or psychological vulnerability in Europe to remain more or less unaffected by current or future refugee flows. At least in the case of psychological vulnerability, this might be somewhat surprising as refugees trying to escape war and expulsion often struggle with psychological problems. It is, however, also unknown how many of them (will) have children.

Compared to estimates regarding economic and psychological vulnerability, the ones for impacts of refugee flows on future social vulnerability are somewhat different. With 32 (41) per cent of the experts assuming no consequences for social vulnerability of families in Europe between 2015 and 2020 (2020 and 2050), the numbers for social vulnerability are smaller than the corresponding ones for economic and psychological vulnerability. At least some of the respondents seem to be worried about social vulnerability, especially in the short run. Around 47 per cent of the experts assumed a slight increase of social vulnerability until 2020, and an additional 11 and 5 per cent a moderate or even a strong increase (Figure 10). Given the definition of social vulnerability in the questionnaire, it can be assumed that these experts expected stigmatisation and discrimination to grow, probably resulting in a lack of social support.

**Figure 10: Expected consequences of current and future refugee flows on shares of vulnerable families with children in Europe**



**Note:**  $N_{\text{economic vulnerability}} = 76$ ,  $N_{\text{psychological vulnerability}} = 52$ ,  $N_{\text{social vulnerability}} = 75$ . This figure differentiates between estimates that the share of vulnerable families will strongly decrease (▽▽▽), moderately decrease (▽▽), slightly decrease (▽), stay roughly the same (○), slightly increase (△), moderately increase (△△), or strongly increase (△△△) due to current and future flows of refugees.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

Table 10 compares expectations of practitioners with those of scientists. Taken short- and long-term estimates together, it turned out that practitioners seemed to be more optimistic with regard to the effects of refugees on economic as well as social vulnerability. Though only small percentages of experts thought that vulnerability might decrease, these fractions are a little larger with practitioners than with scientist. Practitioners who are often working with vulnerable families, however, did *not* assume any decreases in psychological vulnerability with refugees while some scientists did, at least in the long-term perspective (2020–2050). Practitioners may have more (personal) experience with refugees and their psychological health problems than different groups of scientists have. The difference is striking: while almost half of practitioners expected psychological vulnerability to increase between 2020 and 2050 due to refugee flows, only one in five scientists did so.

**Table 10: Expected consequences of refugee flows on future shares of vulnerable families with children by practitioners and scientists**

(a) Numbers of experts

| Development of...    | Economic vulnerability |    |    | Psychological vulnerability |    |    | Social vulnerability |    |    |
|----------------------|------------------------|----|----|-----------------------------|----|----|----------------------|----|----|
|                      | ↘                      | ≈  | ↗  | ↘                           | ≈  | ↗  | ↘                    | ≈  | ↗  |
| 2015–2020            |                        |    |    |                             |    |    |                      |    |    |
| Experts (total)      | 4                      | 33 | 39 | 0                           | 25 | 27 | 4                    | 24 | 47 |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 3                      | 10 | 11 | 0                           | 15 | 18 | 2                    | 6  | 19 |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 1                      | 23 | 28 | 0                           | 10 | 9  | 2                    | 18 | 28 |
| 2020–2050            |                        |    |    |                             |    |    |                      |    |    |
| Experts (total)      | 11                     | 38 | 27 | 2                           | 30 | 20 | 5                    | 31 | 39 |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 4                      | 12 | 8  | 0                           | 17 | 16 | 4                    | 8  | 15 |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 7                      | 26 | 19 | 2                           | 13 | 4  | 1                    | 23 | 24 |

(b) Share of experts (in %)

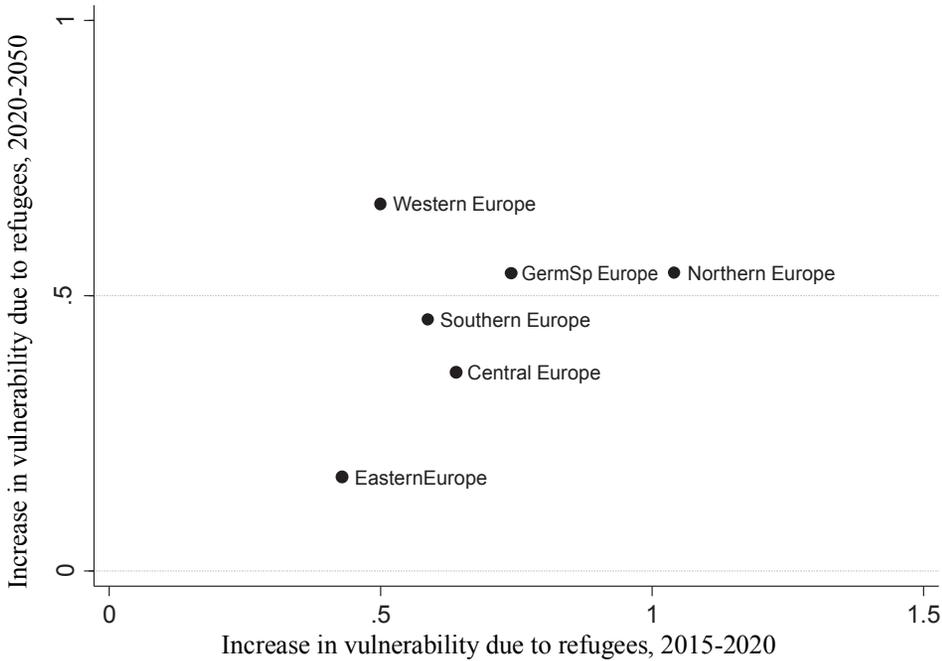
| Development of...    | Economic vulnerability (N) |    |    |      | Psychological vulnerability (N) |    |    |      | Social vulnerability (N) |    |    |      |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----|----|------|---------------------------------|----|----|------|--------------------------|----|----|------|
|                      | ↘                          | ≈  | ↗  |      | ↘                               | ≈  | ↗  |      | ↘                        | ≈  | ↗  |      |
| 2015–2020            |                            |    |    |      |                                 |    |    |      |                          |    |    |      |
| Experts (total)      | 5                          | 43 | 51 | (76) | 0                               | 48 | 52 | (52) | 5                        | 32 | 63 | (75) |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 13                         | 42 | 46 | (24) | 0                               | 45 | 55 | (33) | 7                        | 22 | 70 | (27) |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 2                          | 44 | 54 | (52) | 0                               | 53 | 47 | (19) | 4                        | 38 | 58 | (48) |
| 2020–2050            |                            |    |    |      |                                 |    |    |      |                          |    |    |      |
| Experts (total)      | 14                         | 50 | 36 | (76) | 4                               | 58 | 38 | (52) | 7                        | 41 | 52 | (75) |
| <i>Practitioners</i> | 17                         | 50 | 33 | (24) | 0                               | 52 | 48 | (33) | 15                       | 30 | 56 | (27) |
| <i>Scientists</i>    | 13                         | 50 | 37 | (52) | 11                              | 68 | 21 | (19) | 2                        | 48 | 50 | (48) |

**Note:** This table differentiates between estimates that the share of vulnerable families will decrease (↘), stay roughly the same (≈), or increase (↗) between 2015 and 2020 or 2020 and 2050, respectively.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors' own computations.

European countries may not be affected by refugee flows to the same degree. Figure 11 thus, finally, presents average estimates of future vulnerability development for the six European regions already described in Chapter 4 (ratings for different dimensions of vulnerability are pooled in this figure). The positive values in the figure indicate that expectations of increases in vulnerability due to current and future refugee flows in all regions across Europe. The average expected increase of vulnerability is highest for Nordic and German speaking countries and lowest for eastern European countries.

**Figure 11: Average expected consequences of current and future refugee flows on shares of vulnerable families with children in Europe by six regions**



**Note:** The figure gives mean ratings across three dimensions of vulnerability for six European regions (see Chapter 4 and/or Table A.2 in Appendix). It indicates what experts think about how the share of vulnerable families will develop due to current and future flows of refugees. The original scale ranges from -3 (strong decrease) to + 3 (strong increase). The positive mean values shown in the graph indicate that, on average, experts expected future vulnerability to increase due to refugees in all regions.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey, authors’ own computations.

Indeed, the share of experts assuming negative consequences (increases in vulnerability) from current refugee flows until 2020 was largest in German-speaking and Nordic countries. Increases in economic and social vulnerability were less often predicted for eastern countries than for other parts of Europe. Psychological vulnerability increases, on the other hand, were less frequently expected in southern Europe. For the long run development between 2020 and 2050, experts for German-speaking countries and Nordic countries were again more pessimistic with regard to economic vulnerability than others. With regard to psychological and social vulnerability, however, experts for western and southern European countries were most worried, respectively.

### 8.3 The vulnerability of the displaced: a specific challenge for social cohesion

The present chapter discussed the vulnerability of migrant families and focused on expected effects of asylum seekers and refugees on future vulnerability in Europe. Findings of focus groups and the expert questionnaire both contributed valuable insights about communalities and differences between different types of immigrants and between different regions in Europe.

In focus groups, migration background and in particular language deficits were first and foremost seen as factors adding difficulties to already otherwise vulnerable families (e.g., making it harder for single parents to get informal childcare or to find a good job). While specific groups of immigrants might face different kinds of problems, the risk of social vulnerability due to small networks (or even isolation) is relevant to all of them (even for well-paid expatriates and their children). Nevertheless, vulnerability of immigrants and ethnic minorities is often multidimensional: economic hardship, psychological symptoms and missing social embeddedness in the host country often go hand in hand. Specific risk factors might add to difficult situations. For refugees, for instance, traumatic events may be of special importance and unaccompanied minors might need most support.

Summarising experts' assessments of effects of current and future flows of refugees on future shares of vulnerable families with children in Europe, there are at least three messages. *First*, it seems that experts expected more negative consequences in the short run (until 2020) than in the long run (until 2050). A share of experts explicitly believes that in particular economic vulnerability of refugees will not have longstanding consequences (i.e., that it will decrease again after an increase in the first years).

*Second*, there were regional differences in the expected effects of refugee flows. These differences are largely in line with the existing variety of prior migration histories of European countries and the affectedness by the arrival of displaced persons and asylum applications in 2015. Partly, these differences were also reflected in focus group discussions. Short-term consequences were expected to be larger in German speaking and northern European countries. But many of them were also among the main target countries of hundreds or tens of thousands of people seeking for protection in 2015 (Eurostat, 2016a). Nevertheless, they are characterised by different migration regimes (Carta et al., 2005; Mau & Verwiebe, 2010). Critical views on immigrant parallel societies and worries about the future were primarily discussed in focus groups in Vienna and Bern while experts in Stockholm were more optimistic about integration processes.

*Third*, it were not the future prospects for economic or psychological vulnerability of families that were perceived most negative, but the effects of refugee flows on the social vulnerability of families with children. Social vulnerability refers to stigmatisation, discrimination and a lack of social support. This result can be interpreted as a warning that social cohesion in European societies may be at risk—a

thought that should probably stimulate thinking about policies to avoid such a future development. Long-term integration policies are necessary as a large part of asylum seekers might want to stay in Europe (e.g., Buber-Ennser et al., 2016). Policies need to strengthen the public confidence and societal trust in migrants to improve the societal climate (Dalla Zuanna, Hein, & Pastore, 2015).

## 9 What may be future consequences of the ongoing “gender revolution”?

Gender roles have been a relevant topic throughout this book. They were identified as one of the most important topics in the stakeholder workshop as well as a major driver of future vulnerability of families in focus groups. The same is true for work–family reconciliation policies. The present chapter will discuss these issues and their relevance for the future of families once more by means of a thought experiment and an agent-based model approach.<sup>29</sup>

### 9.1 The gender revolution

Since the 1960s, gender roles have undergone dramatic changes (cf. Oláh et al., 2014). First and foremost, women’s enrolment in higher education and labour force participation have increased tremendously. Meanwhile, female graduates from European universities are outnumbering their male fellows. As a result, women’s employment aspirations have also changed. The housewife is no longer the leading role model. Women rarely withdraw from the labour market when they marry and with an increasing frequency they continue to work for pay after they become mothers. The female role was expanded and reaches far beyond the private sphere of the home. The transformation of the male role seems to be less profound. Still, men’s activities are often perceived to be focused on the public spheres outside the home (employment, politics, etc.). Nevertheless, females became serious competitors in public life. Furthermore, male responsibilities inside the home are no longer restricted to economic provision for family members. At least among younger men, it seems that fathers increasingly want to intensify their involvement in the family. Until today, however, changes in male engagement in childcare and (in particular) in household labour does not reflect the grown female engagement in life domains outside the family. Thus, several authors diagnose that the “gender revolution” is still incomplete (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 2009; Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Lappegård, 2015).

Societal changes of the past decades were, however, not restricted to gender roles. Numerous developments in public, economic, and private life could be observed.<sup>30</sup> Among others, fertility levels decreased. For a long time, economic and societal progress was therefore assumed to inevitably lead to lower fertility. Mean-

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<sup>29</sup> The presented thought experiment which is the main topic of this chapter, has been described in detail in Riederer et al. (2017). The agent-based model developed by Thomas Fent and Bernhard Rengs is only briefly presented here; details can be found in Winkler-Dworak et al. (2015).

<sup>30</sup> For instance, the development of service societies, globalisation, technological change (internet etc.), the fall of the Iron Curtain, or the foundation and expansion of the European Union have all shaped life in European societies.

while, however, several highly developed countries experienced a recovery of fertility. Some of the existing explanations for this development refer to changes in gender role attitudes.<sup>31</sup> For instance, McDonald (2000) explicitly understands low fertility as result of misfits between high gender equity in some and low gender equity in other social institutions. He concludes that higher levels of gender equity in family-oriented social institutions could prevent very low fertility. While some authors highlight public support for parental employment and a reduction of work–family conflict, Goldscheider and colleagues (2015)—though not dismissing the relevance of policies—emphasise male engagement in the family as central aspect. The conclusion, however, is pretty much the same: a better compliance of more progressive gender roles at the individual or household level with advancements of gender roles at the societal level could have led (and lead) to higher fertility again (e.g., Arpino, Esping-Andersen, & Pessin, 2015; Esping-Andersen & Billari, 2015).<sup>32</sup> The negative effect of increasing gender equality on fertility at the beginning would change and become a positive one at a point where gender equality is widespread enough among the population to trigger changes in societal institutions and an adaptation of welfare state policies. Though our main interest is not fertility but vulnerability of families with children, these theories constitute the background of the following analyses. All these changes affect family vulnerability and well-being of children as well. Thus, we will again refer to them later in this chapter.

## 9.2 Starting a thought experiment

Building upon expert knowledge gained in focus groups and questionnaire studies, we want to think about the relevance of gender roles for future vulnerability of families with children. The aim is to explore consequences of prevailing gender roles under different economic and societal circumstances. We start with the most pessimistic scenario (a dystopia) and the most optimistic scenario (a utopia) as reference states of the future. While in the pessimistic scenario, economic, psychological, and social vulnerability are all extremely high, there is no vulnerability at all in the optimistic scenario.

*The dystopian scenario:* Consider a long-lasting and severe economic crisis. Unemployment is extremely high and the labour market becomes highly hostile. There are high demands from employers with respect to required skills, working hours, employees' mobility and availability. As labour supply is high, employers can freely choose whom they want to hire, and fire workers without any problems as the next ones are already standing in line waiting to be employed. Therefore, on

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<sup>31</sup> For other explanations see, among others, Goldstein, Sobotka, and Jasilioniene (2009), Myrskylä, Kohler, and Billari (2009), or Lesthaeghe (2014).

<sup>32</sup> Progress of egalitarian values may induce institutional changes (e.g., in terms of better childcare arrangements, evolution of social norms towards working mothers) that facilitate the compatibility of parenting and pursuing a professional career. Thus, parenthood becomes affordable with regard to dual careers, money and time.

the one hand employers' expectations increase while on the other hand employees happily accept even very demanding jobs at low salaries. Consequently, wages generally remain at a low level. Only a very small fraction of the society—with some highly specific skills or otherwise privileged—can make large amounts of money, making this inequality in income particularly visible. The working environment is characterised by high levels of stress and competition. While availability of employees is expected (in relation to time and place of work), no flexibility is offered to them, even if needed. The employers do not recognise a need for work–life balance and employees are generally exploited. Spatial mobility (or even economically driven migration) might become a necessity for many people.

In such a difficult setting, most families are in an adverse economic situation or face high economic uncertainty, at the very least. Young people have difficulties entering the labour market and keeping their jobs. Consequently, starting a family becomes really difficult. Providing for a family gets to be a real challenge. In most families, only one person is employed if any. The severe economic crisis would impact not only on the economic well-being of families but also on their social and psychological well-being. Economic hardship would increase levels of stress and conflicts within families. With difficult labour market conditions, members of the society would compete for scarce resources and social relations would deteriorate. Any “outsiders” would probably be perceived as a threat, turning the society towards a less tolerant one. Parenting behaviours also change in this scenario. As families have limited economic resources, they are not always able to invest in children. The majority of parents might try to do everything to sustain a decent level of living for their children. Some other parents, however, will immediately start neglecting their children to have some money to spend for themselves. As the pressure for parents rises, investing in children (both in terms of time and money) might cease to be a priority for all parents in the long run as they have to focus first and foremost on providing basic economic security. As a consequence, relationships between parents and their children also deteriorate.

In the case of such a pessimistic scenario, (almost) all families would be at risk regardless of the gender roles they lived. Women's employment could naturally improve the financial situation of families but with extremely high unemployment it might be essentially impossible. In most cases, women would not be able to work even if they strongly desired to (nor would men's employment be universal). With low salaries and high labour market insecurity for both genders, economic vulnerability would be experienced almost universally regardless of people's lifestyle preferences. Gender role attitudes might thus be of secondary relevance.

*The utopian scenario:* Imagine prosperity is incontrovertible and sustainable (stable and without any potential threat for nature and social environment). It means a virtual lack of unemployment and overall high incomes, observed in a long-term perspective. Work is available to people of different skills and working conditions generally improve. This would have a positive impact on numerous life dimensions. With the economy developing, the well-being of employees becomes important—

not only their productivity—and employers need to create good working environments to attract the best workers. As an important element of individual well-being, the work–life balance becomes crucial for employers as much as for employees. The use of modern technology allows for higher productivity without putting additional stress on employees and also allowing for their flexibility, when needed. It also diminishes a need for employees’ mobility and physical availability, allowing e.g., for tele-working. Spatial mobility related to work is a choice (with no negative impact on the well-being of families) rather than a necessity. People feel economically secure. The salary in one’s first job is sufficient to start a new family.

In the optimistic scenario, all cultural and social changes also act against different types of vulnerability. With emphasis on work–life balance and economic security, people spend more time in the family and in their social networks. Their social ties become closer and more meaningful: they are socially embedded, able to receive emotional as well as practical support from different sources. Nobody is treated as competitor in the society, as there is enough work for everybody, and consequently social networks become also more diversified, including people from different backgrounds and of different characteristics. This means that there is a larger array of available options for emotional and practical support (more alternative solutions, if needed). The result is an open and tolerant society characterised by social cohesion. Generally, levels of stress and levels of conflict in families are low and the quality of intimate relationships is thus high. People are able to invest time and money in the well-being of their families and in their children’s development. With enough resources, they can create an excellent environment for their offspring.

With excellent economic prosperity, financial security of all individuals can be assured, regardless of their gender role attitudes and preferred work–care arrangements. With (virtually) unlimited economic resources, the welfare state could introduce additional measures to protect families from any of the risks associated with both lifestyles, no matter if a woman wants to stay at home with a child or be active in the labour market. With high salaries and family-friendly employers, both partners could flexibly organise their work to have enough time for their family life and leisure. The welfare state could also afford to offer high-quality childcare for the time span both parents are working. In the case of single parents who are working, high salary and wide availability of high-quality childcare would also prevent any form of vulnerability. If a woman wants to stay at home with her children (less egalitarian preferences), the economic situation of her family is not problematic either. The salary of the husband is high and governments could additionally afford to pay some form of a salary for stay-at-home mums, recognising their workload in the private sphere. Subsidies for single mothers staying at home with their children could be even higher and facilities of high-quality childcare providing them with some leisure time could still exist. Together, these measures would prevent any form of vulnerability.

Taken together, full flexibility could be offered in the utopian scenario, such that each family could follow their preferred options, in line with their gender role attitudes, without being exposed to a risk of vulnerability. After all, gender role attitudes might not matter much if almost unlimited resources allow for a broad and flexible policy and a tolerant society accepts the diversity of existing family forms.

### 9.3 Introducing gender roles and policy

Building upon knowledge gained in our expert studies, we discussed a dystopian as well as a utopian scenario. In both scenarios, preferences for gender roles were hardly relevant for the situation of families. In the case of the pessimistic scenario, (almost) all families would be at risk of vulnerability regardless of the gender roles they lived. In the case of the optimistic scenario, resources allow each family to follow their preferred gender roles without being exposed to any severe risks. The experts participating in our studies, however, did not assume that such extreme scenarios of the future will come true. In medium scenarios, gender roles may be highly relevant.

Assume now that the economy remains relatively stable at an average level, with some moderate growth and occasional but limited ups and downs. People experience unemployment although its levels are not high (at least not for longer periods). Incomes remain at a relatively good level. It is possible to accumulate high income in a household although it requires much effort. In addition, governments cannot afford implementing all policy measures and need to be selective in what they dedicate money to. Resources are to some extent restricted at the micro as well as at the macro level. Given such a situation, we outline two further scenarios that differ with respect to gender roles in the next section. Thereby, we discuss which policy measures could meet the varying demands that are associated with specific gender role arrangements.

*The gender equity scenario:* Assume first that egalitarian gender role attitudes are spread universally in society. High participation of women in the labour force is the rule. When long run policies are in line with predominantly egalitarian attitudes and policies support female labour force participation, most families will be financially secured as both partners will be active in the labour market. With two salaries, families are able to afford a decent/good standard of living. Even if one partner is unemployed for some time, the family is not immediately pushed into poverty. If a long-term unemployment occurs, however, it increases the family's financial vulnerability substantially. Unemployment benefits will remain low since priority is given to reconciliation policies. To allow for both partners to participate in paid employment, high-quality childcare options are widely available. They are also crucial for single parents who have to rely on institutional childcare even more.

Assume childcare is a top priority to governments. It is available for small children, but various options are created for children at school age as well: after school and during holidays. Childcare is also an issue for companies. In the race for best

talents, at least large successful companies offer high-quality childcare at or near the workplace. Additionally, flexible working arrangements are promoted—including part-time jobs and telework—to allow parents to organise childcare with even more ease. With high gender equity, men are involved in childcare and it is as likely for men to work part-time as it is for women. At medium-level salaries, however, this will likely be not very common for financial reasons (to avoid a risk of financial vulnerability).

**Table 11: The discussed future scenarios**

| Scenario:  | Dystopia   | Utopia                             | Gender equity                                     | Male-breadwinner   |
|--|--|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Economic development                               | long-lasting crisis  | stable growth                      | medium  | medium   |
| Social/cultural development                        | social conflict  | social cohesion                    | medium  | medium   |
| Gender role attitudes                              | mixed  | mixed                              | egalitarian views dominant                        | traditional views dominant                                   |
| Policy measures                                    | none; not affordable   | comprehensive; everything possible | support work–family reconciliation for both sexes | support for stay-at-home mums and traditional families       |
| Work–family balance                                | irrelevant   | no problem                         | dependent on effectiveness of policies            | separation of tasks in couples; difficult for single parents |
| Well-being/vulnerability of families with children | high levels of economic, psychological, and social vulnerability | high well-being, no vulnerability  | degree of vulnerability depending on policies     | degree of vulnerability depending on policies                |

Balancing work and family life remains the most important challenge for the majority of parents. With work being an important part of the lives of both men and women and with childcare largely outsourced, it is necessary to find ways to spend high-quality time with one’s children. It is equally important to secure good, warm contacts in families and relations between generations. An important challenge is also to promote a work–life balance among employers, who—given the medium level of economic development—have relatively high expectations of their employees (in terms of their productivity: expected skills, working time and availability). In other words, with economic vulnerability addressed, efforts must be made to avoid social and psychological vulnerability.

In the egalitarian society, new challenges also arise for single parents after a divorce. The respective legislation will decide about shared custody allowing both

parents to be equally involved in raising children. As both parents should also be active in the labour market, their employment has to be supported by respective reconciliation policies. Shared custody reduces risks of economic vulnerability. In principle, a child can easily spend time either with the mother or the father. Both are used to looking after the child. However, shared custody would still increase stress by having to organise daily life in accordance with the former partner's needs, matching the schedules of both parents and their children (in extreme case they even might not live in the same town any more). Conflict between former partners is likely to occur and time needed to uphold arrangements might be missed for social life.

Given that gender equity is a ruling ideology shared by virtually all society members in this scenario, non-egalitarian life choices are disapproved and will not be supported by policy measures. Although a high degree of tolerance of a society might mitigate social vulnerability, social groups cherishing different values and attitudes need to adapt to the egalitarian ideology to avoid at least psychological vulnerability. A woman who wishes to become a housewife is likely not to receive any support from the state. She becomes dependent on her spouse, which might have a negative impact on her financial as well as psychological well-being. Policies that are not in line with predominantly egalitarian attitudes, however, would raise vulnerability for the majority of families.

*The male-breadwinner scenario:* Assume traditional gender role attitudes prevail in society, with people turning towards role specialisation and division of labour in families. A fair share of the population (women with children) decide—and are encouraged—to leave the labour market. Consequently, there is enough work for men, but their salaries need to suffice to secure the financial standards for their families. Therefore men often need to work long hours or even take additional jobs. Since the male-breadwinner family model is universal, institutional childcare will likely be very basic. Consequently, even in case of economic hardship, mothers are basically not able to work and to contribute to family income. Their involvement could be possible only if informal childcare is organised (e.g., provided by other family members or within a social network).

With a dominant-breadwinner model ideology and the labour market being oriented towards men, women's employment is generally problematic. As managements of companies consist of men with traditional gender role attitudes, companies neither invest in the education and training of women nor in reconciliation policies supporting mothers. Young women are oriented towards family formation and themselves do not invest in their professional development. It is also unlikely for them to enter the labour market when their children have grown up. Their self-realisation lies mainly within the house and family life. Consequently, women's financial security depends entirely on their partners' income or on social support (e.g., state subsidies). If the economic situation of a country allows it, some compensatory payments to stay-at-home wives could be introduced, but with a majority of women staying at home, the payments will usually be rather low.

Since women are largely excluded from work-based social networks, they create social networks within their families as well as among neighbours. Children are raised in the feminine environment and they often lack high-quality contacts with their fathers. This becomes particularly difficult in case of divorce. Financial vulnerability remains extremely high for single mothers (children universally stay with the mother after a divorce): as they rarely work, they usually need to rely on child support payments from their ex-husband and the child is virtually deprived of a father figure. These means that a large fraction of single mothers are also heavily dependent on support by their original families (grandparents etc.). Unless economic upturns allow for high welfare provisions to single mothers, it is therefore necessary to keep the divorce rate at the lowest possible level. In the extreme case, since traditional values are strongly supported in the society, divorces can be illegalised to protect women and children.

In the gender equity scenario, reconciliation of family life and professional work via childcare support and flexibility of working arrangements might help mitigate psychological and social vulnerability. (Because both partners are economically active, the risks of economic vulnerability should not be large in this scenario.) In the male-breadwinner scenario, however, reconciliation is not an issue because female employment as well as male engagement in parenthood are both not wanted by individuals. Instead financial support to families who cannot live by means of a single income would be preferable. *With a medium-level economic development, the well-being of families will largely depend on what gender role attitudes prevail in society and on whether policy measures match these preferences.*

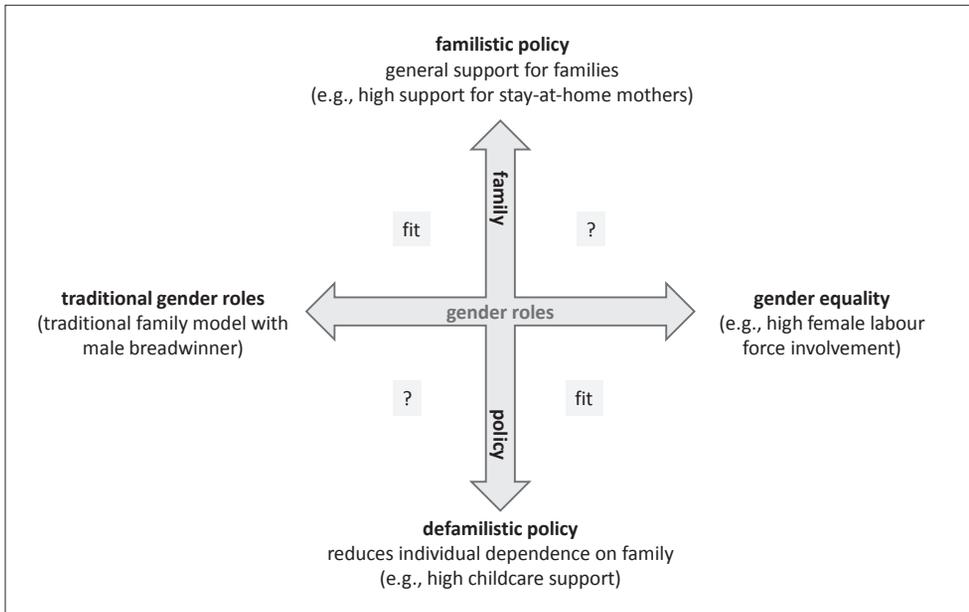
## 9.4 The gender regime policy fit

The thought experiment demonstrates that the usefulness of policies is heavily dependent on aims and targets but also on acceptance in the population. If parents can afford it, they will avoid making use of any existing policy measure that is in opposition to their will. In the male-breadwinner scenario, reconciliation policy would be largely useless. Maybe childcare facilities would help single mothers and husbands might be happy about flexibility at work, but as long as women want (and are expected) to stay at home with their children and as long as fathers are not held responsible for spending more time on work than on family life, they will not have much impact on the well-being of vulnerable families. On the other hand, measures like financial support for stay-at-home mothers are obviously of limited usefulness to mothers who want to return to work as quickly as possible after having given birth to a child.

These basic insights that hold for the discussed policy measures (childcare, financial transfers etc.) should also be true with regard to legal regulations, private options of support for parents, and policy measures that go beyond family policy in a narrow sense. The cultural environment is very important for the effectiveness of legal regulations, whether regarding marriage and recognition of paternity (legal

fatherhood status) or divorce laws and custody issues. As long as shared custody is not accepted by society at large, for instance, it will probably not affect the vulnerability of children to a great extent. Children might stay with mothers facing high risks of vulnerability. Risks arising with the spread of shared custody, on the other hand, are different (e.g., mobility issues, stress) and create other challenges for policies supporting different family types and arrangements. Family law regulations have to fit preferences, too, and will affect well-being in combination with policy measures offering direct support. Support by others and thus relationships to grandparents or neighbours may also be more important if egalitarian gender roles prevail and support in childcare is needed. Finally, if gender role attitudes and accordingly preferences for lifestyles are diverse, policy-makers might focus on measures raising tolerance and social cohesion to avoid social and psychological vulnerability resulting from discrimination or stigmatisation.

**Figure 12: Interdependency between gender issues and family policy**



In the literature, family policy measures are frequently assigned to one of two categories: “familistic” policies, enlarging individuals’ dependence on the family, or “defamilistic” ones, increasing the independence of single family members (e.g., Esping-Andersen, 1999; Leitner, 2003; 2006). Familistic policies are usually directed at all families. They aim at supporting families by strengthening their care function and are thus often in line with traditional gender roles. Transfers to stay-at-home mothers are a good example. Defamilistic policies, on the other hand, help

families by unburdening them from certain tasks, thereby increasing the time available to family members for own activities. From a historical perspective, the introduction of such policies allowed women to be more independent. Thus, they are usually in line with egalitarian gender perspectives.

In our scenarios, vulnerability is lowest when policies support the realisation of preferred lifestyles (a perfect gender regime policy fit). Family policy would not be as successful in curtailing the vulnerability of families with children if gender role attitudes were not in line with existing policies or vice versa. Figure 12 depicts the four possible combinations (or situations). Once the problem is re-framed in this way, it seems to be obviously linked with arguments of authors like Esping-Anderson (2009), McDonald (2000), or Goldscheider and colleagues (2015). These authors all assume that a better compliance of gender roles at the individual or household level with gender roles at the societal level facilitates higher fertility. The societal level includes public policy. If we replace “fertility” by “well-being” (or “well-being of parents”), the similarities between this theory and the results of our thought experiment become obvious. Our thought experiment suggests that the scope of existing demographic theory should maybe be extended to issues of vulnerability and family well-being.

## 9.5 Simulating change from a traditional to a gender-egalitarian world

Demographic theory argues that the compliance of gender roles at the individual or household level with gender roles at the societal level is crucial for fertility. Our thought experiment indicates that this compliance may also affect vulnerability and thus well-being of families with children. In this subsection, a computer simulation will be used to demonstrate whether such a compliance could indeed lead to higher fertility as well as improved well-being.

Aiming at proving the theoretical arguments, the agent-based model developed in the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project investigates a heterogeneous population of agents who derive utility from consumption and from meeting their individual fertility intentions while explicitly addressing the dynamic effects of changes in gender equity. It allows to observe the *development of fertility and well-being* (utility) *during a transition from a traditional regime* characterised by a dominance of the male-breadwinner model *to an intermediate regime* showing a conflict between individual desires on the one hand and societal expectations and general conditions on the other hand *to a regime of advanced gender equity* at the household level as well as at the institutional level. The approach thus at least partly also reflects the development from (1) a good but traditional gender regime policy fit to (2) a bad gender regime policy fit and finally (3) a good and egalitarian gender regime policy fit.

Agents in the model are characterised by their age, sex, level of available resources (monetary and nonmonetary), level of individual gender equity ( $g$ ), intended fertility, number of dependent children, family status (living in a union or not) and their network of friends. Intended fertility is assumed to be slightly lower for more progressive households. Unmarried agents look for an adult matching partner of opposite sex who is not part of their direct family (neither parent nor sibling or child), unmarried, and whose social distance is as small as possible.<sup>33</sup> If there is no appropriate partner, the agent remains unmarried and again tries to find a partner in the next time step.

By definition, families consist of a mother, a father and dependent children. If one partner dies who is part of a household without children, the household is disbanded and the widower returns to the marriage market. If both parents die in a household with children, the latter is disbanded and the children are assigned to a common household for all orphans (an orphanage). If one parent dies who is part of a household with children, the household becomes a single-parent household with children, while the widower returns to the marriage market. If such an agent finds another partner, they form a new household that includes both parents and their children (in the very rare case that both were part of widower households with children).

The two partners forming a household may have different individual levels of gender equity. Immediately after marriage, however, these levels will be rather similar as a result of the matching process. Individuals may adapt their gender roles due to social effects exerted by their peers. It is assumed that gender equity at the institutional level,  $G$ , lags behind development at the individual or household level. Institutions cannot adapt as quickly as individuals or households since transformations require a chain of individual decisions at different organisational layers. Secondly, institutions only adapt if those people in the decision chain perceive changes in the society. These perceptions also lag behind individual developments. It is assumed that more progressive households (those with a higher level of  $g$ ) can achieve a higher income—since it is more likely that both parents participate in the labour market. This advantage becomes stronger if it is supported by institutions (expressed by a higher level of  $G$ ; an additional parameter  $\beta$  intensifies or weakens the economic advantage of higher gender equity).

Perceived consumption needs are higher for households that experience a mismatch between their local level of gender equity and gender equity at the institutional level. For instance, it may be difficult to raise children for a more progressive family if the provision of childcare is insufficient. This would either require parents to accept reduced career opportunities or to engage expensive private childcare. On the other hand, a conservative family may experience high costs in a progressive society if the tax-benefit system is not designed to meet their needs appropriately. Children consume less than adults and income resulting from being more progressive is consumed only by parents.

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<sup>33</sup> Social distance comprises age, resources, intended fertility, and individual gender equity.

Agents' utility depends on consumption per capita and on the match of intended fertility with actually achieved parity. Utility is crucial for the childbearing decision. If a(nother) child would raise utility of both partners and the female is below biological infertility age, they choose to have child. If it is fulfilled for only one partner, the couple checks if their combined utility—i.e., the sum of their individual utilities—would increase or decrease by getting a(nother) child.

The agents are connected to a network of friends and observe their friends' utility. This social network always includes parents, adult siblings and adult children and regularly includes other agents. Agents search for friends of both sexes whose social distance not too big. New friends may enter the social network and old friends may leave the network during the agent's lifetime. Every time step, adult married agents are influenced by their social network, by observing the utility and gender equity of their married peers. If agents are among the most successful agents of their social network, they assume that they cannot gain by imitation. If agents are not among the most successful ones in their network, they will evaluate whether the more successful agents had a higher or lower  $g$  than themselves and adapt their own level of  $g$ . Children observe and learn from their parents during childhood, which shapes their initial gender equity (social imprinting process).

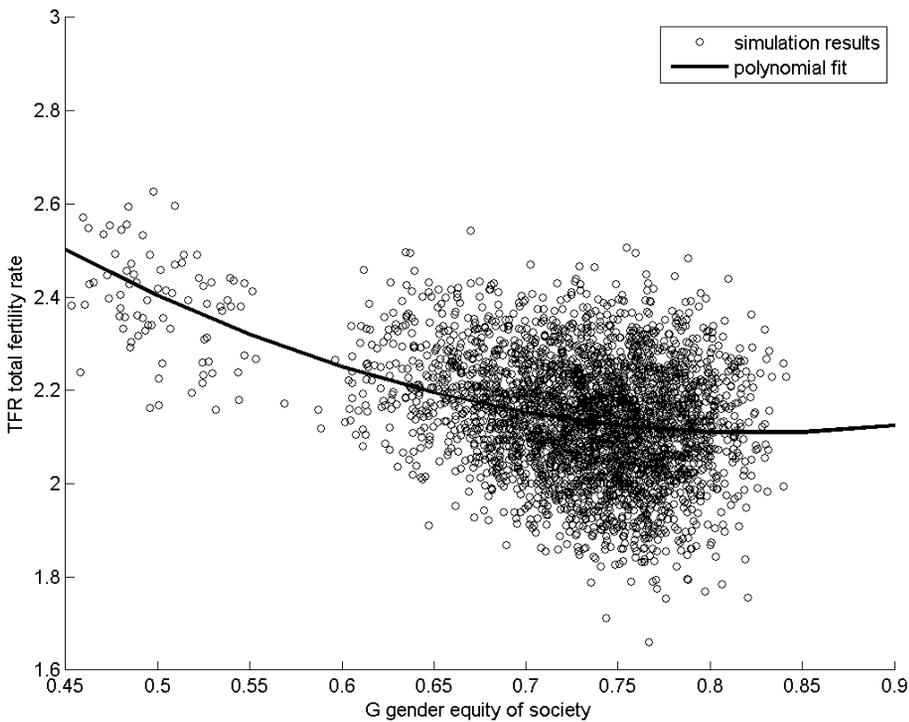
Simulation model runs were conducted with artificial populations with an initial size of 4,000 agents. Depending on different parameter combinations, fertility developed heterogeneously in different simulation runs. The simulation runs were done for 150 time steps (years) with 44,128 different parameter combinations. After 150 time steps, data on gender equity, fertility, consumption and utility were recorded.<sup>34</sup> As expected, the parameter  $\beta$  that captures the influence of policy-making on gender equity had a positive and strongly significant impact on the level of gender equity in society. At higher levels, however, the marginal impact of  $\beta$  became weaker (a positive but diminishing impact of  $\beta$  on  $G$ ). In addition, results indicated that the level of gender equity will be the higher the more a society values consumption compared to meeting fertility intentions. Most importantly, simulation runs indicate a negative impact of gender equity  $G$  on fertility confirming the classical view that more progressive gender roles result in lower fertility. However, the simulation also indicates a recovery of fertility after the society has passed through a transitional regime where the negative impact dominates.

The circles in Figure 13 show combinations of gender equity on societal level ( $G$ ) and cohort total fertility rate resulting from simulation after 150 time steps. The solid line depicts a polynomial model approximating this relationship. The negative correlation between gender equity and fertility is clearly visible. The recovery of fertility at advanced levels of gender equity can only be concluded from the polynomial curve which shows an upturn at higher levels of  $G$ . Similar results could be obtained with a fitted polynomial curve linking the policy parameter ( $\beta$ ) and the cohort total fertility rate.

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<sup>34</sup> Details of the model and simulation runs were presented in Winkler-Dworak et al. (2015); basic features were also shown in Riederer et al. (2017).

**Figure 13: The relationship between gender equity and fertility**



**Note:** The figure illustrates the influence of the level of gender equity at the institutional (societal) level ( $G$ ) and total fertility rate (TFR). The circles indicate the state of our simulations after 150 time steps (years). The solid line represents a polynomial model approximating the relationship. Increasing gender equality goes in line with a decrease in fertility.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* agent-based model.

Finally, total utility of agents in conservative and progressive societies were compared to each other. The agents derive utility from consumption—of goods and the monetary equivalent of non-working time—and from realising their fertility preferences. Due to higher consumption per capita utility increased in more gender egalitarian societies. Well-being of agents was indeed higher. Essentially, the results thus support the presented theoretical ideas.

## Main messages, conclusions, and policy implications

In the final chapter, we want to present the essence of the research findings discussed throughout this book. The following lines are organised in terms of main messages and corresponding policy implications. All in all, we hope that our research can stimulate considerations about existing as well as future policies, their effectiveness, and their meaning under different circumstances.<sup>35</sup>

### #1: Vulnerability matters: there are families at risk

The Europe 2020 target on EU citizens living at risk of poverty and social exclusion already reveals the high significance of vulnerability issues. High rates of *child poverty* in Europe remain an important challenge that can only be addressed by a substantial reduction of *family vulnerability*. Vulnerability matters and will be crucial for and in the future of European societies.

On the one hand, there are *no family types that are inevitably vulnerable*. On the other, however, specific family types are more at risk of being in vulnerable situations than others. First and foremost, experts named single-parent families. Across Europe, single-parent households are more at risk of poverty and social exclusion than the average population. It is extremely difficult for them to combine family life with paid employment. In addition, irrespective of the problem that occurs, single parents are frequently lacking the support of a second person who is also responsible for the child(ren). Therefore, stressors that all parents experience are usually a bigger challenge for them. In traditional communities, negative gossip and stigmatisation may add to the vulnerable situation of solo parents.

The second family type being at higher risks than average families in many European societies are large families with a high number of children. Costs, time requirements, and consequences of many problems are increasing with the number of children. Work–family reconciliation becomes more difficult. Parents with many children sometimes also suffer prejudice (e.g., that they are welfare scroungers not wanting to work who profit from benefits for children). Other family types at higher risks include families with dependent family members, families belonging to ethnic minorities or immigrant groups, and same-sex families. Most of them suffer from rather specific problems though one type of vulnerability can lead to others. Finally, children without families (orphans) also have to be mentioned.

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<sup>35</sup> This chapter is based upon considerations in Riederer et al. (2017).

## **#2: The reasons for vulnerability are manifold—and thus also drivers of future vulnerability**

“Being vulnerable” refers to a situation with an increased risk of becoming disadvantaged. It implies some sort of weakness or inability to deal with challenges or, put in other words, a lack of resources to address upcoming problems (cf. Hanappi et al., 2015; Patterson, 2013; Zimmermann, 2017). It is crucial to note that vulnerability is not restricted to poverty. Although the economic situation is of central importance, other aspects of vulnerability should not be overlooked. *Vulnerability is multidimensional* comprising at least four different dimensions: economic, psychological, physical, and social. It includes a diversity of overtaking challenges arising from financial difficulties, insufficient housing, traumatic experiences, mental problems, poor physical health, a lack of social support, and/or discrimination. This list is far from being exhaustive. Though vulnerable families are often confronted with many challenges at the same time, just one of these may be sufficient to make a family vulnerable.

As vulnerability is multidimensional, a broad variety of societal developments can influence the future of vulnerability of families with children. *Most important are* the economic development, changes in gender roles, factors influencing the reconciliation of work and family life, broader cultural changes, and future policy measures. These forces driving future vulnerability are partly linked to each other and, sometimes, ambivalences of specific developments may outweigh and compensate each other. For instance, economic growth will contribute to ensure low unemployment, decent wages, and substantial public support for families which reduce (economic) vulnerability. But economic growth might increase the pressure and thus the (psychological) vulnerability of families if it is not accompanied by sufficient improvement of work–family reconciliation. All ambivalences about possible economic (and cultural) developments need to be carefully considered, as even the most positive changes may raise new challenges for policy-makers.

On the whole, experts perceived economic development to be most important for economic, psychological, and social vulnerability. It is, however, not GDP growth that matters but rather (un)employment and (in)equality in incomes. The development of work–family reconciliation was given high emphasis by parents—but also by experts. Changes in gender roles and other cultural aspects were expected to be primarily relevant for psychological vulnerability.

## **#3: Vulnerability may rise—but policies can reduce it**

Experts participating in the expert questionnaire study expected *increases in the future vulnerability of families with children* in Europe. More than two-thirds of them predicted that *economic vulnerability* will increase during the next years (until 2020) and about one-half of them stated that the share of families affected by economic vulnerability will further increase in the period from 2020 to 2050. Even

more pessimistic were predictions regarding *psychological vulnerability*. Eight out of ten experts thought that the share of families whose members suffer from psychological vulnerability will increase over the next five years. Three-quarters of respondents expected the extent of psychological vulnerability to grow after 2020. Regarding *social vulnerability*, results were only slightly more optimistic than those for economic and psychological vulnerability. Our findings clearly indicate that the majority of experts did not expect the situation of families with children to improve in the near future. Nevertheless, only a few experts expected strong future increases of vulnerability. Furthermore, policy is perceived as able to change expected developments.

Families per se are not inevitably vulnerable. There are only families in disadvantaged positions and bad situations—situations that make them vulnerable. This was one of the most fundamental results of the focus group discussions. Policies supporting families to avoid such situations or helping them leave such situations behind them are thus capable of reducing vulnerability. Experts rated family policy the second most important driving force of future vulnerability after economic development.<sup>36</sup> The relevance of policy was even more clearly voiced among the parents responding to the family questionnaire. They attached the greatest importance for future well-being of families with children to changes in welfare and family policy and to the reconciliation of family life and professional work. The belief in the power of policy to influence the future seems to be strong.

#### **#4: Hindering the reproduction of vulnerability is the key to a brighter future**

One of the main challenges for modern welfare states is the ongoing reproduction of inequality—and vulnerability—from one generation to the next. The question how policies could support children to overcome disadvantages and risks based in their social heritage is thus highly relevant for present and future policy-makers.

Experts participating in focus groups saw education, employment, and the creation of a more family-friendly society as indispensable in supporting vulnerable families and protecting the children living within them. While financial transfers are required to address the most urgent needs of vulnerable families, they alone do not solve the problem of reproduction of vulnerability. On the contrary, they might even lead to the socialisation of state dependency. Instead, it is crucial to facilitate families to sustain themselves. Regarding children, discussants in focus groups primarily stressed the relevance of *education* to overcome their underprivileged social heritage. Successful education results in opportunities for children and was understood as the first step out of poverty. Education referred not only to schooling as such but was understood more broadly. Parents, for instance, have to be involved

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<sup>36</sup> However, the concrete form of future policy measures was perceived in a more ambivalent way. Experts assumed, for instance, that consequences of lower financial transfers to families could counteract the positive effects of improved access to childcare on future vulnerability of families.

as well and might need information, advice, and support. It has to be clear to them what education and professional opportunities their children could have and how they may support them. In addition, the structure of educational systems and educational contents could be optimised and further developed to provide an ideal environment for children.<sup>37</sup>

Findings from the expert questionnaire confirmed the relevance attributed to education. The three policy measures identified by experts as being most important were the *provision of childcare options* for preschool children, *assistance for children with special needs* and *raising the awareness of employers* regarding the work–life balance of their employees, closely followed by providing *education for all children already at an early age*.<sup>38</sup> Investing in people is necessary to improve their living not only in the short but also in the long run. When the reproduction of vulnerability cannot be stopped, vulnerability will remain noticeable in the future.

## #5: A good gender regime policy fit is a necessity

In focus groups, some ambivalence was visible in how the experts spoke of the increasing female labour force participation. On the one hand, higher engagement of women in paid work has a positive impact on family incomes and improves women's situation in terms of financial independence, also with regard to their future pensions. On the other hand, several experts pointed out that the pressures it imposed on women should not be overlooked. Without family-friendly workplaces and sufficient childcare, and without changes in men's role perception women may run the risk of being overburdened, given increased pressure to do their best both in the role of a mother and of an employee.

Our thought experiment has demonstrated that the well-being of families is largely dependent on what attitudes and preferences prevail and whether policy measures match these preferences. Only if dominant attitudes, needs, and values are supported by policies, will vulnerability be minimised. The link between gender (role) arrangements and welfare policy seems to be obvious (cf. Pfau-Effinger, 2005) but its interdependencies and potentially implications for future policy nevertheless have to be made clear. The topical relevance of these issues can hardly be underestimated in the light of existing differences in prevailing gender role attitudes across Europe (e.g., Panova & Buber-Ennser, 2016).

A utopian world would allow politicians to support all kinds of different gender role attitudes. With restricted resources, however, it is inevitably to set priorities. Regardless of any normative aspects, many findings of our research are in favour

<sup>37</sup> Experts provided us with numerous suggestions that are worth thinking about (see Mynarska et al., 2015). They could, however, still be extended. For instance, giving advice to children themselves may be embedded in a mentoring program to provide positive role models how to overcome disadvantages of social heritage.

<sup>38</sup> Parents participating in the family survey emphasised the relevance of other policy measures more. Nevertheless, they also thought that educational measures are very important (see Chapter 6).

of gender-egalitarian views. Higher female labour force participation would bring about economic advantages for women themselves, the family, and the society at large (GDP growth). The simulation results of the agent-based model showed that increasing gender equity can also improve the well-being of agents: utility derived by individuals from consumption increases as egalitarian attitudes spread through the society. Men's involvement in childcare was perceived to be beneficial for children and fathers. A final point highlighting the benefit of more gender-egalitarian arrangements can be seen in the fact that at present, children stay usually with their mothers after parental separation. More gender equity would allow for more involvement of men in raising children as well as more economic security and financial independency for (single) mothers at all ages.<sup>39</sup> Our microsimulation results and projections by the OECD (2011; 2012) both indicate that separation and re-partnering will remain an important trend for the future of families in Europe: the share of single parents is likely to increase.

We do not want to conceal that some of our results also indicate that a more traditional division of labour can be beneficial in specific situations. However, first and foremost, a traditional division of tasks that was freely chosen and agreed upon by equal partners is not necessarily opposing gender equity. Second, although families with children share a lot of needs and concerns, different families (and different types of families) will always have specific needs that may differ from those of the majority of families. These needs should not be ignored. Nevertheless, the general gender regime policy fit has to be maintained to effectively avoid vulnerability.

## **#6: Improve work–family balance: raising awareness for parental needs, promoting work–family reconciliation, and introducing time policy are priorities**

Experts emphasised the relevance of work–family reconciliation to avoid vulnerable states. In this respect, they went far beyond childcare and other “classical” policy measures but rather discussed the necessity for parents of finding time for children and their needs. A better future for children requires both secure financial means and time for parents to be there for their children. Unsuccessful work–family reconciliation means that either or both are missing.

The link between paid work and family life is so central because it affects economic, psychological, and social vulnerability. Non-employment, part-time work, and precarious jobs all mean lower family income and contribute to economic vulnerability. Non-employed parents may also suffer from limited social contacts. High levels of time pressure, work strain, and stress resulting from simultaneous

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<sup>39</sup> More gender equity means allowing women to stand on their own feet (to be independent from family members and public welfare) and giving them a chance to pursue a professional career.

demands in professional work and private life impair psychological well-being. Reducing time with children for the sake of economic safety may harm the parent-child relationship and thus the emotional well-being of both parents and children.

In general, many contemporary lifestyles do not support families. In particular, experts complained that the contemporary culture of work(place) is not very family-friendly. Policies are needed to raise employer awareness. A more positive attitude of employers, managers, and co-workers towards their colleagues' family responsibilities could substantially improve the situation of families. Everyday life would be easier for parents in a more supportive working atmosphere characterised by understanding for children's needs. Flexible measures should enable parents to reorganise or reduce their workload to have more time for parenting *if it is needed*.<sup>40</sup> Flexibility is also highly recommended as specific families' well-founded needs (and expectations) need to be met. In the future, the variety of families is likely to even further increase in Europe.

Issues of time for parenting, self-determined working hours, and all-day child-care refer to "time policy" and a restructuring of time.<sup>41</sup> On the one hand, available time contingents can be divided between tasks at one point in time while, on the other hand, time for specific tasks can also be shifted to different time periods across the life course. Time policy as such may thus go beyond the usual concept of planning. It could also aim at organising life courses to avoid "rush hours" in individual lives where educational prospects, careers, and family demands collide.

It has to be noted once more that the improvement of work-family reconciliation is better than direct financial support. People should be empowered to create capacities for an autonomous living to avoid a life-long dependency on welfare payments. Thus, for instance, single mothers must be encouraged to enter the labour market (see also Avramov, 2002).

## #7: Mainstreaming family

In a recent report by Eurofound (2015), the authors stated that an adequate income, the provision of adequate childcare, sufficient information for parents, and support in reconciling care responsibilities with employment are desperately needed measures. In addition, it was emphasised that family policies often lack a coherent and integrated policy framework. Our findings confirm their results and support most of their claims. In particular, experts in focus groups recognised a necessity for a comprehensive strategy and complementary policies in supporting

<sup>40</sup> In the present situation, flexibility is desperately needed for most parents. Nevertheless, policy measures have to be implemented carefully. Total flexibility implies important dangers as well. Regular working hours, for instance, are highly relevant to employee health. If everything is flexible, the boundaries between family life and work may collapse. In the extreme, the result of flexibility is a double burden for 24 hours per day on 7 days a week. For some subgroups in new economy jobs, flexibility is not the solution but rather the cause of their reconciliation problems.

<sup>41</sup> An overview over time policy activities in Europe can be found in a special issue of the time policy magazine available at [http://www.zeitpolitik.de/pdfs/zpm\\_26\\_0715.pdf](http://www.zeitpolitik.de/pdfs/zpm_26_0715.pdf).

vulnerable families and children. Monitoring should assure that single measures go hand in hand with each other.

Regardless of their relative rankings, all policy measures presented in questionnaires were identified as relevant by the large majority of our participants. As many aspects and different policies matter, an integrated approach might be the best possible option to fight multidimensional vulnerability. A very important element might thus be *mainstreaming family*—an aspect already mentioned in the stakeholder workshop. Mainstreaming has become very popular since the 1990s (e.g., mainstreaming gender, mainstreaming ageing). The policy measures identified as most important belong to different social or economic policies, some even to more than one. For example, measures such as direct financial transfers or lower prices for food belong to family policies but also to policies for fighting poverty. Childcare is a fundamental measure related to family policies but also to policies related to the reconciliation of professional work and care for the family. Assistance to disabled children belongs to well-designed policies for the disabled in line with the international *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Several other measures mentioned relate to education policies. To these we can add other steps which are not explicitly specified here although they are bound to have an effect on vulnerability: for example, policies related to employment and unemployment, policies mitigating income inequality, and other economic policies. In general, the list of relevant policies is extremely long, indicating that family vulnerability can, and does, permeate numerous policies. Therefore, it is a topic that has to be mainstreamed across a great number of policies. With the inclusion of the matter of interest in a broad circle of policies, mainstreaming bears important advantages.

## **#8: Inform families about policies to raise their acceptance**

If policy measures should be effective, their acceptance by parents is crucial. Acceptance was already included in the argument establishing the necessity of the gender regime policy fit. However, it goes well beyond this issue. It means that policy measures need to be evaluated from the perspective of families, considering their well-being and vulnerability. Furthermore, newly introduced policies should be explained to the public and promoted as it might be that not all parents are aware of their benefits—in particular, if a specific measure is part of a mainstreaming strategy. But also policy measures that were discussed and are not implemented have to be explained. Differences in preferences for specific policy measures between experts and parents suggest that both groups may sometimes have different weightings with regard to short- and long-term benefits for families—and/or different components of family well-being.

## #9: Strengthen communication and social cohesion

Findings of focus groups and the questionnaire both showed that experts expected a weakening of personal relationships to increase future vulnerability. Worries concerned intimate relationships as well as more general ones between strangers. Trust in and support by others is essential in vulnerable situations. This is true for all family types and single-parent families in particular. Social vulnerability can only be minimised by improving communication between and maximising solidarity among people. This also holds with regard to immigrant families and asylum seekers.

Children and families who have fled from their home countries due to discrimination, violence and/or persecution, children and families who encountered numerous challenges and hard times also during their flight, these children and families are vulnerable. More than half of the displaced people worldwide are children (Esses, Hamilton, & Gaucher, 2017, p. 79) and thus current and future "refugee flows" will be very likely to affect the vulnerability of families and children in Europe. The experts anticipated an increase in all dimensions of vulnerability on account of present asylum seekers for the period until 2020. They were, however, not as much concerned about consequences for economic or psychological vulnerability development between 2020 and 2050. It is the long-term development of social vulnerability that worried experts most. Discrimination and lack of social support may be the most important challenges resulting from the so-called "refugee crisis". It is thus important but not sufficient to promote the integration of refugees into the labour market of their host societies. The whole debate about asylum seekers has to be re-humanised. Solidarity is likely to be strengthened if we recognise that we are talking about *people in need* and not about "swarms", "plagues", or "parasites" (cf. Esses et al., 2017, p. 87). With regard to displaced people, widespread fears of alleged "welfare shopping" are usually unfounded. In addition, policies need to strengthen the public confidence and societal trust in migrants (Dalla Zuanna et al., 2015). For instance, actions allowing their participation in local public affairs could mobilise their capacities for the well-being of the whole community (IOM, 2015), thereby showing the added societal value of migration.

## #10: It is necessary to further extend and enhance our knowledge about family issues

Our results delivered important points of departure for future policy-making. We could, however, hardly gain all the information necessary to design concrete policies for sustainable societies. Many issues call for additional research including, for instance, the long-term implications of new gender roles for European societies, mechanisms of vulnerability reproduction within the family, interactions of family-related life-course transitions with educational as well as professional

choices and constraints, or the development of measures capturing the diverse aspects of (psychological and social) vulnerability.

To give concrete examples, first, an operative policy monitoring would be helpful to identify policy measures that complement or counteract each other in fighting family vulnerability. Therefore, a certain number of policy aspects has to be selected and linked to indices related to family vulnerability. After the development of appropriate indices, monitoring could be implemented. At present, indices constructed and followed by Eurostat can be used for monitoring risks of poverty (and social exclusion)—and thus primarily economic vulnerability. Regarding psychological and social vulnerability, further research would have to identify and combine the components of an appropriate index before efficient monitoring could be implemented.

With regard to the accumulation of wealth and the intergenerational reproduction of vulnerability, research should, second, observe and analyse for which sectors of the societies “gains” or “losses” might arise. This is important for several reasons: culminations of disadvantages might be particularly problematic (and unfair) if existing differences manifest themselves over generations—with consequences for society as a whole. For instance, rising inequality resulting from increasing disadvantages to the lower classes might be detrimental to economic growth (OECD, 2015b). Families belonging to lower strata often react to a worsening of their situation by restricting their children’s education. In consequence, the potential of future generations will not be fully exploited.

The better the data we have, the more we can profit. Recent scientific surveys, new databases, latest ad-hoc modules and modifications of existing Eurostat surveys all point to the right direction. In many ways, research conducted in the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project has improved existing knowledge. Nevertheless, longitudinal studies allowing international comparisons are ultimately needed to answer all remaining questions.



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## Appendix

**Table A.1: Information on expert focus groups**

| Venue                               | Bern      | Brussels | Madrid   | Stockholm | Vienna   | Warsaw   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Size of the FG                      | 7         | 6        | 7        | 8         | 9        | 7        |
| Background of informants            |           |          |          |           |          |          |
| governmental organisation           | 1         | 1        | 3        | 5         | -        | 2        |
| non-governmental organisation       | 5         | 4        | 4        | 3         | 5        | 5        |
| member of parliament                | 1         | 1        | -        | -         | 3        | -        |
| state representative                | -         | -        | -        | -         | 1        | -        |
| Language                            | German    | English  | Spanish  | English   | German   | Polish   |
| Duration in minutes (approximately) | 90        | 110      | 90       | 90        | 103      | 90       |
| Date                                | June 2015 | Dec 2014 | Nov 2014 | Dec 2014  | Nov 2014 | Jan 2015 |

**Table A.2: Regions and number of assessments in the expert questionnaire**

| Region                 | Countries included (n)   | Total N (%) | Economic vulnerability | Psychological vulnerability | Social vulnerability |
|------------------------|--|-------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Central western Europe | Belgium (7), France (13), Luxembourg (1), Netherlands (9)  | 30 (17)     | 7                      | 14                          | 15                   |
| German-speaking Europe | Austria (29), Germany (14), Switzerland (3)  | 46 (26)     | 15                     | 14                          | 21                   |
| Western Europe         | Northern Ireland (1), Ireland (3), United Kingdom (7)  | 11 (6)      | 6                      | 2                           | 4                    |
| Northern Europe        | Denmark (2), Finland (3), Norway (5), Sweden (11)  | 21 (12)     | 13                     | 1                           | 10                   |
| Southern Europe        | Cyprus (1), Greece (1), Italy (20), Portugal (1), Spain (17)   | 40 (23)     | 22                     | 11                          | 13                   |
| Eastern Europe         | Bulgaria (4), Czechia (3), Estonia (2), Hungary (4), Lithuania (1), Macedonia (1), Poland (1), Romania (7), Russia (3), Slovenia (2) | 28 (16)     | 13                     | 10                          | 12                   |

**Note:** The total number of vulnerability assessments can be higher than the number of assessments for regions as experts could answer for more than one dimension of vulnerability.

**Source:** *FamiliesAndSocieties* Expert Survey.

## About the authors

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*Thomas Fent* is a population economist at the Vienna Institute of Demography. He published articles in professional journals and edited volumes on union formation, fertility, family dynamics, and family policies but also on the economics of ageing, investment in human capital, and economic growth. He applies agent-based models, formal mathematical methods, computer simulations, and empirical methods.

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*Dimiter Philipov's* main scientific interests focus on topics related to fertility, family, and disability. He has also specific interests in studies on subjective individual measures such as intentions and expectations related to demographic events. During his long-lasting career as a demographer, he worked at the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, at the Princeton University, and at the Max-Planck Institute for Demographic Research in Rostock/Germany. Since 2003, he is senior researcher at the Vienna Institute of Demography.

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## **Vulnerability and the future of families with children in Europe: Nine questions and corresponding answers**

prepared by Bernhard Riederer

*Research mainly conducted by*

Bernhard Riederer (Questions 2-6 and 8-9),  
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Maria Winkler-Dworak (Question 7),  
Thomas Fent (Questions 1 and 9),  
Bernhard Rengs (Questions 3-6 and 8-9),  
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*Union Instability and Fertility: A Microsimulation Model for Italy and Great  
Britain.* (available at: [www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/publications/serial-publications/vid-working-papers/](http://www.oeaw.ac.at/vid/publications/serial-publications/vid-working-papers/))

## **Vulnerability and the future of families with children in Europe: Nine questions and corresponding answers (Abstract)**

This book wants to contribute to answers on important questions about the future of families in Europe. The first part of the book gives an overview over the contemporary situation (existing problems of families) and present as well as future challenges for policy-makers, establishes the vulnerability of families and children as a crucial aspect, and finally discusses the vulnerability of different family types. In particular for the design of efficient (preventative) policies, it is essential to understand vulnerability in detail and to comprehend it in all its facets. Furthermore, knowledge about most family types concerned will allow future policies to focus on specific risk groups and their main challenges.

The further two parts of the present book concentrate on the future. The second part covers the future of the vulnerability of families with children in general. It presents expert estimates to answer the question how vulnerability of families with children will develop in the future in Europe. Doing so, the answer will differentiate between different European regions and different dimensions of vulnerability. Next, it aims at the identification of the most important factors that might drive the vulnerability of families with children and their well-being. Going into detail, analyses show which factors seem to be relevant for different dimensions of vulnerability. The identification of factors important for vulnerability development would possibly allow to react to changing circumstances, thereby steering against a potential increase of family vulnerability in the future. In addition, we ask “What policies will be relevant to stop intergenerational vulnerability reproduction?” Social risks are still passed on from one generation to the next. Our societies are not equal with regard to children’s opportunities and future options. Mitigating the reproduction of vulnerability within the family is thus a priority for European Union if it wants to reach its goal of bringing millions of people out of poverty and social exclusion and fostering future economic (and social) prosperity.

The third part of the present book covers specific issues of particular relevance. They all focus on trends and developments we could observe during the last years and that are assumed to continue or be liable to recur. It discusses implications of increasing union dissolution and re-partnering trends for future family size and distribution of family types, it asks how an increase in asylum seekers and refugees may affect vulnerability of families in the future, and it considers the crucial theme of gender equality. Finally, closing remarks will summarise main results and draw conclusions for policy-makers. The book ends with ten concrete policy recommendations.



Vulnerability shapes the future well-being of families and particularly the children raised within those families. Reducing the societal reproduction of vulnerability is a great challenge for policy-makers. The present book explores societal developments that influence future vulnerability and discusses respective policy implications.

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