

# Families in Europe

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## Abstract

*Analysing data from the European Social Survey, in this article we try to capture the main features of European families. Accounting for the changing trends of the last forty years in family arrangements, practices and values we also discuss some theoretical and methodological issues raised by the exercise of comparing countries. General configurations like family size, composition of the household, living arrangements and marital status are identified and analysed by clustering European countries. The insertion of men and women in the labour market, fertility rates and the hours of work of parents are another central focus of discussion. Our results tend to contradict some stereotypes. The majority of Europeans are formally married or living together; conjugal disruption is transitory for the divorced and the separated tend to return to conjugality. With modern ideals family is, for all European countries and with very similar averages, the most valued dimension of personal life.*

## Keywords

family  
marriage  
gender  
values  
work and family  
European families

## Families in Europe: convergence and divergence

The fundamental objectives of this article are to describe and analyse the basic features of family structures in Europe on the basis of the European Social Survey (ESS) data, evaluating the similarities and differences between countries. It is an attempt to create a portrait that, while necessarily only capturing the main trends, acts as a point of departure in the search for evidence that explains the regularities encountered.

From a wide range of possible subjects of analysis, we chose to concentrate our attention on five fundamental aspects. The first two refer to identification of the dominant family profile in Europe on the basis of the average family size and the composition and morphology of households and, also, the forms and distribution of the different conjugal situations in the various countries. In addition to a variety of other types of information, it will be possible to assess, for example, the age groups in which those who live alone are concentrated and their weight in the different countries. We shall also analyse the importance of the formal tie of marriage in relation to other forms of relationship such as cohabitation and single-parent situations and, also, divorce. This data contributes to the debate, especially in the field of the sociology of the family, on topics such as the processes of 'conjugalisation', individualisation and de-institutionalisation.

1. In this analysis, it is important to present a critical perspective of the work of comparing European countries with each other, considering that emphasis may be being placed on differences that would be attenuated if we compared Europe with other regions in the world. Similarly, the differences noted within each country are sometimes more significant than those found between countries (Roussel 1992).

The work–family relationship is another focus of analysis that is developed on two planes. Firstly, the variation in the fertility rate in the group of European countries is discussed and variations and indicators possibly influencing it are explored. This is followed by a more systematic approach to the relationship between motherhood, fatherhood and the labour market in the European area, with an attempt also to explain the specificities of the Portuguese case. Also included in the debate are the forms and the role of social policies, in particular those relating to family situations and gender equality.

Finally, a more systematic view is taken of the value attributed to the family in other aspects of life such as work, leisure, politics, religion and voluntary work, with the effect of certain variables also being assessed. This part also discusses the meanings given to these different hierarchies, thus helping to question the idea that the family has lost its central importance in contemporary societies.

Before commencing the data analysis, it is worth discussing certain overall questions relating to comparability, convergence and divergence among European countries.

As is already known, a comparison between countries, in a way of thinking that reflects Durkheim, allows an overall vision and is, in itself, heuristic. In seeing, for example, that a certain demographic indicator in a country insistently goes against the trend in the countries culturally closest to it, we face research situations that, on a sociological level, oblige us to question and seek the cause of the matter. The chance to look beyond a national reality helps us to formulate other questions and seek new responses.

The changes taking place in recent years in all European countries, directly or indirectly related to family situations, have long been identified: the fall in birth and marriage rates and the increase in divorce, cohabitation and female employment rates. What are the reconfigurations in family relationships to which these changes in most European countries have led? Do the points of convergence among them predominate today? Or are those differences being maintained that make geographical frontiers – in as much as they too correspond to social processes and political and cultural contexts with a specific historical density – still relevant? What are the aspects of family life in which it still makes sense to speak of southern, northern or Eastern Europe? Where are the frontiers more marked or more indistinct?

In a book on the European family, Singly and Commaille (1997) stress the need for a comparative exercise of this kind to comply with certain methodological rules, if it is not to arrive at less accurate conclusions. In the authors' view, it is important, among other matters, to make a comparison on the basis of clear and relevant theoretical assumptions, to distinguish what is statistically significant, to take account of the problem of 'variable distance' or, in other words, the scale of observation<sup>1</sup> and not to confuse observed differences with the diversity of models.

With regard to the last rule, they consider it possible to speak of a European family model, with the differences between countries representing the effect of the specific processes of achieving this general model. According to the authors, two principles govern family relationships in a European context: respect for the independence of family members and respect for communal life, with the diversity of family types that exist in

Europe being an expression of the different forms or arrangements between the two principles. Defending the existence of an ideal with regard to the European family, the authors quoted mention the proposal of Franca Bimbi who also suggests that in Europe there is a shared set of symbols relating to the family that are based on

the presence of women in professional work and their investment in a career, the importance of children for the emotional life of the family, the responsibility of the public sphere regarding childcare, the democratisation of family decisions, the participation of the father in his children's care.

(Singly and Commaille 1997: 11)

In the thinking of Singly and Commaille, the varied religious heritage, the different importance placed on individual fulfilment, the objective conditions of the applicability of a model that lays value on independence, and other specificities help to explain the different forms adopted in the process of making this European family model autonomous and real in the various countries. However, having a greater or lesser degree of cohabitation or divorce, more or fewer young people living alone and a higher or lower rate of female employment represent distinguishing characteristics that other authors may consider as sufficiently important to contradict the idea that a single family model exists. But when we leave the synchronic analysis aside and move on to a diachronic perspective of the processes that have occurred in the last forty years, the different authors generally tend to converge. The same phenomena have, in fact, been noted in all countries – divorce, female employment and births outside of marriage are on the increase and the number of marriages and the birth rate itself are on the decrease.

Louis Roussel also contributed to this debate in an article that he published at an earlier point, in the early 1990s (Roussel 1992). In that article, he analysed the demographic data for the family at the end of the 1980s, discussing convergences and divergences between the different European countries at the time, though arguing that the synchronic cross section necessitated, at that time, that emphasis be placed on the disparities. The European figures for fertility, marriage, divorce, cohabitation and births outside of marriage varied. There was a particular contrast between the data for southern Europe and the countries in the north, especially in Scandinavia. These two subgroups represented the poles in relation to which the others were closer or farther away – the first with their low rates of divorce, cohabitation, births outside of marriage and fertility and the second with their high values for the same indicators.

When, however, the author mentioned the data for recent developments, he indicated a clear 'ground swell' with the same trends in all countries: everything seemed to indicate that in the centre and south the phenomena were being followed that had already been noted in Scandinavian countries, albeit with varying time frames – more cohabitation, more divorce and more births outside marriage. With respect to fertility, after the Scandinavians had witnessed the slow erosion of their figures from the 1960s, the 1980s revealed a change and, at the end of the decade, the process of recovery and a rise in the number of births had already begun. On the other hand, at the end of the 1980s, after a significantly

2. The Swedish author explains that when some of the basic legislation on marriage, the family and women's rights was applied in Scandinavian countries at the very beginning of the twentieth century, a large part of the working population was still engaged in agriculture (Therborn 2004: 77). Accordingly, he tends to question the acknowledgment of urbanisation and industrialisation, made in particular by W. Goode, as the fundamental factors in the change in family structures in the world (Goode 1963).

later and more abrupt fall than had taken place in the north, the countries in the south recorded very low figures in the fertility rates. These figures, moreover, would be maintained during the whole of the 1990s and even at the beginning of the new millennium.

The social processes that help to explain these common trends in development, the ground swell mentioned above, are relatively well known. They include social recomposition phenomena such as de-ruralisation and the expansion of the middle classes; socio-economic changes such as the growth of the service sectors; de-industrialisation and the greater participation of women in the labour market; and, additionally, profound cultural changes. They are transformations that, at the level of values and, more precisely, those values relating to the family, are reflected in another set of phenomena known as secularisation, emotionalisation, privatisation and individualisation (Ester, Halman and Moor 1994; Shorter 1975; Kellerhals et al. 1982; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). The processes of female assertion in the public sphere, which may also be termed the transition from the idea of a woman by nature to a perspective of the woman-individual, are also relevant (Torres 2001).

We can therefore say that the ground swell that has led to such significant upheavals in demographic indicators in recent years is grounded in similar social processes that have cut across most European countries. But though these processes have identical effects on the level of major trends, they still present certain specificities in the individual countries. A greater or lesser commitment to the independence of family members or the greater or lesser influence of institutional attitudes towards the family and marriage, for example, may be explained by specific social, economic, institutional and cultural configurations.

In a recent book in which he analyses changes in the family throughout the world, in particular during the twentieth century, Goran Therborn concludes that the diversity of family models persists, though they have all suffered great changes. With regard to what he calls the European family system, he states that certain internal distinctions that could already be determined in the past have ultimately re-emerged after substantial social changes (Therborn 2004: 306). He also argues that crediting urbanisation and industrialisation alone with the role of providing the principal motor for the family changes observed in the last hundred years does not seem sufficient to explain these changes. Therborn takes the example of the pioneering role played by Scandinavian countries in certain transformations that, with regard to the family, are today considered as the 'norm' in other European countries – gender equality in marriage, the freedom to choose a partner,<sup>2</sup> the greater value given to individual rights and a secular vision of conjugality. In accordance with this, he tends to give pre-eminence to political, cultural and ideological factors such as strong secularisation to explain the differences in the European family system that can be observed between countries (Therborn 2004: 78).

It is, thus, essential to bring together the specificities of each individual country or group of countries in order to understand certain differences or similarities. For example, to understand the reason why female employment rates in Portugal are comparable to those in Finland, a country with

innumerable basic differences in relation to Portugal, it is of fundamental importance to take account of the fact that here, besides the lower salaries for males, there was a colonial war from 1961 to 1974: that is, for thirteen successive years young males were obliged to join the military services for four years and fight in Africa for at least two. In combination with other factors, this situation ultimately represented an opportunity for women to enter and remain in the labour market, whether they had little schooling or a higher level of education. Later, the April Revolution (25 April 1974) allowed the legal changes that were necessary for the development of the discourse on equal opportunities for men and women in different spheres of life, as well as in the access to paid work. In a comparative analysis, therefore, it is also necessary to take account of the fact that, for the same indicator, countries may present similar values which veil specific cultural and social conditions, histories and meanings that are considerably different.

The distance between Scandinavian and southern countries can be further confirmed with the most varied examples. To quote just one more, in Sweden, among the many movements and measures to protect equal opportunities for men and women, in existence since long before the 1960s, sex education has been obligatory in schools since 1955 (Roussel 1992: 144). In southern countries, on the other hand, not even today is it possible to speak of a similar situation despite the current general use of contraception.<sup>3</sup>

However, in addition to the recognised effect of the difference arising from Catholic or Protestant influence or, as Therborn states, the greater or lesser influence of secularisation on topics associated with the family, the existence or absence of policies on gender equality or sexuality, which cannot be understood as simply the mechanical consequences of religious attitudes, is also a factor to be taken into account in explaining these differences.

The dynamics of change in social, political and ideological contexts produces effects that must be taken into account. For example, to understand the sharp fall in the birth rate in Eastern European countries, it is necessary to consider not only more general influencing factors but also a combination of factors connected with the loss of job security, the privatisation of childminding services and the departure of young people from these countries (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001: 119–27; Therborn 2004: 258).

But conjunctural alterations such as changes in the political direction of governments do not fail to affect existing policies in both the area of family policies and that of unemployment. An example of such change is the alternation in the same country between social democratic/socialist governments and conservative governments, which makes it possible to introduce modifications in the direction and variations in the related effect. This is the situation in the United Kingdom, which, while maintaining a liberal model, has seen certain policy alterations in the areas that we have mentioned. Between the years 1995 and 2001 it was also the case in Portugal.

The different interpretations of the role, operation and provisions of the welfare state in the various countries also have a decisive influence

3. The most obvious signs of the general use of contraception, even when the church advises against it in southern countries, are the birth rates themselves, which, in countries under Catholic influence, have been consistently among the lowest in the whole of Europe since the late 1980s.



on their planning greater or lesser institutional support or the implementation of policies that may affect the decisions of individuals (Torres et al. 2001). The fact that Finland and Spain have very similar youth unemployment rates but completely different birth rates – far higher in the Scandinavian country – has been explained precisely by the existence in Finland of an array of social and educational amenities for children and support arrangements for mothers which are ultimately reflected in the different fertility rates (Tobio 2001, 2005; Oinonen 2004: 340).

It only seems possible to accept that a European family model exists, in different concrete forms as Singly and Commaille propose, if we understand it as a set of very general characteristics. In fact, shared family concepts can be seen in the great majority of European countries at the present time – a high level of conjugalisation, individual freedom in the choice of partner, the predominance of feelings in the conjugal and parental relationship to the detriment of external criteria and institutional ideas, and the principles of equality between partners and equal access to the labour market for both sexes. This group of ‘shared’ practices and symbols (Singly and Commaille 1997: 11) is what really seems to be capable of explaining the convergence of movements in the demographic indicators relating to the family in most European countries.

But in practice, as the same authors also state, these very general attitudes are matched by different behaviours and even contradictions such as those connected with the total discrepancy between gender equality defended as a principle and the inequality that women experience in daily practice in family life and paid work. In addition to such contradictions, in order to distinguish countries and even internal groups in each country, differences count that we can term cultural and structural conditioning factors (e.g. the weight of religious constraints and inequalities of income). They interfere in the way that the so-called notions of emotionalisation, secularisation, privatisation and individualisation can be experienced and carried through to their conclusion. It is thus necessary to pay attention to what is most hidden in these transformation processes, which some authors have identified as the presence of a ‘modernised traditionalism’ in the context of the family (Levy, Widmer and Kellerhals 2002).

If on a very general basis, as has been mentioned above, it seems in fact possible to identify a European family model, even so, it is still necessary to insist on the importance of localizing and analysing its differences and asymmetries. Identifying a general model allows us to capture the meaning of certain common transformations and also define, with clearer contours, the values that are today considered fundamental acquisitions of civilisation in relation to the family. They contrast with a past vision of family relationships that stressed authoritarian, patriarchal, institutional and traditional aspects that have been and are still being questioned. Nowadays conceptions that lay stress on the importance of personal fulfilment and well-being within the family and on equality between the sexes do not entail abandoning the idea of having children or caring for others (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). This comes out very clearly in the ESS results that we are going to analyse.

In addition to these major common trends, it is also essential to give an account of the marked asymmetries that subsist both between and within countries. This may be considered a question of different models or different manifestations of the same European model but the decisive element seems to be the consideration of this array of conceptions and situations. Beyond the symbolic level – with its greater insistence on the religious or institutional aspect or the dimension of individual assertion – various constraints have a bearing on the way in which family relationships are experienced. Dependence on the operating mechanisms of the labour market, precarious situations that make it difficult to build a family, and unemployment that may take individuals by surprise at later points in their life cycle are just a few examples of situations that can make themselves felt more strongly in certain countries, at given moments in history or in certain social sectors. Family life is lived in a specific framework of constraints that, without obviously hindering individual action or strategies, sets limits that sometimes cause contradictions between what is actually desired and what can be achieved.

**A portrait of European households. The Europe of ‘couples’**

With regard to the picture of European family profiles, an initial indicator is the average size of households. Europe presents a common pattern of small families containing an average of three people, although this size varies. An increase occurs between the Scandinavian countries (2.6 people per household) and the countries belonging to central/southern Europe and the area of the recent enlargement (3.3 people per household). This movement can be seen in Figure 1.

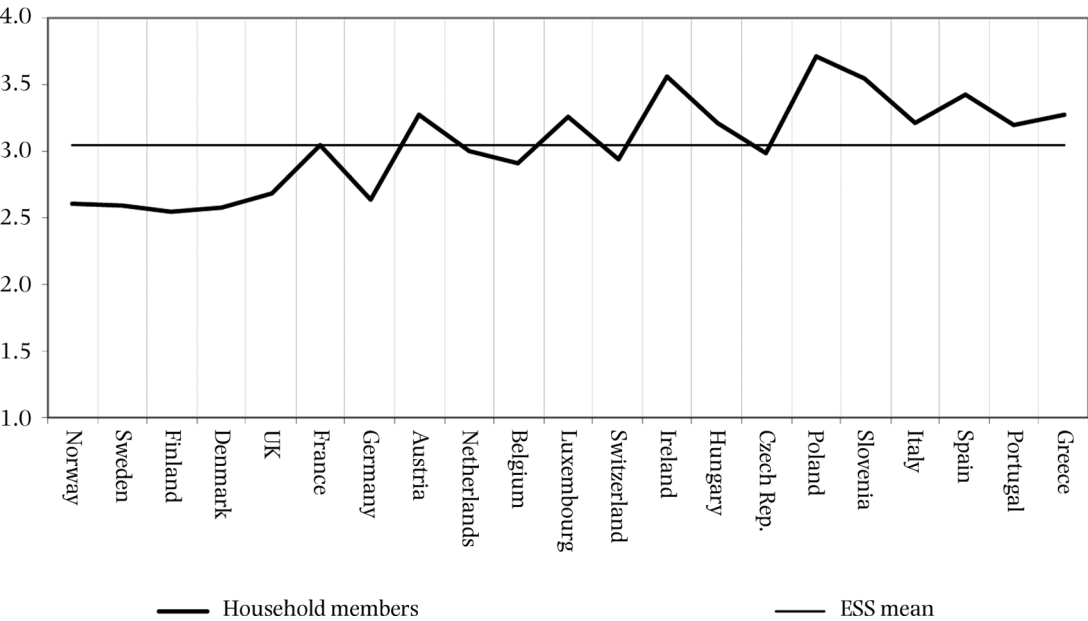


Figure 1: Household averages in ESS countries.

The ESS data also shows that Norway presents the lowest percentage of larger households, i.e. with more than five people (1.8 per cent). In this field it is closest to other Scandinavian countries, namely Denmark with 2.3 per cent and Sweden with 2.4 per cent. At the other extreme, Poland is the country with the highest percentage of households with more than five people (13.3 per cent), followed by Ireland with 11.8 per cent, which is consistent with the fact that both of them, on average, have the largest households.

The progress of the fall in family size can be clearly illustrated by the Portuguese example, which moved from an average of 3.8 people per household in 1960 to 3.2 in 2002. In addition to this, Portugal has witnessed a marked fall in the percentage of households with more than five people, which was 17.1 per cent in 1960 (Almeida et al. 2000), while the ESS data indicate 3.4 per cent for 2002.

Europeans either live in partnerships, which is the case of the overwhelming majority, or alone, as can be seen in Table 1, with various generations sharing the same household to a progressively more limited extent. Single-parent families and people who live with their parents have little significance in the whole, though there are variations between countries with respect to the latter. These overall trends clearly illustrate, on the one hand, the processes of 'conjugalisation' and family modernisation that are so well described by Durkheim (Durkheim 1975; Torres 2001) but, on the other, they also illustrate the individualisation processes in the family context that have been analysed by various contemporary authors (Kellerhals et al. 1982; Kaufmann 1993; Singly 1993; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001).

|             | Living alone | Couple without children | Couples with children | Lone parents | Living with parents | Other situation | Total |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------|
| Norway      | 20.5         | 33.1                    | 34.2                  | 3.6          | 5.9                 | 2.7             | 100   |
| Sweden      | 21.2         | 35.3                    | 29.2                  | 3.9          | 8.3                 | 2.0             | 100   |
| Finland     | 23.1         | 32.9                    | 27.8                  | 3.9          | 10.3                | 2.0             | 100   |
| Denmark     | 18.1         | 37.8                    | 29.9                  | 4.2          | 7.0                 | 3.0             | 100   |
| UK          | 18.4         | 31.9                    | 28.9                  | 4.4          | 11.3                | 5.2             | 100   |
| France      | 12.9         | 28.7                    | 39.5                  | 5.3          | 9.2                 | 4.5             | 100   |
| Germany     | 19.1         | 32.9                    | 28.3                  | 4.5          | 10.7                | 4.6             | 100   |
| Austria     | 11.5         | 23.3                    | 38.2                  | 3.7          | 12.3                | 10.9            | 100   |
| Netherlands | 11.2         | 31.9                    | 39.9                  | 3.1          | 12.0                | 2.0             | 100   |
| Belgium     | 14.5         | 27.8                    | 31.0                  | 6.0          | 15.6                | 5.1             | 100   |
| Luxembourg  | 12.5         | 18.9                    | 37.4                  | 2.4          | 20.7                | 8.3             | 100   |
| Switzerland | 15.0         | 30.2                    | 34.9                  | 2.9          | 13.4                | 3.7             | 100   |
| Ireland     | 10.2         | 16.0                    | 39.3                  | 5.9          | 20.2                | 8.4             | 100   |
| Hungary     | 11.2         | 20.3                    | 32.7                  | 5.3          | 17.6                | 13.0            | 100   |
| Czech Rep   | 12.2         | 27.9                    | 35.6                  | 4.9          | 10.6                | 8.8             | 100   |
| Poland      | 8.2          | 14.8                    | 33.3                  | 3.5          | 22.4                | 17.9            | 100   |
| Slovenia    | 7.9          | 14.1                    | 34.1                  | 4.4          | 23.2                | 16.4            | 100   |
| Italy       | 8.8          | 18.4                    | 40.3                  | 4.2          | 22.0                | 6.3             | 100   |
| Spain       | 6.2          | 20.1                    | 34.0                  | 3.5          | 25.1                | 11.2            | 100   |
| Portugal    | 6.9          | 24.8                    | 34.5                  | 3.0          | 16.1                | 14.7            | 100   |
| Greece      | 8.1          | 22.8                    | 36.2                  | 3.4          | 16.8                | 12.7            | 100   |
| Mean        | 13.3         | 26.4                    | 33.9                  | 4.3          | 15.0                | 7.1             | 100   |

Table 1: Composition of households (%).



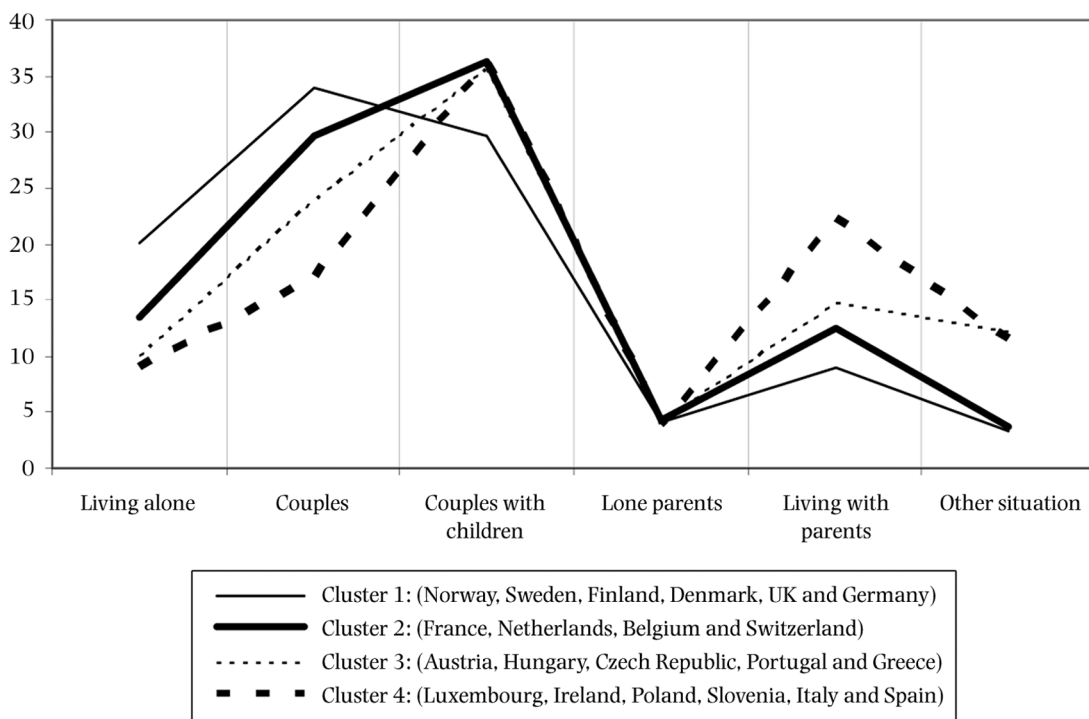


Figure 2: Hierarchical cluster analysis for the composition of households (%).

With regard to the differences between countries, which are presented in Table 1, they can be perceived in a more systematic manner if we use the statistical method of hierarchical cluster analysis. This method allows us to identify four main groups, while safeguarding the analytical consistency of such identification, as can be seen in Figure 2.

The first cluster, composed of Scandinavian countries, Germany and the United Kingdom,<sup>4</sup> is characterised by the greater number of couples without children, which is higher than the percentage of couples with children. It also has a higher percentage of people who live alone, which is consistent with the fact that in this group of countries there are fewer people living with their parents. It is to be noted that this first group also presents a small percentage of other situations, in similar fashion to the second cluster. Regarding the data on single-parenthood, there are no differences between the clusters.

The second group, consisting of countries in the centre of Europe (Belgium, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands), records intermediate percentages for those living alone and those living with their parents. In this group, couples with children appear as the dominant category, as also happens in the remaining clusters.

The third group, made up of Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Portugal and Greece, distinguishes itself from the first two in having fewer individuals who live alone and more respondents who live with their parents. These features are even more prominent in the fourth cluster, which is formed by Ireland, Luxembourg and the remaining countries from the enlargement and the south. In fact, this is the group of countries that

4. The reservation should be made that this aggregation only takes household size and composition into account. The Scandinavian countries are different from Germany and the United Kingdom in such important aspects as social policies, which may be reflected in differences in indicators like the fertility rate, or systems for coordinating conjugal life and work, as will be discussed below.

5. The data should be read in the following manner: in Portugal, among the group of people living alone, only 8.3 per cent are between 15 and 29 years of age.

registers the lowest percentages of people living alone and that has the largest households, the lowest percentage of couples living without children and the highest number of individuals living with parents, in accordance with what other recent studies have concluded (Saraceno, Olagnero and Torrioni 2005: 10).

If we take a more careful look at each of the categories in the composition of the domestic groups, it can be seen that the weight of individuals living alone in Scandinavian countries is almost three times greater than that for the southern countries as a whole. This is a clear indicator of the differences in the degree of independence in relation to the larger family group.

It is to be noted that, in Scandinavian countries, between 20 and 25 per cent of young people live alone, which distinguishes them from the other countries and adds to the evidence of their early independence. At the other extreme, we have countries such as Ireland, Hungary, Poland, Slovenia, Spain and Portugal with very low percentages of young people who live alone (between 1 and 2.5 per cent).

The old people in Scandinavia are also among those who most often live alone, especially in Norway and Finland, where they total 40 per cent. The south is characterised for having not only fewer young people living alone but fewer old people, too.

Another perspective is provided by Figure 3, which shows a cluster analysis carried out just for the group of individuals who live alone,<sup>5</sup> to shed light on how they are distributed among the age groups and how the different countries compare.

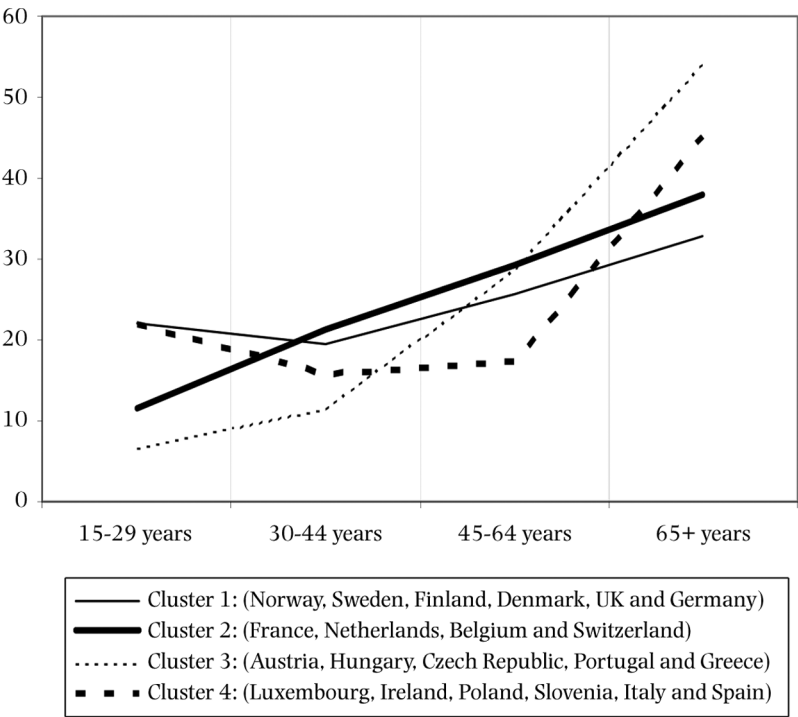


Figure 3: Hierarchical cluster analysis: weight of each age group in the total number of individuals living alone (%).

In the cluster made up of the Scandinavian countries, France and Austria, the weight of the youngest people in the group of those living alone is greater than in the other groups. In addition, it may be noted that afterwards there is a more equitable distribution among the various age groups.

In the second group, consisting of the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Italy, among those who live alone we may note the increasing weight of the older age groups and the lesser significance of the young people in relation to the previous cluster.

In Ireland, Spain, Portugal and the countries of the enlargement, a large discrepancy is to be noted between the weight of the young people and the old people. More than 50 per cent of the people who live alone are over the age of 65, a situation that, in the context of the lowest incomes, may indicate vulnerability and social exclusion associated with old age.

Greece seems isolated in that, on the one hand, the weight of the young people among the few individuals who live alone is, curiously, equivalent to that of the Scandinavians, while, on the other hand, the weight of the oldest people is closest to the cluster to which Portugal and Spain belong. It may be remembered that, with regard to the total number of people living alone, Greece compares with its geographical group, southern Europe.

A person's independence of older or younger generations is certainly greater in Scandinavian countries as a result of cultural factors that attach importance to this independence, though, also, as a result of the social protection systems. In contrast, in other countries there are greater obstacles to this independence, not only for cultural reasons but also, particularly among the young people, because of social inequalities and the difficulties encountered in entering the labour market (Pais 2001; Guerreiro and Abrantes 2004).

With respect to the distribution of couples without children – including those who had never had children and those who were not living with their children at the time of the survey – higher percentages are observed in Scandinavian countries, Germany and the United Kingdom than other ESS countries. This not only reflects the degree of independence achieved among the younger people but also the increase in average expectancy with regard to life together as a couple. This indicator also represents an item of data that is consistent with the smaller average family sizes in these countries.

The southern countries, in their turn, especially Italy and Spain, along with Ireland, Luxembourg and the countries of the enlargement, present high percentages of couples with children and some of the lowest numbers for couples without children, which indicate less (and later) independence among their children.

Another quite illustrative indicator of the different levels of independence among these children is the percentage of respondents who live with their parents, especially the youngest.

As can be seen in Figure 4, only 40 per cent of the young people in Scandinavian countries and France have not yet left the parental home. In contrast, from the position of the Netherlands onwards, almost all

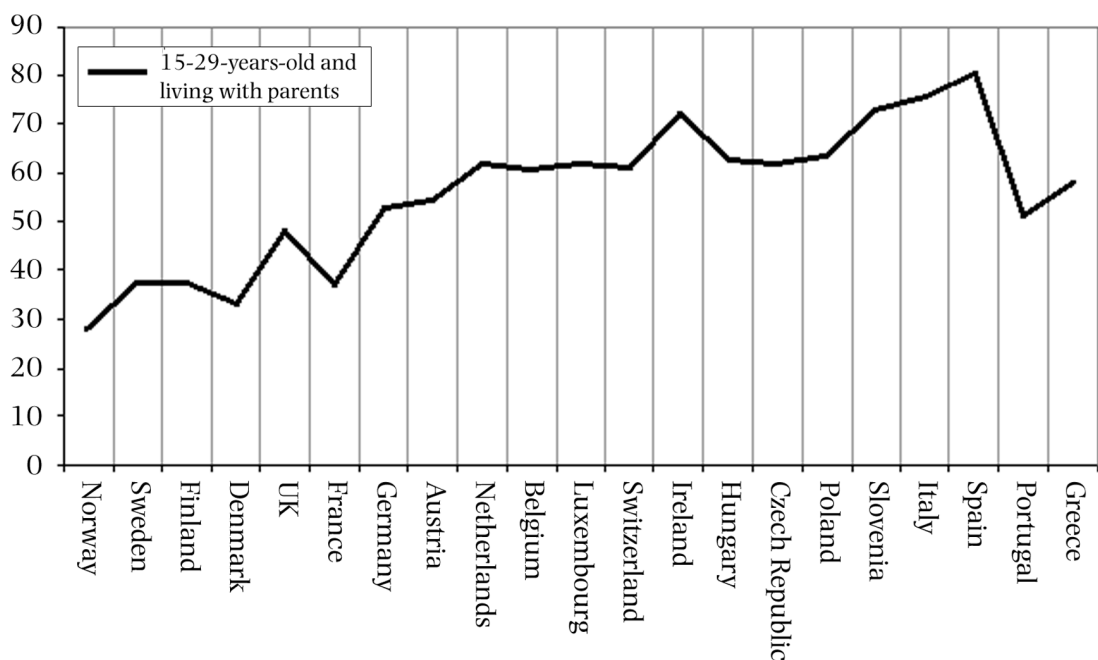


Figure 4: Respondents who live with their parents (%).

countries register more than 60 per cent of young people living in their parents' homes, with two exceptions: Portugal and Greece. The lower percentages of young people living with their parents in these two countries, in comparison with other southern countries, those of the enlargement and those in central Europe, are consistent with the fact that Portugal and Greece present some of the highest percentages of young people who have started a family, as Figure 5 illustrates.

We can see here how the percentages of single-parent families and couples with children vary in ESS countries, among both the young people aged 15–29 and the respondents as a whole.

With respect to young couples with children, Norway, France, Hungary, Portugal and Greece stand out with the highest figures. But Norway and France are only close to Portugal, Greece and Hungary as far as the number of young couples with children is concerned. For the rest, they share a greater range of options for young people who leave home – starting a new family, living as a couple without having children or living alone – with other Scandinavian and northern and central European countries.

The ESS data shows that, for young people from the southern and enlargement countries who are not living with their parents, the formation of a family is the exit point par excellence from the parental home. This fact confirms other research results which show lower percentages for couples without children and young people living alone in southern and eastern Europe (Saraceno, Olagnero and Torroni 2005: 11). Portugal and Hungary, however, have an earlier pattern for starting a family, compared to other southern and eastern countries.

Figure 5 clearly shows the contrast between Portugal, where 14.3 per cent of young couples have children, and Spain, where this percentage

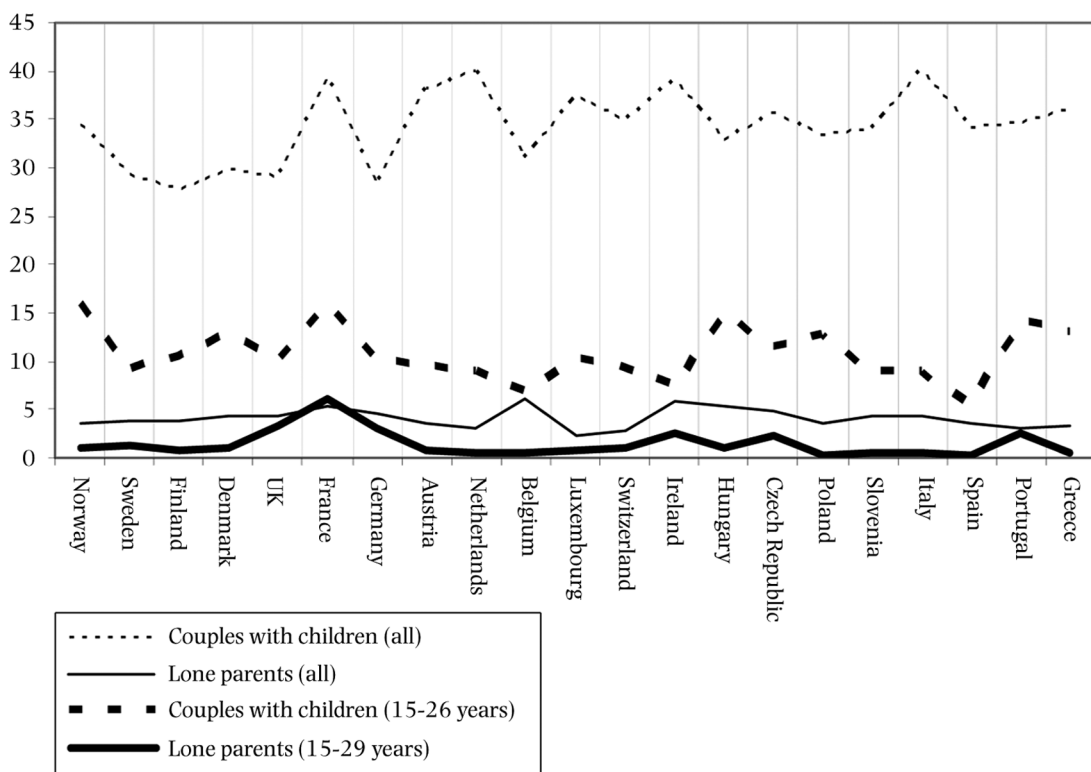


Figure 5: Single-parent families and couples with children (%).

falls to 5.5. On the other hand, Portugal has 51.2 per cent of its young people living with their parents, whereas in Spain this figure rises to 80.3 per cent, the highest in ESS countries.

These important differences between the two Iberian countries in the independence of their young people may be explained by the higher youth unemployment rates in Spain and the dearth of policies – in either country – simultaneously supporting motherhood and employment (Torres et al. 2004; Tobio 2005). But with regard to Portugal, which records the highest percentage of young married people in all ESS countries (26.4 per cent), it is also to be stressed that when the youngest people start a family this is accompanied by early school leaving, which leads to the low qualifications of these young Portuguese and drives them into low-paid employment that is often precarious.

Young people also leave home late in countries like Spain and Italy, on account of uncertain and erratic transitions often marked by advances and retreats, precarious employment and youth unemployment,<sup>6</sup> as an array of qualitative research demonstrates (Pais 2001; Guerreiro and Abrantes 2004; Brannen et al. 2002).

Thus, when young people remain in their parents' homes or postpone independence, a conjugal situation or the starting of a family, this cannot simply be put down to an extended education. These difficulties of transition to independence may be indicators of the perverse effects of precarious integration into the labour market, against a background of retrenchment

6. Youth unemployment rates in Spain and Italy are among the highest in Europe and these countries also present some of the highest percentages of young jobseekers, 10.5 per cent and 10.6 per cent respectively – figures that only Poland exceeds, with 13 per cent.

in social security systems that leaves the individuals to rely more on themselves (Beck 2000).

Generally speaking, it may be said in summary that, for young Europeans, the opportunity to live independently or start a family is set within a framework of differences in cultural and gender values, socio-economic conditions and the circumstances of access to the labour market and the forms of integration into it. Of equal significance is the presence or absence of policies that make employment, independence and the starting of a family simultaneously possible (Saracens, Olagnero and Torrioni 2005; Oinonen 2004).

The data for single parenthood – whether among young people or in an assessment of the figures for the respondents overall – do not show great variations. France is conspicuous in the youngest age group, followed by countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Ireland and, also, Portugal. Most Europeans in single-parent situations, however, are aged between 30 and 59, which may be explained by the fact that most divorced people are to be found in this age bracket. Perhaps the most obvious fact to be pointed out is precisely the small percentage of single parents, which means that generally, as with the situation of divorcees, it involves situations that tend to develop into new conjugal and family configurations.

Another view of the data on parenthood is provided by Table 2, which allows us to distribute parents with children under 10 years of age by type of household.

|             | Couples with<br>children | Lone parents | Three<br>generations<br>(parents, sons,<br>grandsons) | Other<br>situation | Total |
|-------------|--------------------------|--------------|---|--------------------|-------|
| Norway      | 92.9                     | 5.9          | 0.6   | 0.6                | 100   |
| Sweden      | 87.5                     | 11.6         | 0.0   | 0.9                | 100   |
| Finland     | 90.9                     | 9.1          | 0.0   | 0.0                | 100   |
| Denmark     | 91.3                     | 7.7          | 0.5   | 0.5                | 100   |
| UK          | 87.1                     | 10.8         | 1.5   | 0.6                | 100   |
| France      | 90.8                     | 6.4          | 0.0   | 2.8                | 100   |
| Germany     | 87.3                     | 9.5          | 1.9   | 1.3                | 100   |
| Austria     | 84.8                     | 5.5          | 7.0   | 2.7                | 100   |
| Netherlands | 95.5                     | 2.6          | 0.0   | 1.9                | 100   |
| Belgium     | 88.4                     | 9.7          | 0.0   | 1.9                | 100   |
| Luxembourg  | 91.8                     | 2.3          | 1.2   | 4.7                | 100   |
| Switzerland | 93.8                     | 4.3          | 0.4   | 1.5                | 100   |
| Ireland     | 79.4                     | 7.5          | 0.4   | 12.7               | 100   |
| Hungary     | 76.1                     | 4.1          | 1.2   | 18.6               | 100   |
| Czech Rep   | 83.6                     | 8.9          | 1.2   | 6.3                | 100   |
| Poland      | 71.8                     | 1.7          | 21.0  | 5.5                | 100   |
| Slovenia    | 79.1                     | 3.7          | 11.2  | 6.0                | 100   |
| Italy       | 94.5                     | 1.7          | 0.4   | 3.4                | 100   |
| Spain       | 82.7                     | 1.4          | 4.3   | 11.6               | 100   |
| Portugal    | 81.6                     | 3.0          | 8.4   | 7.0                | 100   |
| Greece      | 5.0                      | 2.8          | 8.9   | 3.3                | 100   |
| Mean        | 93.1                     | 2.4          | 3.0   | 1.5                | 100   |

Table 2: Distribution of parents with children under 10 years of age by type of household (%).



Single parenthood among parents with children under the age of 10, which, on average, is lower than for parents as a whole – 2.4 per cent in the first case and 4.3 per cent in the second, as we saw above – is more widespread in Sweden and the United Kingdom, with values above 10 per cent. In the case of the southern countries, Portugal presents the highest percentage with 3 per cent.

It is also worth mentioning the percentages for three-generational co-residence, where small children are involved, in Poland and, to a lesser extent, Slovenia, Greece and Portugal. Among other reasons – possibly, for example, the greater survival of the rural economy – the economic difficulties associated with the greater lack of socio-educational and child-minding solutions may help to explain these statistics. But, as research based on qualitative methodologies concludes, at least in the case of Portugal, it is to be noted that in general it is a question of situations imposed by the objective conditions. The people regularly express the wish to achieve the model of residential independence reflected in the so-called modern conjugal family (Torres 2002).

In summary, northern Europe has smaller families and is notable in that it has more young people living alone, fewer couples with children and fewer respondents living at home with their parents, which are all indicators of a greater assertion of independence. The number of households where three generations live together is very limited.

Families in southern and enlargement countries tend to be slightly bigger and have fewer individuals living alone, with the greater part of the latter being older people. These countries are also characterised by a larger number of respondents living with their parents, especially young people. We are, thus, dealing with a continuation of the differences that Roussel (1992) and Therborn (2004) have already pointed out. But the extent of these differences has been diminishing over recent years, as longitudinal analyses show, and signs of convergence are also to be seen. We shall be seeing this matter in more detail below.

## **Marriage: the main form of ‘conjugalisation’ throughout Europe**

With our picture of marital status in Europe as a base – and account being taken of cohabitation relationships – it is of interest to discuss social factors and processes that may explain the prevailing patterns.

What is evident from Table 3 is that we are still living in a ‘Europe of the married’, since this group undoubtedly reflects the marital status of the majority in practically every country. Only in Sweden are less than 50 per cent of the people married, nonetheless, that bracket still represents the modal group. There are, indeed, certain differences to be noted between countries.

Scandinavian countries record the lowest number of married people in Europe. In the southern countries, these percentages are approximately 60 per cent, as Table 3 illustrates.

The cohabitation results show a higher level of informality in relationships in Scandinavian countries (with more than 30 per cent of the people cohabiting) and in some northern and central European countries (with the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria and Switzerland registering a figure

|             | Married | Separated | Divorced | Widowed | Single | Cohabitant |
|-------------|---------|-----------|----------|---------|--------|------------|
| Norway      | 51.3    | 1.2       | 7.2      | 7.1     | 33.2   | 36.9       |
| Sweden      | 46.1    | 0.8       | 8.9      | 5.4     | 38.8   | 36.9       |
| Finland     | 50.2    | 0.7       | 9.3      | 6.4     | 33.4   | 24.5       |
| Denmark     | 55.0    | 0.8       | 7.6      | 5.7     | 30.9   | 35.5       |
| UK          | 55.7    | 2.4       | 7.1      | 6.9     | 27.9   | 21.8       |
| France      | 58.3    | 1.3       | 5.7      | 5.7     | 29.0   | 28.6       |
| Germany     | 56.2    | 1.9       | 7.5      | 8.2     | 26.2   | 20.9       |
| Austria     | 58.4    | 1.1       | 6.4      | 5.8     | 28.3   | 24.4       |
| Netherlands | 63.2    | 0.4       | 4.9      | 5.9     | 25.6   | —          |
| Belgium     | 53.5    | 2.5       | 8.2      | 6.4     | 29.4   | 19.1       |
| Luxembourg  | 54.4    | 1.4       | 4.7      | 5.3     | 34.2   | 15.6       |
| Switzerland | 58.9    | 1.5       | 7.4      | 4.3     | 27.9   | 22.1       |
| Ireland     | 55.3    | 3.3       | 1.1      | 7.4     | 32.9   | 8.0        |
| Hungary     | 55.3    | 0.8       | 8.5      | 12.3    | 23.1   | 15.1       |
| Czech Rep   | 64.4    | 1.8       | 8.3      | 10.6    | 14.9   | 13.3       |
| Poland      | 57.6    | 0.5       | 3.2      | 9.8     | 8.9    | 3.6        |
| Slovenia    | 53.9    | 0.7       | 3.7      | 9.0     | 32.7   | 14.4       |
| Italy       | 60.5    | 2.2       | 1.8      | 6.7     | 28.8   | 7.6        |
| Spain       | 58.5    | 1.7       | 1.2      | 7.5     | 31.1   | 4.9        |
| Portugal    | 64.8    | 0.7       | 2.2      | 7.5     | 24.8   | 4.0        |
| Greece      | 66.6    | 0.6       | 1.6      | 7.6     | 23.6   | 3.0        |
| Mean        | 57.8    | 1.6       | 5.2      | 7.4     | 28.0   | 20.4       |

Table 3: Marital status and cohabitation (%).

of more than 20 per cent). In contrast, southern countries have the lowest results in Europe, with Italy recording the highest level in this group, though it involves less than 8 per cent of the population. Greece is the country with the fewest people cohabiting (3 per cent), followed by Portugal (4 per cent).

Figure 6 shows how the percentage of married people rises, though not very markedly, between Scandinavia and the countries of southern Europe. More notably, the cohabitation lines undergo a more accentuated descent between the Scandinavian countries and those in the south. The way the two lines develop therefore leaves the impression that marriage numbers are correlated with those for cohabitation, though the correlation value obtained ( $r = 0.32$ ) suggests that there are other relevant factors involved in the explanation of marriage and cohabitation percentages in the different countries.

With respect to the younger generation, Figure 7 presents an interesting inversion of the marriage and cohabitation lines as we move from the Scandinavian and Nordic countries to the southern and enlargement countries. In fact, between the two there is a significant correlation for the younger people ( $r = -0.55$ ). However, Figure 7 suggests a trend towards ‘conjugalisation’ and, despite the high results for cohabitation among young people, in certain countries, a large proportion will ultimately marry, as is suggested by the total results seen above for individuals who are married.

As the chart shows, in Scandinavia and northern and central European countries the most frequent trend is cohabitation, with a clear separation

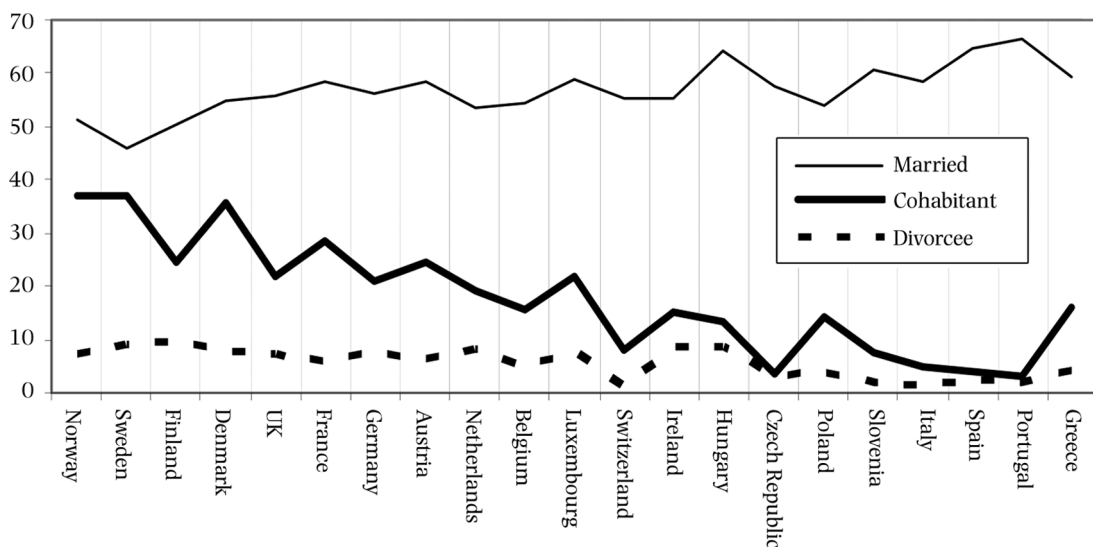


Figure 6: Married, divorced and cohabiting (%).

between leaving home and marriage. In contrast, in southern countries the percentages of young people who cohabit are among the lowest in Europe, from which it can be deduced that ‘conjugalisation’ and leaving the parental home essentially take place by way of marriage and a new family.

The choice to marry may indicate, among other factors, retreat from a less formal and a legally less protected option such as cohabitation (Torres 2002). Furthermore, cohabitation does not arise as an alternative to marriage or a choice against it. As Kaufmann (1993) suggests, it often appears as a stage in the selection of partners, with marriage taking place when

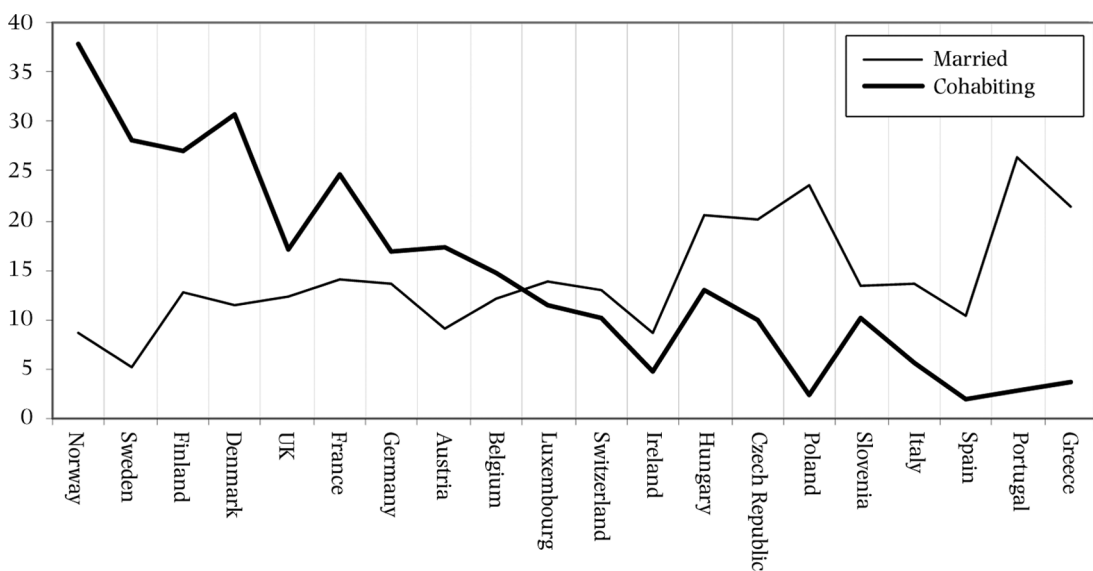


Figure 7: Individuals aged 15–29, married or cohabiting (%).

there are guarantees of stability, when the decision is taken to have a family or when it already exists, as Oinonen (2004) indicates. In the same vein, Bozon (1992: 445) shows in the case of France that ultimately, even among those who cohabit, the majority not only marry but also have a church wedding. So, in these cases, we are not dealing with the 'de-institutionalisation' of marriage, as some have suggested, but with its postponement and with a more pragmatic attitude towards life's options and its institutions (Torres 2002: 67).

In this respect, Spain and Italy differ from Portugal in that fewer young people are married – but not because they establish informal relationships like the young Scandinavians. If, in these two countries, few young people are married, cohabiting or living alone it is because they remain in their parents' homes, as has already been mentioned and has been ascertained by other studies (Saraceno, Olagnero and Torroni 2005).

In an analysis of the percentages for the divorced – see Table 3, and Figure 8 below – the most interesting factor to observe, as we have already noted for single-parent families, is the fact that the values are low (5.2 per cent on average). This clearly demonstrates the temporary nature of these situations, as studies on the subject of family recomposition have shown (Lobo and Conceição 2003). A comparison between countries leads us back to the well-known pattern of differences between the Scandinavian, northern and central European countries and those in the south, with the percentage of divorcees being higher in the first group and with the south-eastern group being joined by Ireland and Poland.

To confirm what has been said about the temporary nature of the situation of divorce, it is worth observing in Figure 8 – which compares the percentage of divorcees with the percentage of married respondents who have been divorced – that in most countries the results for those who have been divorced are higher than for those who were divorced at the moment the survey was applied.

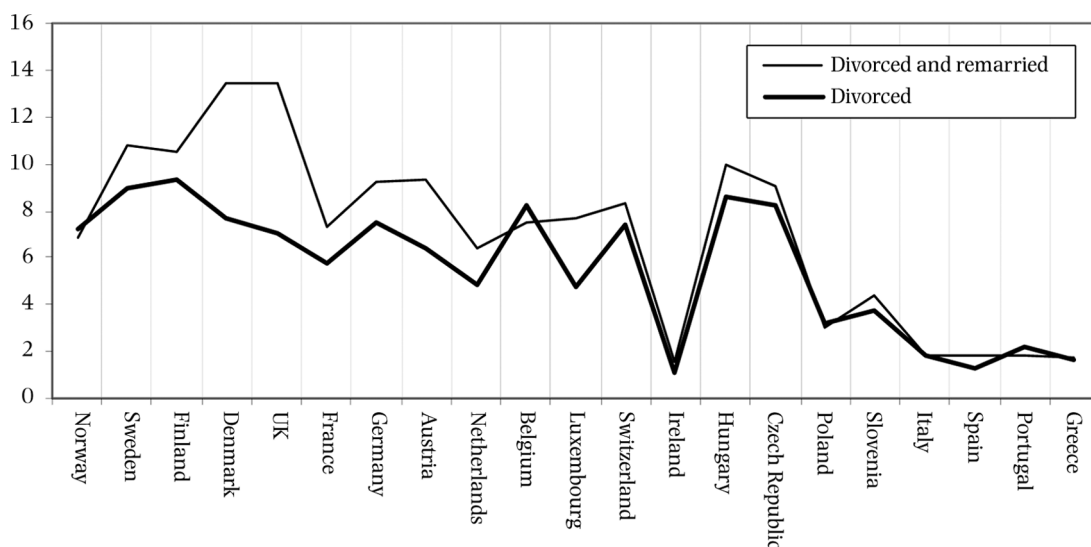


Figure 8: Divorced respondents and married respondents who have been divorced (%).

It is to be observed that, generally speaking, in countries where divorce rates have been higher, i.e. where it may be assumed that family recombination and the return to living in a couple are also more established practices, there are far more people who have been divorced than are so at present.

As Roussel (1992) and Therborn (2004) note, another relevant factor in explaining the higher number of divorces in Europe is the process of secularisation, i.e. the more limited influence of religion on daily practices and on decisions such as marrying, cohabiting or divorcing. In six countries (Sweden, the United Kingdom, France, Holland, Belgium and the Czech Republic) over 50 per cent of respondents declared that they had no religion. A more detailed analysis showed a significant correlation between not belonging to a religion and cohabiting ( $r = 0.38$ ) and a significant and fairly sizeable correlation was obtained between not belonging to a religion and being divorced ( $r = 0.66$ ). Our data also allows us to establish a relationship between the greater integration of women into the labour market, which can reduce the economic dependence of women and men alike in relation to marriage, and the higher percentage of divorcees ( $r = 0.65$ ).<sup>7</sup>

To summarise the fundamental aspects, the ESS data shows that marriage remains the main form of living as a couple and that there is also a strong desire among Europeans to live conjugally, whether formally or informally. This is seen in the fact that situations of divorce or single parenthood tend to represent a low figure, thus revealing themselves to be temporary. The central role that family and conjugal life plays in personal happiness, as we shall see more clearly at a later stage, is of such importance that most divorced people tend to return to a conjugal arrangement.

A synchronic cross section displays differences between ESS countries. On the one hand, we have countries such as those in Scandinavia and northern and central Europe with more cohabitation and divorce and fewer ties with a religion. On the other, in southern countries, Poland and Ireland, religion has a greater influence and this is where there are the fewest divorces, the highest number of formal marriages and the least cohabitation.

However, any diachronic analysis shows that there are processes of change that have developed throughout Europe and all point in the same direction: the greater importance given to individual interests, the increased value attached to the family, privacy and personal satisfaction, a demand for symmetrical positions between men and women and reduced value attached to, or resistance to, external forms of imposition and conditioning. The traditional idea of an unbreakable and formal conjugal relationship with unequal or different roles is thus called into question (Roussel 1992; Giddens 1992). If these are appreciable and overall trends for the population as a whole, it is the young people, and especially the women, who tend to give the most support to such attitudes, as has already been seen and as can be concluded from other research results (Torres 1996a).

What it therefore seems necessary to stress is the change of direction attributed to marriage, even when it takes place according to the liturgy

7. Various studies show that the fact that women are working may also be a facilitating factor for men to take the initiative for divorce, since they will have fewer responsibilities after separation, in particular with regard to maintenance payments (Torres 1996).

8. According to the data monitoring fertility rates over the successive generations of women (beginning with those born in 1930), southern countries start off with the highest fertility rates in Europe in the older generations and then present a large fall in this indicator over the generations (Eurostat 2001).

of the church. In all cases, it is important to emphasise that, in addition to the differences between European countries, already indicated, different attitudes also coexist within each country. If from the standpoint of values the great majority distance themselves from a traditional vision of marriage and the family, it is also true that there are larger or smaller minority groups who maintain these positions. However, and this seems to be an even more relevant factor, constraints of various types mean that not everybody manages to live according to his or her own representations or expectations.

### **Motherhood and female employment: a positive correlation**

From the range of relationships that exist between work and family we decided to give more in-depth treatment to the relationship between motherhood, fatherhood and work, taking the ESS data as the base. In the first place, in a combined form, the analysis covers the development of fertility indicators and the proportion of mothers in work, in an attempt to understand and explain the differences observed between countries. The analysis that follows deals with the way in which men, women, fathers and mothers are positioned with regard to the labour market.

For a considerable period it was generally believed that one of the fundamental factors that could help to explain the marked fall in birth rates was the increasing participation of women in the labour market. If it is true that, for several years, the correlation between fertility and female participation in the labour market was negative for OECD countries (Del Boca and Locatelli 2003: 152), since the end of the 1980s the effect has been precisely the opposite. Figure 9 shows that, for most EU countries, the greater the rate of female participation in the labour market, the higher the fertility rate. It is still the case, however, that no EU country attains the values necessary to replace its population.

How is this inversion to be explained? Before we seek to understand these processes, it is worth observing the data on the development of both indicators in the different European countries. When we consider the development of the fertility rate in the European Union since the 1960s, we see that in northern, central and, particularly, Scandinavian countries, there was an early and smooth downward trend until the 1980s, with a slight rise later in 2000. On the other hand, in southern countries, the slowdown in fertility was sharper and came later,<sup>8</sup> since it fell abruptly, beginning with the 1980s, and has maintained extremely low values up to the present day (Del Boca and Locatelli 2003: 152; Therborn 2004: 285).

With regard to the female rate of employment, it is steadily rising in all countries, though in Scandinavian and some northern European countries it was already high in the 1980s; in contrast, in southern countries female participation in the labour market was weak during those years and, for all that it has risen since, it is still low in relation to the other countries, with the exception of Portugal (Del Boca and Locatelli 2003: 152; Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2002). We thus reach the year 2002 with a positive correlation between the participation of women and mothers in the labour market and the fertility indicators.



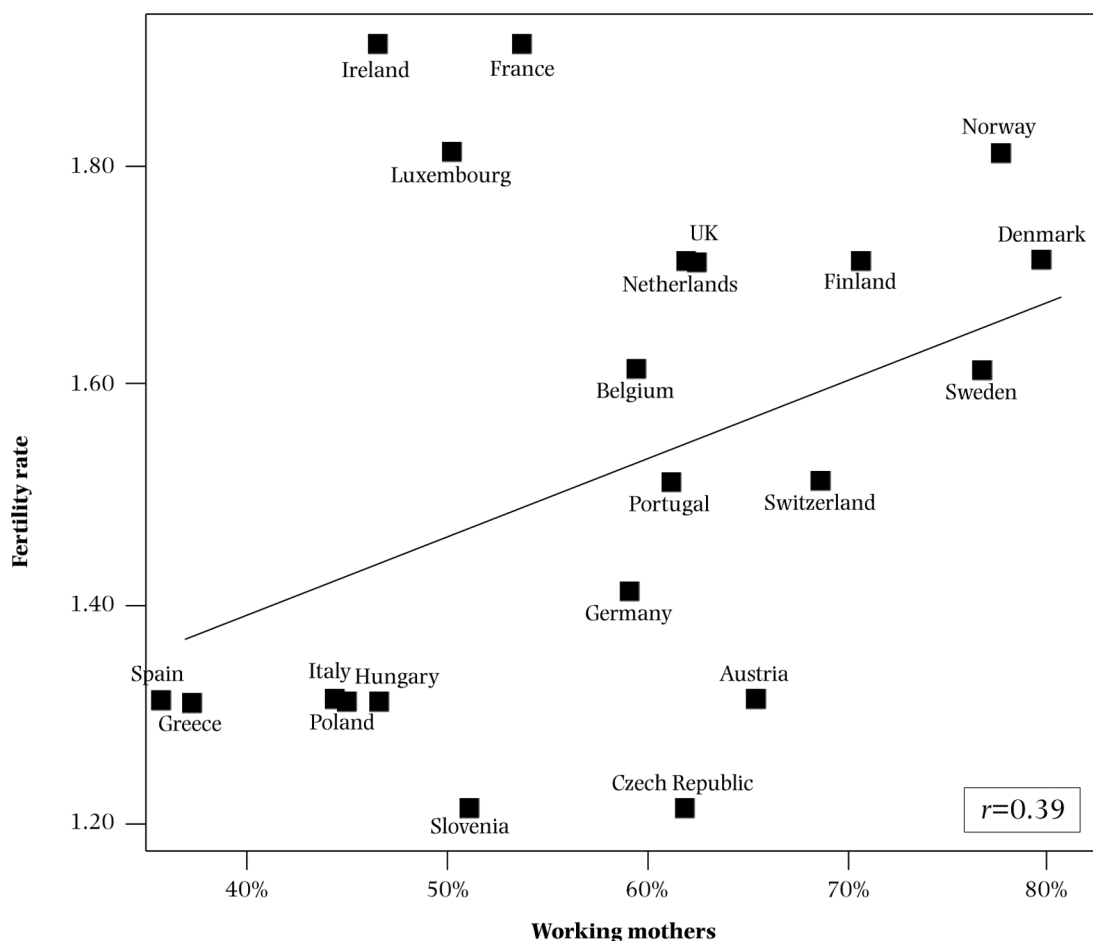


Figure 9: Fertility rate versus working mothers (%).

As has been demonstrated, southern countries, with the exception of Portugal, have both a rather low proportion of working mothers, and fertility indices among the lowest in Europe. Scandinavians occupy precisely the other extreme, with the extensive participation of mothers in the labour market and high fertility indicators. We also find a group of countries with a certain proportion of working mothers and intermediate fertility indices. Finally, with a fertility rate of 1.9, France stands out as the country that most closely approaches the value at which the population replaces itself (2.1). With regard to the countries in the east, if they all have very low fertility levels, they differ on the point of the employment rate among mothers, with the Czech Republic recording appreciably higher values.

How can we explain these correlations, which, for some, are certainly unexpected? Studies have shown that the development of policies aimed at increasing women's participation in the labour market and, simultaneously, a set of measures to improve maternity and infancy/childhood support may be the basis of both the relative recovery in fertility and the

retention of mothers in the labour market. In effect, in a practically unequivocal manner, these are the results of various examples of research work that compare groups of European countries against the same indicators or others related to them (Del Boca and Locatelli 2003; Oinonen 2004; Klement and Rudolph 2004).

In contrast, the types of policy mentioned may not exist, as happens in southern European countries. Given that the youngest women tend to want to join the labour market, as is well known in the case of Portugal, and also Spain (Tobio 2005), there is greater hesitation about embarking, without reservations, on motherhood and it is particularly difficult to have more than one child.

An identical phenomenon, though with a distinct historical background, seems to exist in the countries in the east. After the political changes at the beginning of the 1990s, both the employment rate among mothers and the birth rate went down. Factors such as precarious employment, greater instability at the level of social security and the privatisation of public facilities formerly intended for childcare seem to have generated this double effect (Beck 2000: 125; Therborn 2004: 258).

The way in which each country has confronted the issue of the falling birth rate and the relationship that can be established with a higher or lower rate of female employment thus seems to be predicated, as indeed other authors conclude, on the role played by the welfare state and its philosophy of greater or lesser intervention with respect to equal opportunities between men and women and the protection of children's interests (Sainsbury 1994; Torres et al. 1999; 2001).

But other factors also have an influence on explaining the higher or lower birth and female employment rates in the various countries, such as youth unemployment and precarious forms of integration into the labour market, which are closely related with the difficulties of starting a family (Guerreiro and Abrantes 2004; Brannen et al. 2002). It is also important to consider ideological and cultural attitudes towards the question of who should take care of the children (Brannen, Moss and Mooney 2004). Furthermore, it is quite clear that there are different obstacles in the way of making decisions on motherhood or fatherhood, when it is concluded that Europeans would like more children than they in fact have (Fahey and Spéder 2004).

However, the data analysed seems to indicate quite clearly – positively in the case of the Scandinavian countries and negatively in the case of southern and enlargement countries – that policies seeking to reconcile work outside the home and motherhood can have a positive effect on increasing the average family size in Europe.

### **European women in the labour market: Explaining the Portuguese case**

On the basis of the ESS data, let us now look at the actual figures for men and women in the labour market and the hours that they spend doing their job.

Figure 10 presents the proportion of women and men who stated that they were engaged in paid work in the seven days before they completed the questionnaire.

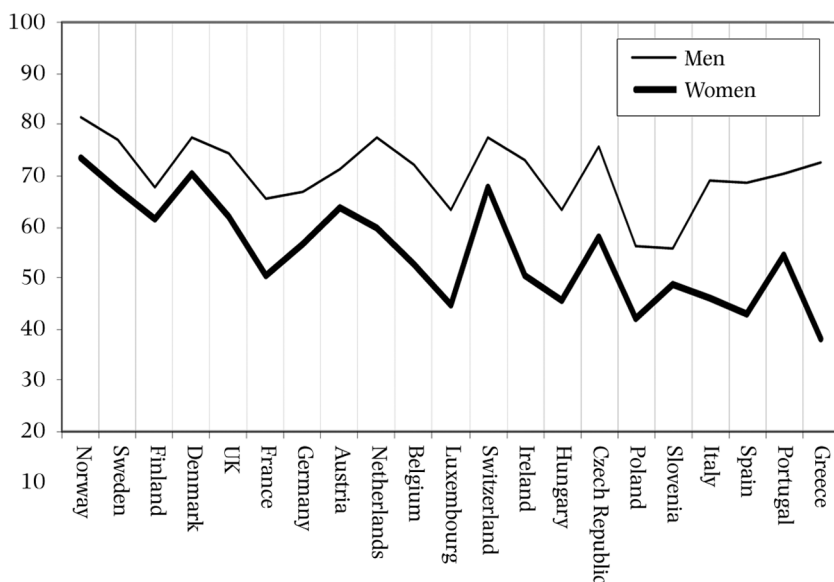


Figure 10: Paid work in the past seven days (aged 15–65) (%).

Reinforcing the contrast mentioned above, Scandinavian countries diverge from southern European countries in that more than 50 per cent of women were engaged in paid work. Northern and central European countries also have high results for female participation in the labour market.

In southern Europe and the enlargement countries these figures reach their lowest value, even if these numbers should be interpreted with a certain caution: they may also reflect the high level of female unemployment, not just express a declared intention by the women to remain at home. Portugal and the Czech Republic are the exceptions to the low figures for female employment.

In the case of Portugal, it is worth pausing to explain why the country is so different from its southern counterparts, clearly distinguishing itself by the strong presence of women in the labour market. The specificity of Portugal, which has been manifested since the 1970s and is maintained to the present day, can be attributed to the combined effect of various factors. Besides the socio-economic conditions of the population and the low salaries of male workers, we must take into account the Colonial War (1961 to 1974), the processes of emigration and the fact that post-revolution politics, i.e. from 1974, reflected a period in which the protection of egalitarian perspectives was given a favourable reception.

Among the most deprived social sectors, the indirect effect of emigration was a certain female activism. The women who remained behind were obliged to take decisions alone, were confronted with new situations, took positions, managed and organised family life, and experienced a certain degree of freedom. Those who left the country with their husbands discovered different ways of life. The development of this female protagonism, albeit forced, and the knowledge of other worlds helped to create a new situation and a new image of female capacities outside the home. These have been presented in various pieces of qualitative research in

9. In the 1960s, with the decline in agriculture and the migratory movements of the population to the big cities and abroad, there was a large increase in the unskilled female labour force employed in domestic service.
10. The women who made up this group probably explain the fairly high number of women, in relation to men, who completed doctorates in Portugal in the 1980s in areas that in other countries tend to be more of a male preserve, e.g. mathematics (49 per cent), physics (44 per cent), chemistry (63 per cent) and biology (61 per cent). In comparison to other countries, Portugal also has a higher percentage of full female professors: in 2001, we could find 14 per cent in this category in France, 12 per cent in Italy, 10 per cent in the United Kingdom, 10 per cent in Germany and 19 per cent in Portugal. It should be noted, nonetheless, that, as in other countries, the gap between men and women is maintained in Portugal, with men being far better represented in highly qualified and/or management positions in university and scientific institutions (Amâncio 2003: 189, 191).

which occupational activity appears as an important form of personal assertion (Torres 2004; Monteiro 2005).

In other more highly educated social sectors, the 13 years of the Colonial War brought about a number of changes. The relative economic expansion of the end of the 1950s had created employment for middle and senior management but the war and compulsory military service delayed the entry of young males to working life for four years, when it did not demand their departure or other changes. On the other hand, young women with a university or secondary education had potential husbands who were finishing their courses before going to war or who had already gone to war with or without their education completed. The market offered them compatible employment opportunities – the civil service, teaching or business. The waiting time for the men to come home seemed too long and the opportunity arose not only to occupy their time but also to generate money. Thus, many of these young women grasped these opportunities and, once they had entered the world of work, they rarely left it. In the attempt to reconcile working and family life, these social sectors could still, at this time, count on cheap and abundant paid domestic help.<sup>9</sup> Strengthening this activism, the April revolution emerged later as a period in which the country opened up to ideas of male–female equality and reformulated obsolete and patriarchal laws. The specific history of this generation of working and more educated women had a series of repercussions.<sup>10</sup>

The conclusions of various pieces of research point to the importance, at the level of behaviour, of the effects of transmission from one generation to another. They show that a mother's occupational activity has unquestionable effects on her daughter's entry to the labour market. These are, indeed, specific effects of socialisation: the higher the educational level attained by the mother, the stronger the effects will be (Segalen 1993: 194). From this point of view, the participation of young women with a secondary and university education in the labour market in the 1960s and 1970s may help to explain the present high levels of Portuguese young women in higher education (Guerreiro and Romão 1995) – some of whom will certainly be their daughters – even in sectors that were traditionally a male preserve. It will also partially explain their tendency to seek to fully reconcile their occupational activities and family life.

Returning to the ESS data, the variations in the values in Figure 10, which charts the inclusion of women in the labour market in the countries under analysis, reflect different social and economic processes, diverse cultural traditions and varied political conceptions and attitudes that are peculiar to each country, as we specifically saw in the case of Portugal.

Moreover, if we simply analyse female occupational activity according to the rates of unemployment and labour market integration, this does not give a full picture (Périvier and O'Dorchai 2003). It is necessary to consider the total number of hours spent in carrying out the paid work, since some countries register high levels of female labour, though in the form of part-time work, while others, such as Spain and Greece, present low indicators of female activity and a high number of hours.

We may consider the case of the Netherlands, with relatively high values for female participation in the labour market – over 50 per cent of

|             | Part-time<br>work (%) | Average<br>weekly<br>hours (part-<br>time work) | ESS – Paid<br>work in the<br>past seven<br>days (%) | ESS –<br>Hours of<br>work<br>(average)* |
|-------------|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Norway      | —                     | —   | 61.5  | 33.2                                    |
| Sweden      | 36.3                  | 22.8  | 55.5  | 36.7                                    |
| Finland     | 16.9                  | 20.8  | 50.3  | 37.9                                    |
| Denmark     | 35.2                  | 19.9  | 59.9  | 35.6                                    |
| UK          | 44.5                  | 18.4  | 53.1  | 31.8                                    |
| France      | 31                    | 23.1  | 43.8  | 35.6                                    |
| Germany     | 37.9                  | 18  | 47.1  | 33.3                                    |
| Austria     | 33                    | 22  | 57.0  | 36.2                                    |
| Netherlands | 70.6                  | 18.8  | 52.4  | 25.4                                    |
| Belgium     | 39.9                  | 22.5  | 44.1  | 36.1                                    |
| Luxembourg  | 26                    | 21.3  | 39.8  | 31.3                                    |
| Switzerland | —                     | —   | 58.8  | 31.4                                    |
| Ireland     | 30.7                  | 18.6  | 45.1  | 34.1                                    |
| Hungary     | —                     | —   | 37.8  | 40.9                                    |
| Czech Rep   | —                     | —   | 47.3  | 41.1                                    |
| Poland      | —                     | —   | 35.4  | 41.8                                    |
| Slovenia    | —                     | —   | 39.5  | 44.0                                    |
| Italy       | 17.4                  | 24  | 39.0  | 38.4                                    |
| Spain       | 17.2                  | 18  | 35.2  | 38.2                                    |
| Portugal    | 16.4                  | 20  | 46.5  | 42.5                                    |
| Greece      | 7.9                   | 21.4  | 31.5  | 43.4                                    |
| Mean        | —                     | —   | 44.5  | 35.5                                    |

Sources: Moreno, Escobedo and Moss 2002; European Social Survey 2002.

\* Average hours each woman spent at work, including extra hours.

*Table 4: Indicators of the inclusion of women in the labour market and the average number of hours worked weekly (% and average).*

Dutch women stated that they were in paid work in the seven days preceding the study. This case, however, also reveals the highest levels of part-time female labour: 70.6 per cent of working women stated that they worked according to this form (Moreno, Escobedo and Moss 2002: 91), as Table 4 shows.

It is now of interest to compare forms of part-time labour and the associated hours of work with female inclusion in the labour market (paid work carried out in the seven days before the questionnaire was filled in) and the hours per day spent on work.<sup>11</sup>

An analysis across all the countries shows that Scandinavian countries and others in central Europe combine a higher percentage of women with full-time work and a high average number of hours worked per week.

It is the women in the enlargement countries who work the most hours weekly of all the countries analysed (around 43.5 hours on average), though they are also among those who register the lowest results for female work, with the exception of the Czech Republic. As mentioned above, the fact that during the 1990s the enlargement countries saw a reduction in economic, political and employment stability on account of

11. The ESS data does not allow us to separate the forms the work takes: full-time or part-time.

the recent structural and social changes is also consistent with this phenomenon. The low female representation on the labour market may also reflect the high unemployment indices that characterise these countries at present (OECD 2002).

With the exception of Portugal, in the southern countries a lower rate of female work activity (see the third column of Table 4) is associated with the highest number of working hours in Europe. This indicates that, though there is also a high number of women who are not in paid work, as in the enlargement countries, female workers are basically engaged in full-time work. The very low figures for these countries in the first column – per cent of paid work that is part-time – are also an exception. This data confirms the recognised absence of a tradition of part-time work in southern Europe (Torres 2004; Moreno Escobedo, and Moss 2002; Périvier and O'Dorchai 2003; Klement and Rudolph 2004).

For the different factors already pointed out, Portugal stands apart from the geographical group to which it belongs since almost half of Portuguese women have a job and, normally, a full-time job: 46 per cent of them have joined the labour market and spend an average of 43.8 hours per week in the performance of their occupation, i.e. Portuguese women work an average of 7.7 hours a day.

**European mothers and fathers greatly involved in the labour market**

To make a closer study and gain an understanding of the relationship between parenthood and occupational activity, it is worth analysing Figure 11, which presents the figures for the proportion of mothers and fathers with children under 10 who stated that they were engaged in paid work in the seven days before the questionnaire was completed.

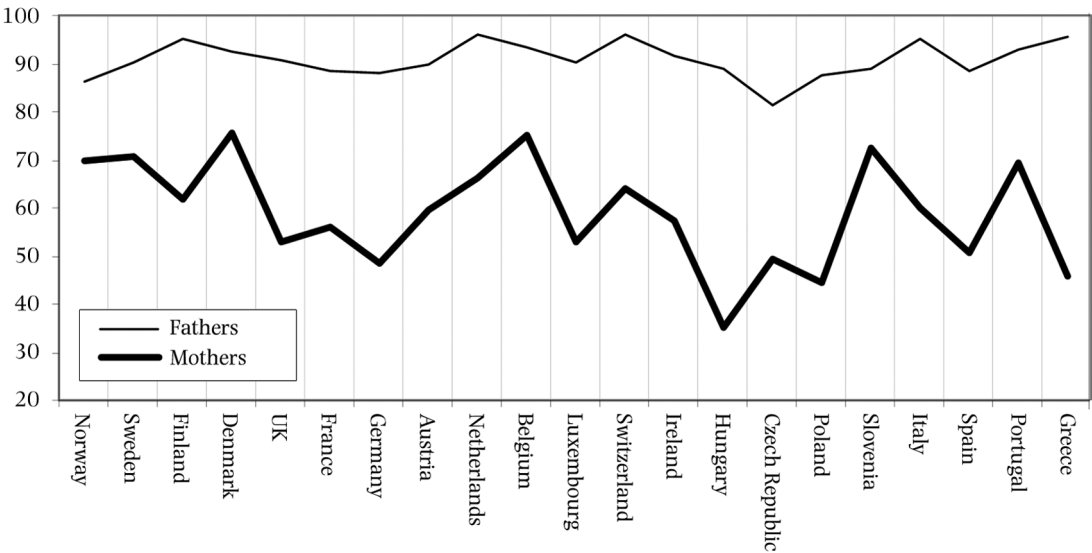


Figure 11: Mothers and fathers with children under 10 who carried out paid work in the preceding seven days (%).



The percentage of European men who have children under the age of 10 and work varies between 80 per cent and 90 per cent. That is, throughout Europe, the numbers are not only higher than those for working people in general, but also quite significantly more homogeneous, with southern-European fathers being those who work most from among all the countries under analysis.

The percentage of mothers who have joined the labour market and have children under the age of 10 varies from country to country. In spite of motherhood, however, there is a clear female presence on the labour market, with the great majority of countries registering a figure of more than 50 per cent. The traditional model of the man as the father and only breadwinner is, in fact, in decline (Crompton 1999).

The extensive presence of mothers on the employment market is particularly conspicuous among the countries of the enlargement. In Germany, Greece and especially in Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, less than 50 per cent of mothers work outside the home.

In Germany, for its part, these figures may reflect a tradition that attributes more responsibility to women for the care of infants or old people through political measures that promote part-time work or even departure from the labour market after childbirth (Klement and Rudolph 2004). On the other hand, in the countries of the enlargement, the low figures for working mothers may be due to situations of economic instability, a precarious labour market and, especially, the loss of public support facilities for infants and young children – factors that are known to associate low entry to the work market with a fall in the birth rate (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; Oinonen 2004). In Scandinavian countries, social and political strategies that are more focused on combining motherhood and an occupation are certainly reflected, as can be seen, in the higher proportion of working mothers.

Comparing the performance of Europeans of working age with those who have children under 10 years of age, on the basis of an analysis of Figures 10 and 11, we see that in all countries, without exception, there are more fathers engaged in work than working-age men. Though this difference is relatively small in Norway and the Czech Republic, it is noteworthy in Slovenia, Poland, Finland, Luxembourg, Italy and Hungary where, in relation to the total percentage of men who work, there are 25 to 30 per cent more fathers who work.

We may understand the specificities that each social, economic and cultural situation displays with regard to the implications of motherhood and fatherhood in the daily working life of men and women, but there are still information gaps to be filled. Thus, the distribution of mothers and fathers in the labour market is known, but how many hours do they work? Table 5 presents the average number of hours worked weekly by mothers and fathers with children under the age of 10.

In all countries, fathers work more hours than the rest of the male working population. This may result from the pressure that greater family responsibilities, besides other objective conditions, place on a young man whose household has increased and who has seen his expenses and financial obligations increase. Thus, in this phase of life, these factors seem to weigh more than the competing need for great devotion to the family.

|             | Fathers' weekly hours<br>of work | Mothers' weekly hours<br>children |
|-------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Norway      | 42.8                             | 33.8                              |
| Sweden      | 43.8                             | 36.3                              |
| Finland     | 43.4                             | 37.6                              |
| Denmark     | 42.7                             | 36.1                              |
| UK          | 45.7                             | 26.7                              |
| France      | 42.4                             | 33.8                              |
| Germany     | 44.6                             | 26.4                              |
| Austria     | 45.3                             | 30.8                              |
| Netherlands | 43.3                             | 20.8                              |
| Belgium     | 44.6                             | 36.1                              |
| Luxembourg  | 40.9                             | 28.5                              |
| Switzerland | 46.5                             | 23.5                              |
| Ireland     | 50.1                             | 31.7                              |
| Hungary     | 50.3                             | 40.8                              |
| Czech Rep   | 46.7                             | 41.9                              |
| Poland      | 51.4                             | 40.0                              |
| Slovenia    | 46.4                             | 44.2                              |
| Italy       | 46.2                             | 37.8                              |
| Spain       | 44.8                             | 38.4                              |
| Portugal    | 46.4                             | 45.9                              |
| Greece      | 53.3                             | 40.4                              |
| Mean        | 45.5                             | 31.6                              |

*Fathers and Mothers:  $F = 721.952 (1; 2987); p = 0.000; \text{Eta}^2 = 0.195.$*

*Countries:  $F = 11.149 (20; 2969); p = 0.000; \text{Eta}^2 = 0.07.$*

*Table 5: Hours worked weekly by mothers and fathers with children under the age of 10(%).*

In more conservative countries, from the gender role point of view, it can be seen that motherhood-protection policies, without an occupational scheme, seem to generate a greater difference between working women and working mothers, as the results presented in Figure 11 for the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Austria clearly show. In contrast, in countries where measures promoting equal opportunities for men and women are simultaneously combined with motherhood and fatherhood protection, as in Scandinavian countries, occupational activity is carried out in parallel to motherhood, as can be observed from the results in Figure 11.

It is also noteworthy that, when mothers from southern and enlargement countries work outside the home, they spend more hours on this activity than other European women, as has already been confirmed for the women of these countries as a whole. Moreover, this is what is concluded from comparative studies, which reveal that the longest work schedules and the highest poverty levels are to be found in countries without support policies for working mothers and fathers (Gornick, Meyers and Ross 1997; Gornick and Meyers 2003: 262, 266).

One of the factors explaining this fact may be pressing economic needs, since, in these countries, the state does not offer public responses to the need for small children to be looked after: childcare and childminding are

the entire responsibility of the families. As grandmothers are, increasingly, still active in the labour market, the alternatives are crèches or private minders, solutions that represent an enormous financial burden.

Nevertheless, questions such as greater individual liberty, more decision-making power within the couple and the desire to experience intimate relationships with a higher degree of democracy are not detached from the importance that women lay on the financial independence won by their entering the labour market (Klement and Rudolph 2004; Tobio 2005). Yet for most of them this conquest is also reflected in an obvious overload, since they tend to combine domestic chores and childcare with work commitments.

## Family, the first priority: work, equally important for men and women

The ESS data also provides an overall picture of the dimensions in life to which Europeans give priority. Presented in Figure 12, this picture gives an answer to two questions that relate directly to transformations in the family sphere. The first is whether social processes such as the greater independence of the members of the couple and the individualisation of life's opportunities represent a fall in the importance of the family in relation to other spheres in life. The second is whether European countries differ among themselves in the various arrangements between the principles of independence and those of the organisation of a life together. Figure 12 responds to both questions with a resounding 'no'.

With regard to the first question, in fact, the aspects connected with feelings (family, friends) appear in the top places, with religion and politics generally occupying the bottom places in the hierarchy. It is also to be seen that the family is an independent value in relation to the others, not being connected to religion, for example. For the second question, the family is no more important in certain European countries than in others. It is an acquired value for all ESS countries, since, on the topic of the importance

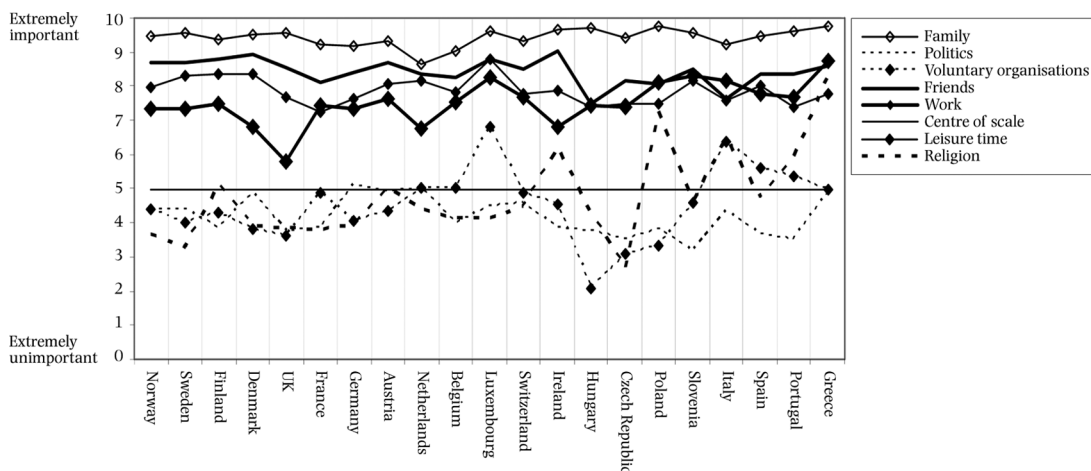


Figure 12: The importance of each aspect in life (average).

given to the family, Scandinavian countries register very similar values to Spain and even higher values than those for Italy.

The family is not, therefore, in a state of crisis: on the contrary, it is the main sphere of personal investment. The factors that do seem to have changed are the family models and the representations and the forms of investment in the family. Phenomena such as the fall in fertility and the general spread and playing down of divorce and cohabitation cannot therefore be interpreted as symptoms of the decline of the family, but rather as symptoms of new investments and feelings associated with it, such as the elimination of the idea that the family is essentially defined by the formal bond. With the assertion of independence and the devaluing of both the institutional component of marriage and the rigid differentiation of gender roles, the construction of the family remains the most important dimension in the life of Europeans. It now defines a place where they hope to find the maintenance and affirmation of individual liberty as well as space for full emotional self-fulfilment.

It is also important to know if there are gender differences in the priority attached to the dimensions 'family' and 'work', in spite of the actual differences in work regimes and labour market integration for men and women. The ESS data shows that men and women rate the family aspect as the most important in their lives (with results above nine, on a scale from 0 to 10) and the importance given to the work aspect is relegated to third or fourth place, though with very similar results for both sexes.

Contradicting the stereotypes – which tend to consider that, by 'nature', men attach greater importance to work and women to the family – this data thus shows that the discrepancies between the sexes are far narrower than the differences between countries. The greater differences within the sexes than between them conform to the conclusions of other studies carried out in the field of gender sociology (Amâncio 1994; Kimmel 2000; Connel 2002).

The parents of small children attach greater value to the family aspect, though this does not mean that the value attached to work is affected. The opposite is rather the case: the work aspect is also more highly rated by working mothers and fathers than by working men and women in general, perhaps as a result of an instrumental attitude.

The ESS data on the importance given to work and family also reveals that women are committed, or would like to be committed, to both fronts. It rebuts the common idea – often explained by the fact that motherhood entails a pattern of discontinuous employment for women (Klement and Rudolph 2004) – that, in being workers, women attach less importance to the family or that men attribute more importance to work than the family. It is certain that these are very general deductions with regard to values. Qualitative research work has shown that, even if in their discourse men put a high value on family life and consider that women have the right to personal self-fulfilment through an occupation, they tend to act in practice as if responsibility for their respective spheres still conformed to the patterns of the old gender asymmetries (Torres 2004).

With regard to women, the new light that this data perhaps throws on the matter is precisely that, for them, work is something of value in itself that goes beyond the economic need for two incomes: it tends to be a part

of a strong female identity model, even in countries where fewer women have entered the labour market. In this respect, it is possible to talk of a European convergence of shared symbols. However, the ability of women to see the harmonious implementation of this desire for a double investment in work and family depends on actual and specific conditions that vary from country to country and may, in some cases, create dilemmas and impose undesired choices. In fact, a motherhood ideology that does not support female employment and the entry of mothers into the labour market may create personal dilemmas for women in the management of the family/work relationship and, in some countries, even make an unintentional and perverse contribution to lowering the birth rate, as seen above.

## Conclusion

We can conclude this 'portrait' of families in Europe, using two types of perspective. In the first, which we could term the broad view, a Europe of small families appears – about three people per household. Though some people live alone (13 per cent) and more live with their parents (15 per cent), it is essentially composed of couples with children (34 per cent) or without (26 per cent), with single parents only representing 4 per cent.

We thus have a Europe of couples, since being part of a couple – through marriage or cohabitation – is the predominant conjugal situation. The most common marital status is that of being formally married (58 per cent), while single people make up 28 per cent of the population; situations involving separation (2 per cent), divorce (5 per cent) or widowhood (7 per cent) are not very significant. Of the European population as a whole, 20 per cent opt for cohabitation. These are undoubtedly reasons that reinforce the idea of a Europe of couples, with the low representation of single-parent families or divorcees showing that these are, certainly, temporary situations. Those who divorce or separate return to a conjugal relationship through marriage or cohabitation.

The final result of the great changes that we have witnessed in recent years – a significant increase in divorce, births outside marriage, life expectancy and the number of people living alone, plus a fall in marriage and birth rates – is the general picture that is now to be seen: clearly, family life in various forms – in a couple, with or without children, or in the parents' home – predominates over situations in which a person is alone, with or without children. It is this range of forms of family life that predominates in Europe, constituted by formal marriage or cohabitation, on the basis of a first or second marriage or a civil partnership.

We are dealing with the effects of the so-called 'emotionalisation', privatisation, secularisation and individualisation of modern families and late modernity, which, instead of producing fragmentation, produce recomposition and offer multiple and more diverse forms of living in a family. As is evident, this diversity expands when we take a close look at the different countries and compare them with each other.

The broad view also allows us to underscore the strong representation of women, including mothers, on the labour market. It reveals a positive correlation – for some, certainly unexpected – between this female participation in working life and fertility rates.

The value of the family as an absolute priority in the personal life of Europeans is another very clear result. An analysis of the order of importance assigned to values also indicates a modern rather than traditional vision of the family. In most countries, after the family, value is attached to friends, then in third place to leisure and in fourth place to work, with the latter two values exchanging positions in certain countries. The attachment of value to the family is completely dissociated from religion. Friendships and the time to enjoy them, in close association with work, undoubtedly represent the dimensions in life on which Europeans lay the most importance.

To deconstruct essentialist visions of the differences between men and women, it was also very interesting to note at the level of values that, in relation to the value attached to work, the differences between the sexes are practically eliminated, a fact that shows this difference to be a key reference for both of them.

But when we move to a narrower view, a considerably more multifaceted image appears: its contours certainly result from the crossing of the internal dynamics of each country and the transverse social mechanisms of change to which we have referred, according to different timetables and rhythms.

In northern Europe, and in particular Scandinavian countries, there are smaller families, more young people living alone, fewer couples with children and fewer respondents who live with their parents. Here, also, there are higher numbers of people who cohabit, who are divorced and who declare that they have no religion. The processes of individualisation, secularisation and independence – in particular among the young people and women – seem to have arrived first in these countries.

In the southern and enlargement countries, families tend to be slightly larger, with more respondents living with their parents, especially the young ones, and with fewer individuals living alone. Most of those in the latter situation are older people. In the same large group, together with Poland and Ireland, religion has greater importance and it is here that the highest number of marriages is to be found, along with the fewest divorced people and the least cohabitation.

A central factor for change in most countries has been the growing integration of women into the labour market, both proportionately and in the number of hours worked. However, the effects of this reorganisation of gender roles on work and the family vary greatly, depending on structural factors such as incomes, youth unemployment rates, social protection schemes and, especially, policies that allow the two worlds to be reconciled. Without this support, either women are overloaded or they withdraw from work activity when they are mothers, or, again, there is an undesired fall in the average family size. It has been seen, moreover, that in Scandinavian countries, where they tend to adopt a clearer, individualised vision of women as workers and mothers and where gender equality policies are applied, the highest fertility rates in Europe are to be found, (with the exception of France), although they have still not reached the point of replacing the population.

As has been confirmed, women and men give practically the same importance to work. However, the female labour system and its forms of payments betray asymmetries. It has also been shown that parenthood



and work are objectives that are simultaneously pursued, practised and valued by European men and European women alike. It thus makes less and less sense to define a woman – or a man – on the basis of an event that is circumscribed in time and space, such as the birth of a child.

Family life, moreover, takes place within a specific framework of constraints that, without obviously hindering individual action and strategies, sets limits and is often the cause of contradictions between what is really desired and what can be achieved. An example of these discrepancies is the fact that the young people in many countries – especially the young women – experience difficulties in the process of gaining independence, of having their own life and space and even of reconciling the desire to start a family and the forms of occupational self-fulfilment.

At the end of the journey, it can be concluded that the ways of life in Europe and the ways in which value is attached to the family reflect modern, more pluralistic patterns and reject the traditional vision that emphasises the authoritarian, patriarchal and institutional features of family relationships. Greater insistence is laid on the importance of the emotional dimension, self-fulfilment, personal well-being within the family and gender equality, without renouncing the idea of having children. However, within this general framework, the differences between countries are to be seen not only in the way that this overall model is put into practice but also in the tonic accent that they place on the values mentioned.

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