

**RECONCEPTUALISING FAMILIES IN THE EU: CHANGES IN
DEMOGRAPHY, HOUSEHOLDS AND THE ALLOCATION OF CARE**

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper charts the demographic changes characterising the last three decades, which have resulted in a diversity of family forms. It marks the magnitude of some of these changes, the exceptions to general patterns and how these may be combined to offer a new perspective on how we might view 'families' and 'households' in the EU. Macintyre states:

Though sex, marriage, and reproduction may be linked empirically in a particular society and its dominant ideology.....We cannot assume a priori that people have babies because they are married, or marry in order to have babies; nor that people have babies because they have had sex, or that they have sex to produce babies (Macintyre 1991: 3).

2. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Demographically, Europe has experienced a reduction in infant mortality, increasing life expectancy and decreasing fertility since 1960. Not only have the number of births (particularly third and subsequent births) been reduced, there has been a postponement of first and often subsequent births and a rise in childlessness. In tandem with these trends, there has been an alteration in the choices available to individuals and couples, exemplified by the lower marriage rates, higher levels of cohabitation, increased divorce and re-marriage rates and births outside marriage. There is no longer adherence to permanent monogamous family units as the basis for family life.

Life Expectancy and Ageing

General mortality rates declined steadily between 1960 and 1990, leading to improvements in life expectancy which have continued in most countries of the European Union. Table 1 sets out the life expectancy at birth for women and men in the European Union and how these have altered since 1960.

By 1994, women's life expectancy was 80 years or over in France, Sweden, Italy, Spain, Netherlands, Greece, Belgium and Finland. Male life expectancy was highest in Sweden, Greece, Italy, Netherlands and UK, where it exceeded 74 years. Since 1960, the former north-south differences in life expectancy have largely disappeared or reversed. Female life expectancy continues to exceed that of their male counterparts and in some countries the gap is widening. In the early 1960s, female life expectancy exceeded the male rate by an average of 5.2 years and this rose to 6.5 years in 1992. The differential varies country by country. France holds the largest male-female life expectancy gap of 8.1 years.

Table 1 Life Expectancy in the European Union (15), 1960-94

| Year | 1960 | | 1994 | |
|----------------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| | Women | Men | Women | Men |
| Belgium | 73.5 | 67.7 | 80.1 | 73.4 |
| Denmark | 74.4 | 70.4 | 78.1 | 72.7 |
| Germany | n.a. | n.a. | 79.6 | 73.1 |
| Greece | 72.4 | 67.3 | 80.2 | 75.2 |
| Spain | 72.2 | 67.4 | 81.1* | 73.8* |
| France | 73.6 | 66.9 | 81.9 | 73.8 |
| Ireland | 71.9 | 68.1 | 78.7 | 73.2 |
| Italy | 72.3 | 67.2 | 81.2 | 74.7 |
| Luxembourg | 72.2 | 66.5 | 79.7 | 73.2 |
| Netherlands | 75.3 | 71.5 | 80.3 | 74.6 |
| Austria | 72.7 | 66.2 | 79.7 | 73.4 |
| Portugal | 66.8 | 61.2 | 78.6 | 71.6 |
| Finland | 72.5 | 65.5 | 80.1 | 72.8 |
| Sweden | 74.9 | 71.2 | 81.4 | 76.1 |
| United Kingdom | 73.7 | 67.9 | 79.4 | 74.2 |
| EU (15) | 72.7 | 67.5 | 80.5 | 74.0 |

Source: Eurostat 1996. * refers to 1993, n.a. refers to not available.

Declining fertility rates and higher life expectancies contribute to an altered age structure, resulting in an 'ageing of the population' throughout Europe whereby an increasing proportion of the population consists of people over 75 years, a trend which is set to continue into the next century. Table 2 sets out the proportion of the population which is/will be aged 75 years and over. In 1960, only 3.6 per cent of the EU's population had reached 75 years, the level rose to 6.3 per cent in 1990 and will be nearly 8 per cent in the year 2020. This represents a major shift in the population structure compared with only a century ago.

Combined with the decline in marriage and increased divorce, it is likely that an increasing number of elderly people will live alone and to varying degrees this could place a burden of responsibility for caring on offspring, other family members and/or the state.

Table 2 Percentage of the Population Aged 75 years and over, 1960-2020

| Year | 1960 | 1990 | 2020 |
|----------------|------|------|------|
| Belgium | 4.2 | 6.4 | 9.9 |
| Denmark | 3.7 | 6.8 | 7.5 |
| Germany | 3.7 | 7.1 | 10.1 |
| Greece | 3.0 | 5.7 | 10.2 |
| Spain | 2.7 | 5.2 | 9.3 |
| France | 4.3 | 6.4 | 9.5 |
| Ireland | 4.2 | 4.0 | 6.3 |
| Italy | 3.1 | 6.1 | 9.4 |
| Luxembourg | 3.5 | 5.7 | 8.3 |
| Netherlands | 3.1 | 5.4 | 7.3 |
| Portugal | 2.7 | 5.1 | 7.0 |
| United Kingdom | 4.2 | 6.7 | 8.7 |
| EUR 12 | 3.6 | 6.3 | 8.6 |

Sources: *Commission des Communautés Européenes, 1992; Eurostat 1995*

Note: *Comparable data for Austria, Finland, Sweden are not available.*

Fertility Rates

The trend towards fertility decline has been traced back in some parts of Europe to the end of the 18th century. With the exception of the period 1945 to 1965, which witnessed a rapid increase in births, the general trend has been one of steady decline during this century. Figure 1 shows the rapid rate of decline in fertility since 1960 throughout Europe. Within Europe there have been considerable variations in the geographical patterns of fertility decline. It is in Germany, particularly the former GDR¹, and southern EU countries that fertility decline is most dramatic. In 1994/95, apart from Germany's GDR, Spain had the lowest total fertility rate in Europe (1.24), followed by Italy (1.26), Germany (1.35) and Greece (1.35) (Table 3).

In contrast, it is in the northern and western EU states that higher than average fertility is recorded in recent years. Based on recent Eurostat forecasts of total fertility up to the year 2020: Sweden and the UK are expected to maintain a fertility rate of 1.90; followed by Denmark, Netherlands and France with a fertility rate of 1.80, compared with a rate in Ireland of 1.50 and Spain of 1.13 (Eurostat 1995). Fertility in Sweden never fell to very low levels (the lowest was 1.56 in 1983) and the social policies pursued by the Swedish government have (somewhat uniquely) 'tried to facilitate women's entry into the labour market and their continued attachment to it at minimal cost to childbearing and childrearing' (Hoem 1990: 740).

Table 3 Fertility Trends in the EU (15)

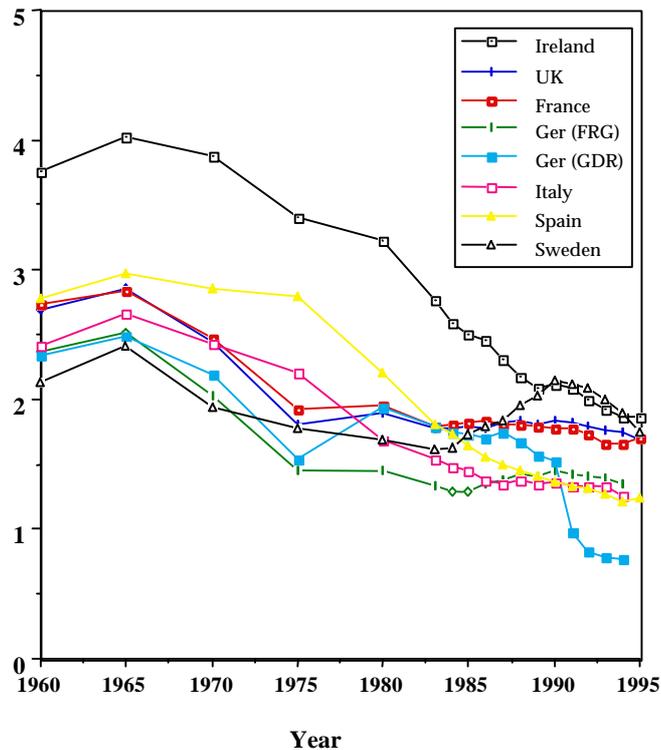
| Country | 1960 | 1965 | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1994/ 1995 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|---------------|
| Belgium | 2.54 | 2.71 | 2.25 | 1.74 | 1.69 | 1.51 | 1.62 | 1.56 |
| Denmark | 2.54 | 2.61 | 1.95 | 1.92 | 1.55 | 1.45 | 1.67 | 1.81 |
| Germany | 2.37 | 2.51 | 2.02 | 1.45 | 1.45 | 1.28 | 1.45 | 1.35 |
| Germany (GDR) | 2.33 | 2.48 | 2.19 | 1.54 | 1.94 | 1.73 | 1.52 | 0.77 |
| Greece | 2.23 | 2.32 | 2.43 | 2.28 | 2.23 | 1.68 | 1.43 | 1.35 |
| Spain | 2.78 | 2.97 | 2.86 | 2.80 | 2.21 | 1.64 | 1.36 | 1.24 |
| France | 2.73 | 2.84 | 2.47 | 1.93 | 1.95 | 1.82 | 1.78 | 1.70 |
| Ireland | 3.76 | 4.03 | 3.87 | 3.40 | 3.23 | 2.50 | 2.12 | 1.87 |
| Italy | 2.41 | 2.67 | 2.43 | 2.21 | 1.68 | 1.45 | 1.36 | 1.26 |
| Luxembourg | 2.28 | 2.42 | 1.98 | 1.55 | 1.49 | 1.38 | 1.61 | 1.72 |
| Netherlands | 3.12 | 3.04 | 2.57 | 1.66 | 1.60 | 1.51 | 1.62 | 1.53 |
| Austria | 2.69 | 2.70 | 2.29 | 1.83 | 1.65 | 1.47 | 1.45 | 1.40 |
| Portugal | 3.01 | 3.08 | 2.76 | 2.52 | 2.19 | 1.73 | 1.57 | 1.41 |
| Finland | 2.71 | 2.47 | 1.83 | 1.69 | 1.63 | 1.64 | 1.78 | 1.81 |
| Sweden | 2.13 | 2.41 | 1.94 | 1.78 | 1.68 | 1.73 | 2.14 | 1.74 |
| United Kingdom | 2.69 | 2.86 | 2.44 | 1.81 | 1.89 | 1.79 | 1.84 | 1.69 |
| EU(15) | 2.59 | 2.72 | 2.38 | 1.96 | 1.82 | 1.60 | 1.57 | 1.45 |

Sources: (Eurostat 1995, Council of Europe 1996)

The link between fertility and social policy intervention is extremely important. One of the themes for further and urgent research is whether rapidly declining levels of fertility (as experienced in Spain and Italy) represent freedom of choice by women, or a pragmatic response to the lack of social supports (separate taxation, child care, flexible work practices, parental leave). The Swedish example represents an interesting alternative model to those states experiencing rapidly declining fertility rates. Norway's response to the prospect of population decline from 4 million to 3 million by the year 2010 was to appoint a Population Committee in 1981. The Committee concluded that a stabilisation of fertility, near to replacement level, should be sought and recommended radical improvement in the living conditions of families with children. It sought an extension of paid maternity leave from 18 weeks to one year; an adequate supply of kindergartens; public care arrangements for children entering school and improved living standards for families with small children through public transfers (Jensen 1989). The author notes that there has been little sign of radical action following these proposals.

Hall has concluded that given the availability of contraceptive technology, higher levels of education, rising living standards and how these impact on women's lives in terms of labour force participation, 'it seems unlikely that fertility will rise much, unless a wide range of public policy measures is introduced to help parents combine parenthood with paid work. Even then it is unlikely that fertility would rise significantly' (1993: 7).

Figure 1 Total Fertility Rate in Selected EU Countries



Source: Eurostat 1996

Maternity - To be or not to be a Mother?

Folbre (1994: 111) has contested that fertility decline is not due simply to an aggregation of individual choices, to conceive or not, but is a ‘circular process of struggle over the distribution of the costs of children [which] accompanies the technological changes associated with fertility decline’.

Throughout Western Europe, women born after 1945 have increasingly altered their reproductive behaviour by controlling their fertility and delaying childbirth. Women can make more deliberate decisions about whether to have children; when to commence, space and complete family formation. Part of this exercise of choice relates to the number of children, whether they are born within marriage or a stable union. The overall rise in childlessness suggests that women now have the means to make real choices rather than to accept some form of reproductive imperative, should they wish to be sexually active. Childlessness in Denmark, Germany, Italy,

the Netherlands and the UK had been 10 per cent for women born in 1945, rising to 18 per cent for those born in 1955 (Hall 1993).

A key indicator of preference being exercised by women is in relation to the age of mothers when their first child is born. In the 1960s there was a pattern whereby women had their first child at an earlier age of 26 to 27 years, coinciding with the 'baby boom'. During the 1970s this trend reversed in all countries so that by 1993 the mean age of first time mothers was 29 years (Eurostat 1995).

Further evidence of women's exercise of choice is in relation to the marked and rapid decline in third and subsequent births. These had formed one-third of births in the European Union countries in the mid-1960s but fell to just one-sixth of births today. Higher levels of third or higher births are still found in Ireland (35 per cent), Finland (26 per cent), UK (24 per cent), Sweden (24 per cent) and France (22 per cent) compared with lower rates in Denmark and Greece (17 per cent) and Italy and Portugal (15 per cent) (Eurostat 1995).

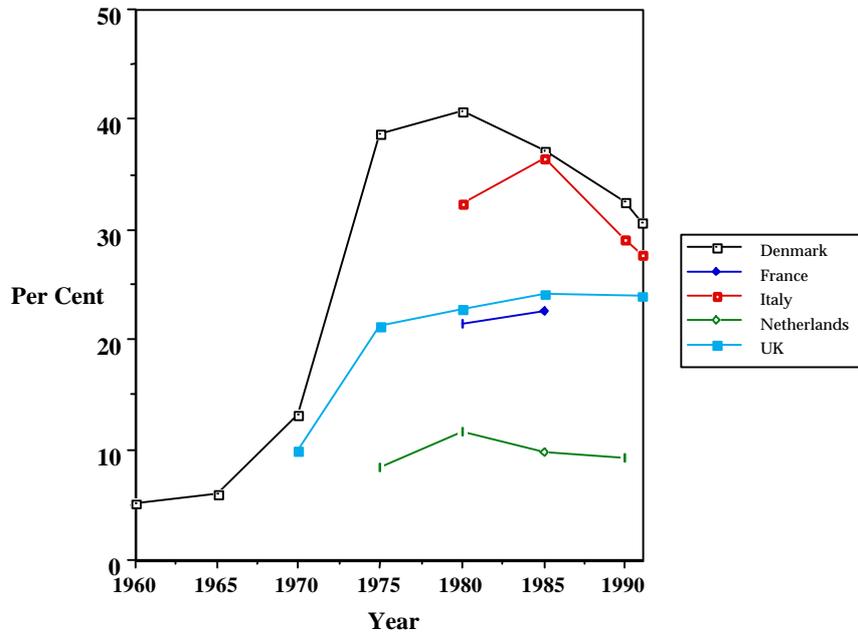
Another trend which has manifest itself to varying degrees in Europe is in the rate of legal abortions. Figure 2 shows that, from a rate of only 5 per cent (legal abortions as a percentage of live births) in 1960 Denmark's abortion rate peaked at 41 per cent in 1980. This rate was almost matched by Italy, following the legalisation of abortion. During the 1980s there has been a decline in the abortion rate in virtually all the countries for which data on legal abortions are available.

Marriage rate

According to Boh (1989: 276) 'changes in marriages in European societies were first marked by a dramatic swing to higher incidence of marriage and to falling age at marriage, to be followed by an inverse trend characterised by a decrease in marriage rates and an increase in the age at marriage, a growing number of divorces and cohabitations'. The total number of marriages peaked in 1970 with 2,625,503 in the EU (15) and fell to 1,939,279 in 1994. All EU states experienced a decline in marriage rates since 1970. Within the EU, the highest marriage rates in 1994 were in Denmark (6.8 per 1000) and Portugal (6.7 per 1000), (Eurostat 1996).

Alongside this trend and the tendency for women to postpone the birth of a first child, the average age at marriage has increased for women by between two and three years since 1970 in many countries. Denmark switched from having the youngest mean age for women at first marriage of 22.8 years in 1960 to representing the oldest, 28.9 years in 1994. The mean age at first marriage of women in the European Union was 24.1 in 1960, 23.2 in 1970 and 26.1 in 1993. Among men there has been a similar shift towards marrying later with a mean of 26.7 in 1960, 25.9 in 1970 and 28.5 in 1993 (Eurostat 1996).

Fig. 2 Legal Abortions Selected EU Countries



Source: Eurostat 1993

Note: Comparable data for 1995 and for other countries are not available from Eurostat or the Council of Europe.

Cohabitation

The postponement of marriage is related to the increased popularity of cohabitation which often precedes and in some cases replaces marriage. As Hall (1993: 8) states 'no longer is marriage seen as the only organising principle for relationships'. Boh (1989: 277) points out that in Europe cohabitation was not unusual in rural regions. However it now represents a newer trend whereby legal marriage has 'given way to a variety of optional non-traditional forms of "living together"'. This pattern was more frequent in the Nordic countries and has also increased in the Netherlands, France and UK, but is still less frequent in Belgium and Italy (Boh, 1989). Boh (1989: 279) also claims that cohabital unions 'have everywhere functioned more as a trial marriage than as a more permanent alternative to formal marriage', since 'most cohabiting couples marry once they have children'.

Although EU or Council of Europe data on cohabitation are not readily available, figures for Italy and Ireland² suggest that fewer women in those two countries were in non-marital unions in the early 1980s, compared with the Nordic countries. Only 1 per cent of the 20 to 24 years cohort were cohabiting in Italy in 1983 and only 2

per cent of Irish women in that age group were in such relationships (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Fux 1991). However, given the quite steady rise in births outside marriage in Ireland since 1980, it is likely that the situation in relatively 'traditional' and Catholic societies such as Ireland and Italy are moving towards the Nordic and European pattern of cohabiting. For example, in England and Wales, 54 per cent of extramarital births were registered by both parents living at the same address in 1990 (while 73 per cent of the total extra marital births were jointly registered) (Hall 1993).

It is difficult to gauge the rate of long-term consensual unions which do not result in marriage. However there is evidence of a growing proportion of older age cohorts among the 'never married' in some countries. Although fewer than 9 per cent of women aged 35-39 in Denmark had never married in 1984, the proportion for men was 18 per cent. It is in Sweden that there has been a steady rise. In 1970, only 11.6 per cent of women aged 30-34 years had never married, a level which increased to 36 per cent in 1984. There was a similar rise among 35 to 39 year old women and the proportions for 'never married' men in these age cohorts was even higher (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Fux 1991).

One further pattern which represents another alternative to marriage and cohabitation is of 'living apart together' in separate households. Hoffmann-Nowotny and Fux (1991: 51) have identified this option which accords with 'societal ideologies of individualism and equality, and becomes structurally more feasible with an increasing material independence of women'.

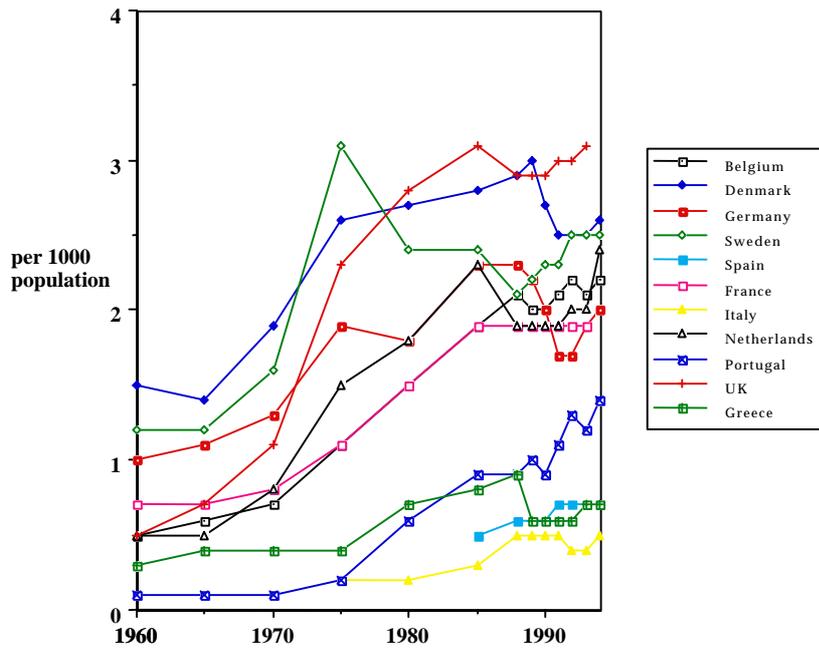
Divorce Rate

Since 1960 there has been a rise in European divorce rates (Figure 3) from 0.5 per 1000 to 1.7 per 1000 in 1993 (Eurostat 1996). At current rates, it is estimated that 40 per cent of marriages in the UK will end in divorce (Hall, 1993). There has been some stabilisation of divorce rates in the later 1980s but this may be due to a rise in cohabitation and lower rates of re-marriage among divorced people. Within the EU (15) divorce rates were higher in UK (3.1), Denmark, Sweden and Finland (2.5) than in Greece (0.7), Spain (0.7) and Italy (0.5) in 1993 (Eurostat 1996).

Part of the increase in divorces has occurred in response to a liberalisation of divorce legislation away from a system based on matrimonial offence, guilt and punishment to one based on irretrievable breakdown, mutual responsibility and need. It is also argued that the rate is high due to the democratisation of relationships and the increased independence of women. Other social factors which are commonly cited are the individualisation and privatisation of marriage in which individuals seeking higher expectations of personal happiness and self-fulfillment break with the traditional adherence to conformity and duty (Boh 1989). With the rise in the rate of divorces there has been a removal of the stigma attached to being divorced, particularly for women. Gittins (1993: 9) posits the view that the divorced state now displaces the experience of widowhood, a much commoner event in

centuries past: ‘the common-sense notion that all families in the past were much more solidaristic and stable institutions cannot be borne out - death saw to that’.

Fig. 3 Crude Divorce Rate in EU Countries



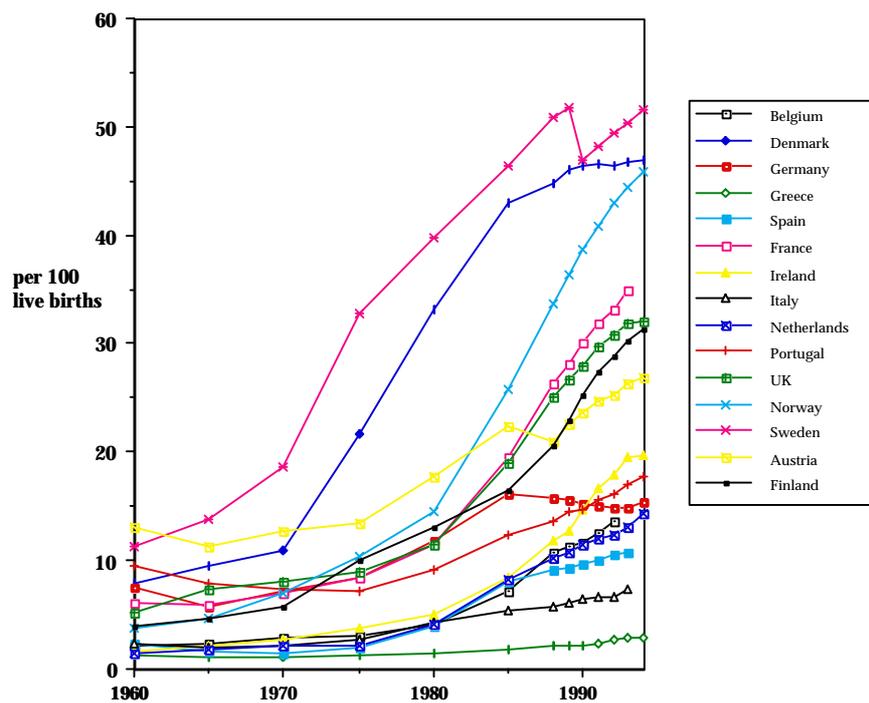
Source: Eurostat 1996

Another feature of the higher divorce rate is the pattern of remarriage and step families. In most countries there has been a rise in the number of marriages by divorced women and men from 1960 to 1990/1, when this increase was halted. The exceptions are in Spain, Finland and Portugal where the number of remarriages continues to rise. Remarriage by divorced persons is higher among men than women, reflecting a possibly greater reluctance to remarry and the higher probability that women will have responsibility for children from a previous relationship (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Fux 1991). Gittins (1993) again reminds us, by the all too common appearance of ‘wicked stepmothers’ in fairy tales, of the common practice of re-marriage and children living with step-parents/siblings throughout recorded history.

Delphy (1991: 46) would argue that while at an individual level a divorce signifies the end of a marriage, ‘it by no means implies the end of **marriage** as an institution. Divorce was not invented to destroy marriage since divorce is only necessary if marriage continues to exist’. Commenting on the virtual monopoly of care which women assume for children after divorce, Delphy (1991: 56) places this on a

continuum of women's responsibility for children 'which exists before the marriage, is carried on in the marriage, and continues afterwards'. For Delphy this responsibility can be defined as the exploitation of women by men and the collective exemption of men from the cost of reproduction.

Fig. 4 Proportion of Live Births outside Marriage 1960-94



Source: Eurostat 1996

Births Outside Marriage

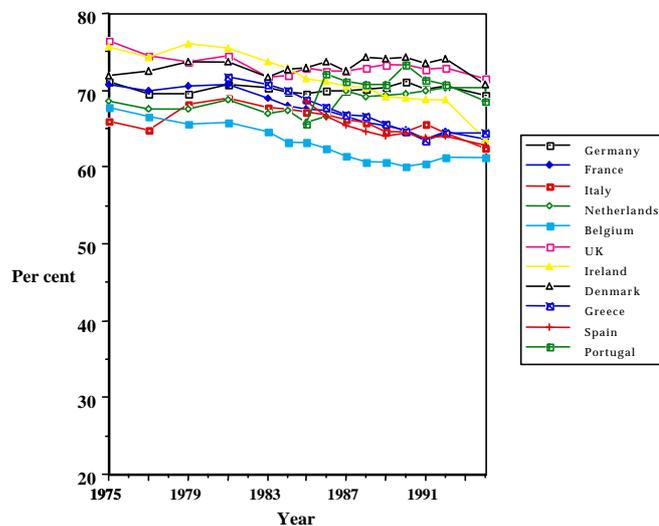
Closely related to the increase in cohabitation has been the rise in extra-marital births which have increased dramatically in many European countries, particularly in the Nordic countries but also in countries like Ireland with formerly low levels (Figure 4). The EU (15) rate in 1960 was 5.1 per cent of all births which rose to 21.8 per cent in 1993. This masks the considerable variation within the EU from a current level of 2.9 per cent in Greece to 51.6 per cent in Sweden. The rise in births outside marriage, which began in Scandinavian countries, has been followed about a decade later in other northern and western European countries. In France births outside marriage rose from 6.1 per cent in 1960 to 34.9 per cent in 1993; in Ireland from 1.6 per cent in 1960 to 19.7 per cent in 1994. Similarly in the UK the level was 5.2 per cent in 1960 rising to 32.0 per cent in 1994. In contrast, Italy's rate of births outside

marriage increased from 2.4 to 7.4 per cent and for Greece the figures are 1.2 to 2.9 per cent over the period 1960 to 1994.

3. DIVERSITY IN FAMILY/HOUSEHOLD FORMS

The differentiation of household types reflects major social, cultural and demographic changes within the EU. Along with demographic trends, Schmidt (1992) identifies four factors which have altered household structures, through changes in women's working lives: the decline of conventional security-affording institutions making it necessary for women to become financially independent; new options and dependencies which have shifted the focus of women's lives from neighbourhood/community towards greater personal autonomy and market consumption; women's identity and self-fulfillment increasingly sought, and obtained, outside the home in the male domain of employment; women's qualifications and career aspirations which enable them to improve their position in the labour market, particularly following the 'feminisation of education' by the 1980s. This has resulted in an overall growth in women's labour force participation and a corresponding rise in dual-earner households compared with single-earner households. Figures 5a and 5b show the trends in male activity rates as static to declining and female activity rates as increasing, albeit from a lower base, since 1975.

Figure 5a Male Activity Rates 1975-94

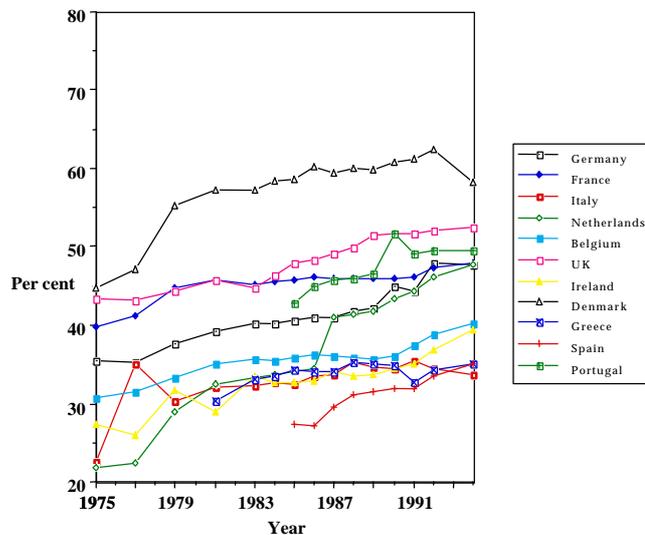


Lone-parenting

Higher divorce rates are contributing to the increase in one-parent families (mainly headed by women). Hoffmann-Nowotny and Fux (1991) state that far from being an

abnormal family type, one-parent families have become a widespread and permanent way of life for many women, stemming from the breakdown of the 'conjugal family' or an alternative consensual union. The dramatic increase in the number of one parent families where a divorced, or married but separated, mother is the household head has increased by 118 per cent in France between 1968 and 1982 (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Fux 1991).

Fig. 5b Female Activity Rates 1975-94



The highest percentage of lone parent families within the EU in 1990/91 was found in Ireland, where 10.6 per cent of private households consisted of lone parent families (of which 1.8 per cent were headed by fathers, compared with 8.8 per cent headed by mothers). Countries with a higher than average proportion of lone parents are: Belgium (9.2 per cent) and the UK (9.0 per cent). Lone parenthood was a less common family form in Sweden (3.5 per cent), Finland (4.1 per cent), Denmark (5.8 per cent) and Greece (6.0 per cent). It is interesting to note that while Greece has a low level of births outside of marriage, its level of lone parenthood is higher than that of Sweden, Finland and Denmark where there are high levels of births outside of marriage.

Part of this apparent paradox is explained by Ermisch (1990) who has pointed to the popular misconception that lone-parent families comprise young unmarried mothers and toddlers. The data for all countries conflict with this and indicate that the majority of lone parents are mothers, of whom the vast majority are divorced or separated, followed by widowed, commonly with older children.

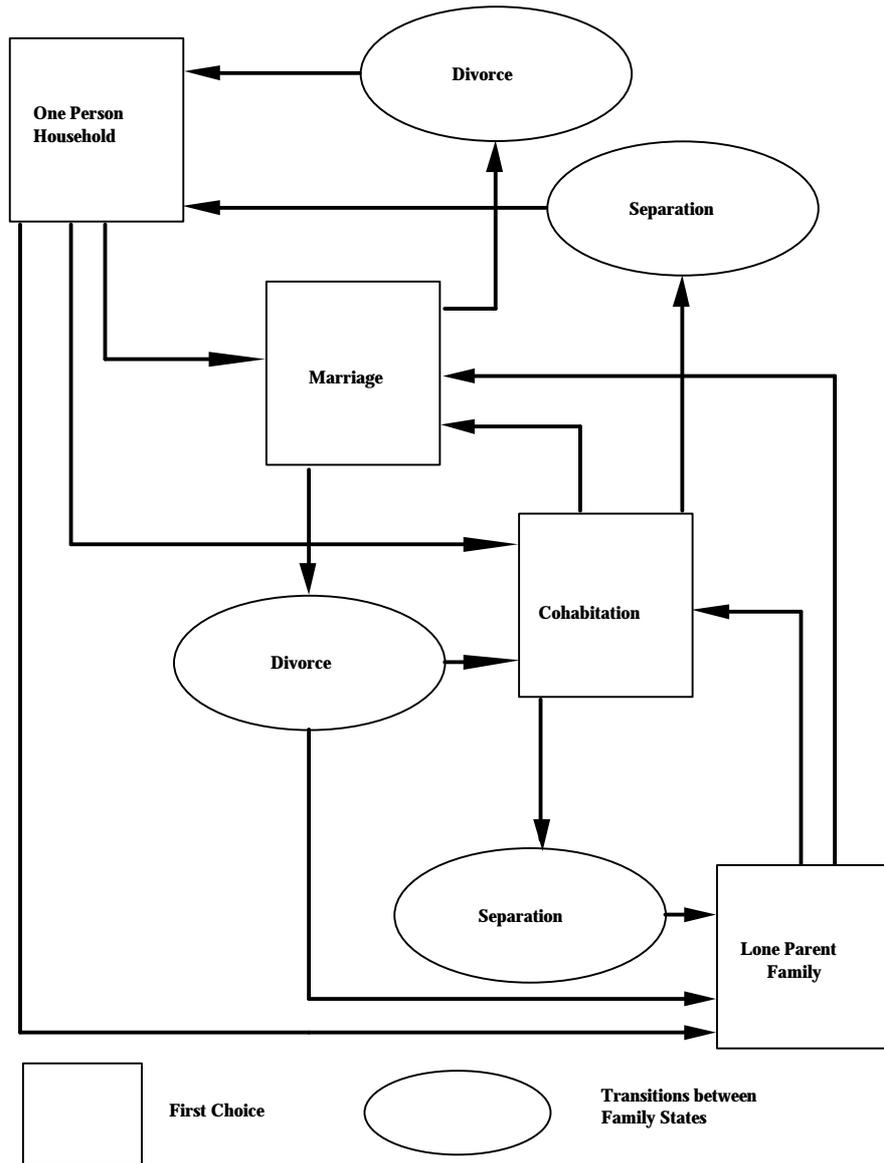
One shift which appears to be well established is towards a greater diversity of family forms, which can be seen clearly in Figure 6. This emphasises a far from static model and suggests that during any person's life span they may move from, and/or return to, 'conventional' family forms, via transitional states of separation/divorce, into one person households, marriage, cohabitation and lone parenting. In examining trends in the data available we find only a 'snapshot' picture at any one time. It is likely that with the current rates of demographic and social change, there will be more flow through a greater range of family forms.

Another strong trend which has become established is towards smaller households. In 1960 21.4 per cent of households in the current European Union had five or more family members (Commission des Communautés Européennes 1992). By 1990/91 this had fallen to 9.3 per cent (Eurostat 1995). In Ireland 26.7 per cent of households had five or more members, followed by Spain with 20.3 and Portugal with 15.4 per cent. Such households were least common in Denmark (4.8 per cent), Germany (5 per cent) and Sweden (5.2 per cent) (Eurostat 1995).

The rise in one person households has been similarly dramatic from 15.0 per cent in 1960 to 33.6 per cent of all households by 1990/91 (Commission des Communautés Européennes 1992; Eurostat 1996). Such households are commonest in Sweden (39.6 per cent), Denmark (34.4 per cent) and Germany with 33.6 per cent in 1990/91 and least common in France (12.1), Spain (13.4 per cent), Portugal (13.8 per cent) and Greece (16.2 per cent) (Eurostat 1996). This increase in single households may be attributed to a number of factors: greater financial independence, individualism and less recourse to multi-generational family forms, lower fertility, marital breakdown, postponement of child-bearing, childlessness, higher life expectancy and widowhood.

Although even official definitions of 'family households' vary (Eurostat 1995) some patterns can be discerned in family/household structure. The percentage of the population living in 'family', as opposed to 'non-family'³, households ranges from 83.4 per cent in Portugal and 83.1 per cent in Spain (these would include extended families in which there could be more than one/two generations living in a household) to 60.4 per cent in Sweden, 61.2 per cent in Greece, 61.9 per cent in Denmark and 62 per cent in Finland (Eurostat 1996). If household structures follow the Nordic pattern, as occurred with diminishing fertility, rising levels of cohabitation and births outside marriage, it is likely that a higher proportion of individuals in the EU will live outside traditional 'family households' in favour of one person and multi person households. Lone mothers accounted for 82.5 per cent of all lone parent households in 1990/91 (Eurostat 1996).

Figure 6 Choices and Transitions between Family Forms



Source: Commission des Communautés Européennes, 1992

The trend towards childlessness can be discerned in countries such as Sweden and Finland, in which 32.2 and 30.6 per cent of all private households respectively were composed of couples without children in 1990/91. Such family forms were least common in Ireland (13.7 per cent), Spain (17.9 per cent) and Italy (19.4 per cent) (Eurostat 1996). Countries with the highest proportion of 'traditional' nuclear families, consisting of couples with children, were: Spain (55.8 per cent), Portugal (49.9 per cent), Ireland (47.9 per cent) and Italy (46.7 per cent) (Eurostat 1996).

In considering the complexities of demographic change it is important to note that trends have not always been consistent, with the possible exception of a steady decline in mortality rates. Some, like marriage rates, have risen to fall with the same degree of intensity. While it is not possible to extrapolate from current trends, there are some indications that the Nordic countries have tended to be the precursors of more European-wide patterns, though the southern countries have been slowest to shift towards less 'orthodox' family forms. For instance Spain, Portugal and Ireland still maintain a strong adherence to the traditional extended or nuclear and patriarchal family forms. Demographic trends have brought about a degree of convergence to smaller families in all members states, particularly in southern countries such as Italy and Spain, where fertility is declining faster than in the northern countries of Europe.

Household structures are becoming increasingly diverse, in all countries, reflecting the greater degree of choice in lifestyle: to live alone, with a partner or with other individuals; to stay single or marry; to remain in/terminate relationships and subsequently divorce/re-marry/cohabit; to forgo/postpone childbearing or have children within/outside marriage or other consensual unions.

Altered family forms can sometimes exacerbate levels of poverty, particularly for lone parents; individuals who live outside consensual unions and 'no earner families', and where the state, as in the UK, expects individual 'breadwinners' to provide. Even within two-parent families, Folbre (1994) has noted that mothers are more likely to be disadvantaged, since they tend to spend a higher percentage of their income on their children. Despite gains in individual rights, particularly for women to bear children outside wedlock, or having preferential rights in child custody, these have to be counterbalanced against the 'growing costs of motherhood' (Folbre 1994: 112). These costs are not purely financial and extend beyond obligations for childcare to elderly and other adult dependants. As the final section of this paper illustrates, 'new terms of endearment reproduce, even intensify, some gender inequalities' (Folbre 1994: 113).

4. THE ALLOCATION OF CARE

Europe is facing a wide range of demographic changes which will affect individuals, communities and nations. The shift towards delaying or abandoning marriage, choosing one or no children and living longer, all point towards population decline and possible labour shortages in the future. They also raise the issue of dependency

away from the traditional association with child dependants to a broader mix of children, elderly, incapacitated and disabled dependants. Of major policy concern is that these trends point to a contraction of the financial and physical base which is needed to support dependent groups. However, counter forces also operate - the increasing participation rates of women (which in some Nordic countries are close to those held by men), the desire for a more flexible retirement age to take account of new generations of 'young' elderly, hence active, people and new waves of migrant workers who, in past decades, met the labour shortages in western Europe.

One of the consequences of declining fertility is that more women are available for work, either before and/or after the birth and rearing of their (average) 1-2 children. In previous generations women's working lives had been prescribed by their more demanding reproductive role. This has become increasingly irrelevant with lower rates of fertility, which are decreasing fastest in precisely those countries in which female labour participation rates have been lowest: Italy, Ireland, Spain and Greece.

However, fertility decline does not in itself promote gender equality, within the family or labour market, since for women the ability to participate in the labour market, and as full citizens, depends upon the distribution of home-based and community-based, mainly unpaid caring work. According to Humphries and Rubery (1995: 22) 'Men and women will never be able to compete on equal terms in the labour market so long as women continue to bear most of the responsibilities for childcare, housework and other caring work within the family'.

While referring directly to the historical contribution of women's labour, Gittins makes a key point relevant to patriarchal relations today:

Work did not bring women independence from patriarchal authority, even if in some circumstances it brought them relative economic independence. What ever the individual circumstances.....(women) never had access to the equivalent 'work identity' as men. They were always expected to provide services for men (Gittins 1993: 38).

Care of Older/Adult Dependants

Caring for the elderly (and people with a disability) is associated with the home and family, in contrast to the social relations which operate in the labour market, which all too frequently engender a degree of social distance incompatible with the giving of care. The exceptions are in occupations with a 'woman's touch' built into the 'caring professions', which are largely female, and an extension of women's housekeeping function to society at large (Graham 1983: 16). The testimony of caregivers (Jani 1993) further illustrates that 'caring is experienced as a labour of love in which the labour must continue even where the love falters' (Graham 1983: 16). All too readily 'Caring...tends to be defined as an act of female sacrifice and supreme selflessness' (Graham 1983: 17). Not surprisingly then:

woman's paid work is often the market equivalent of her unpaid work at home. The growth of services sector employment has involved the transfer of many of the more highly specialised aspects of caring from the home, with the result that in secretarial and clerical work, in nursing, teaching and social work, the woman finds again herself always in response to others - an unending unspecific task of helping, nurturing, educating, supporting (Graham 1983: 27).

Ungerson (1983: 35) states that in relation to women's labour market behaviour 'the limit to the *hours* they actually work is imposed by a set of beliefs that they have about what they really *ought* to be doing for the good of their families back home'. She points to the continuing fact that since opportunity costs are lower for women than men to stay at home, the breadwinner/housewife model predominates and women's labour market activity is more likely to be in low-waged part-time employment. Hence women's role is reinforced by powerful material (opportunity cost) and ideological (women's place) forces.

Altered demographic conditions and family forms, as outlined in this paper, will inevitably have a political dimension as well as socio-economic consequences, not least in state responses to the allocation of responsibility for caring. Waerness (1989: 217) has noted that 'as a consequence of the division of labour between the sexes, the expectations of care and service and the responsibility for the physical and emotional well-being of the family members, are laid mainly on the female members of the family'. Caring has frequently been seen as an extension of a woman's 'domestic' responsibilities, even when the person in need of care is not a direct blood relative (e.g. in the case of a step-child, parent-in-law, partner's sibling).

The exception to this gendered pattern of eldercare occurs when women are cared for by a male spouse. Even then, inequalities exist since women live longer than men, and tend to marry partners who are some years older. Men have higher rates of re-marriage, usually to even younger female partners. As a result, nearly three-quarters of elderly men in the UK, but only two-fifths of elderly women, were married in 1985 (Arber and Ginn 1992). Furthermore, disability is strongly gender differentiated, due to the greater longevity of women and the fact that women are not only more likely to become disabled than men, but the gender differential increases with age (Arber and Ginn 1992). Commenting on men's advantage in terms of health and caring resources, compared with women, Arber and Ginn noted that disabled elderly women were more likely than men to be perceived, and to perceive themselves, 'as a burden simply because they are more likely to live alone or in the home of an adult child.....The limited access of older women to both financial and caring resources is a poor deal for the "carer sex" after a lifetime of unpaid work looking after children, husband and others, often in addition to waged work' (Arber and Ginn 1992: 105).

Childcare

‘The issue of whether women work because they have few children, or the inverse, remains unresolved.....most research indicates there is a conflict for women between their paid labour force participation and having more children’ (Jensen 1989: 115). In Norway it has been demonstrated that among women who have been economically active without interruption for the birth of their first child, the probability of giving birth to a second child is reduced by 40 per cent, compared with women who interrupted their employment.

Even the availability of state supports such as family allowances and maternity leave provide ‘benefits to mothers who refrain from paid employment in order to care for children, but not to fathers’ (Folbre 1994: 161). The financial costs to women who make such choices are considerable. Folbre (1994) claims that a West German mother sacrificed 49 per cent of her lifetime earnings, through embarking upon the employment and earnings path (lost years of employment, lower hours on return to labour market and lower rates of pay) typically associated with caring in a two-child family. A British mother was likely to sacrifice 57 per cent. In France and Sweden, due to public investments in childcare facilities, the estimates were 12 per cent and 6 per cent respectively (Folbre 1994).

Caring for young children in modern industrialised societies is demonstrably a woman’s role and for some researchers this has created an ‘image in the minds of both men and women of “mothers” as immensely powerful, able to give and able to withdraw warmth and closeness and food’ (Ve 1989: 254). This is purported to have negative consequences for male and female offspring and implies that fathers should share more in the nurture of small children. For this to occur there need to be changes in parental rights, a trend which is only beginning to emerge in European member states, though better established in Nordic countries.

Hopflinger (1991: 310) has claimed that within European families ‘there are two main obstacles to an egalitarian division of domestic labour: children and attitudes toward man’s role as breadwinner’. This asymmetry in personal relations underpins Waerness’s (1989: 244) claim that ‘to put it in a somewhat exaggerated form: the public care system in most European societies has mainly been designed supposing the male worker in his best years with no responsibility for household work and caring for dependent members in the family. It has also presumed a female service provider, a person both able to provide family care and services and to relate to the services provided by the state and the market’.

Jensen (1989: 120) refers to ‘new roles for men’ to facilitate the emotional strengthening of ties between fathers and their children. Empirical time budget study results suggest that fathers have increased their participation in childcare and that a higher percentage of fathers overall participate in such activities (a rise from 51 per cent to 70 per cent). Folbre (1994:119) states that ‘As long as male individualism is counterbalanced by female altruism, as long as rational economic man is taken care

of by irrational altruistic woman, families play a particularly important (and unfair) role’.

Yet these imbalances may not be sustainable, given the rate of demographic change and the emergence of more complex and inherently less stable family forms than the classic ‘nuclear family’. The reliance on women’s unpaid labour will also be undermined by initiatives to promote women’s advancements by positive actions and the enforcement of equal opportunity policies. As women’s earning power increases and sex-roles are further questioned, women may no longer be willing to waive these opportunities and take on their traditional ‘caring role’ within the family. Another factor which influences female labour force participation is that of education. As Callan and Farrell (1991) have shown the greater the investment in education by women the stronger their attachment to the labour force will be. It has been demonstrated within the EU that ‘the better educated women are, the more they are economically active’, and this has contributed to the breakthroughs made by women in the labour markets of Europe (Maruani 1992).

As European data show there is a class dimension to women’s labour market participation. Highly educated women have continuous careers, not interrupted by the births of their children, whereas women with few educational advantages are forced off the labour market by the ‘poverty trap’ in which the individual sees no pecuniary advantage to (re)enter the labour market or extend their working hours since net income would remain the same or, in some instances, decline. This situation most commonly arises when woman are faced with caring responsibilities and is reinforced by recent Irish research on demographic and labour market trends (Fahey and Fitz Gerald 1997).

The issue of ‘sharing the caring’ must be addressed, since as Briggs and Oliver have commented:

If the situation seems bleak now, how much more so will it be when the full effects of changing policies and a diminishing ratio of carers to dependants are felt? At the turn of the century, there were seventeen women relatives to every person over the age of sixty five. There are now fewer than three to every elderly person.....(Briggs and Oliver 1985:121).

Hopflinger (1991: 310) has observed that ‘while the development towards greater equality is a slow process, there are some indications that role sharing will become more widespread in the future. Younger Swedish couples are markedly more egalitarian than older ones, even when education and family life-cycle were controlled for’. It will be important to observe whether this tendency is (a) a long term trend, (b) extends to all forms of caring and (c) being adopted in other European states.

Footnotes

1. While the Total Fertility Rate for the former West Germany (FRG) was 1.35 in 1994, the equivalent rate in the former East (GDR) was 0.77.
2. In the case of Ireland, and perhaps other countries, this figure is distorted by the availability of a state allowance to lone parents which effectively prohibits 'formal' cohabitation.
3. Family households are defined as households with one-family or two or more families; Non-family households are defined as one-person or multi-person households.

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DISCUSSION

Joyce O'Connor: Drew, in her paper, provides us with a very important service by directing our attention to a number of important demographic trends in the EU. This may help us to understand what is happening to family structures, and may clarify the causes and consequences of change in them. Looking at what is happening in Ireland within this comparative framework, though this is not Drew's priority, will help us to see where we are the same and where we are different from other countries in the EU. This is an essential part of the process in uncovering the necessity for and determining the form of policy responses. In this response to Drew's paper I will focus on some of the policy implications that her observations may have for Ireland, in particular in regard to lone parent families and population ageing. In so doing I will be acknowledging the importance and I hope, demonstrating the value, of the perspective she has adopted.

Different Cohabitation Patterns

In considering lone parent families, fertility rates and related issues, McIntyre's observation, quoted by Drew, concerning the increasing separation of marriage, reproduction and sexual activity is apposite. How different from the popular view of the relatedness of such matters in Ireland in the 1950s, and indeed by many in Ireland today! As Drew observes, throughout Europe marriage is increasingly being replaced, temporarily or permanently, by various other cohabitation patterns. It is not clear whether such alternative cohabitation patterns are widely practiced in Ireland. Drew observes that the provision of a state allowance in Ireland to lone parents prohibits cohabitation. This is a controversial issue, where little or no research has been undertaken.

While explanations or the analysis of "motivation" for lone parenthood is outside the scope of this paper, it should be noted that lone parenthood is not necessarily a negative experience from the lone parents' point of view. For example, a study of single mothers in West Berlin revealed an ambivalence in their attitudes towards welfare. The women surveyed felt some limitations due to their dependence on welfare but also perceived that welfare gave them the opportunity to live their preferred lifestyle. These women were unwilling to marry or to stay in marriages because of the presence of children. They were prepared to take responsibility for childcare themselves and to leave or reduce paid employment, at least for a period of time, but they refused to rely on a husband's maintenance. For them, the government was the preferred breadwinner (Madje and Neussus, 1994).

Extra-marital Births

Different meanings attributed to extra-marital births can help us to understand the nature and circumstances of lone parent families. In Nordic countries the increase in unmarried cohabitation is associated with the substantial increase in the number of extra-marital births. While, as noted above, there is a lack of information concerning

such cohabitation in Ireland, it is clear that there has been a substantial increase in the number of extra-marital births in Ireland. There are quite substantial differences between countries in the EU regarding the proportions of all births which are extra-marital, and it would very interesting to know the reasons for these differences. Why were 19.7 per cent of births in Ireland in 1994 extra-marital compared with 2.9 per cent and 7.4 per cent in Greece and Italy respectively, or 51.6 per cent in Sweden? Why does the birth rate of single women under the age of twenty vary so much within Ireland? For example, it is considerably lower in Galway City than in either Dublin city or Carlow (Fahey and Fitz Gerald: 48). To begin to understand such variations we have to go beyond the categories; extra-marital-births may have quite different meanings between and within different societies or cultures, and quite different causes and consequences. What significance can be attributed to Hall's observation that in England and Wales in 1990 more than half of extra-marital births were registered by both parents living at the same address while three quarters of all such births were jointly registered. What would the equivalent proportions in Ireland be? Variations in forms of cohabitation and increasing rates of extra-marital births brings us to the issue of lone-parenting.

Highest Proportion of Lone Parent Families in Ireland

It may appear remarkable that the highest proportion of lone parent families in the EU is found in Ireland, 10.6 per cent in 1990/91, and perhaps even more surprising when compared with the proportion of such families in Sweden, 3.5 per cent in 190/91, where the proportion of extra-marital births is more than twice as great as in Ireland. Importantly, Drew warns us against facile interpretation of such statistics; in most countries the majority of lone parents are divorced, separated or widowed mothers. However it appears unlikely that such considerations would account for this difference between Ireland and Sweden.

Lone Parent Families with Children Under 15 Years

Classifications of families with at least one child under the age of 15 provide additional information about the number and nature of lone parent families in Ireland. In 1991 10.7 per cent of families with at least one child under the age of 15 were lone parent families; 9.3 per cent of all families with at least one child under 15, 38,235, were headed by lone mothers. It is likely that this number has increased since then as the number of such families headed by lone mothers increased by more than a quarter in each of the two inter-censal periods 1981-86 and 1986-91. Also in 1991, 9.1 per cent of children under the age of 15 were living in lone parent households; 7.9 per cent of such children, 73,783, were living with lone mothers (McCashin: 3-4).

Single Mothers

The number of families headed by single mothers dependent on the state has increased over the last twenty years. This is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Number of Single Mothers and Children in Receipt of State Allowances /Benefits - 1974-1997

| Year | Mothers | Children | Total |
|-----------------|---------|----------|--------|
| 1974 (March) | 1,633 | 2,074 | 3,707 |
| 1986 (December) | 12,039 | 15,026 | 27,065 |
| 1997 (March) | 39,183 | 55,204 | 94,387 |

Note: Information for the years 1974 and 1986 refers to the recipients of the “unmarried mothers allowance”. That for March 1997 refers to single mothers in receipt of the “lone parents allowance”. The number of children of 32,366 of mothers in receipt of an allowance in March, 1997 was known; however, because of new recording procedures the number of children of the other 6,817 mothers was not. It is assumed here that this latter group of mothers have on average the same number of children as the others (Source: Department of Social Welfare).

In March 1974, shortly after the introduction of what was then called the “Unmarried Mother’s Allowance” 1,633 mothers benefited from the allowance. Twelve years later 12,039 mothers benefited from the allowance. More recently, March 1997, 39,183 single mothers and an estimated 55,204 children, a total of 94,387 persons, benefited from the lone parents allowance. In the Irish context this is a large number of people, equivalent in size to the combined populations of the County Boroughs of Limerick and Waterford, 94,558 in 1996 (CSO, 1997). It would appear that a very high proportion of lone parent families headed by mothers are dependent on the state as in 1991 38,235 lone parent families with at least one child under 15 years of age were headed by mothers. In view of this it appears surprising that very little investigation of lone parent families has been undertaken in Ireland.

Outcomes of Lone Parent Family Status

Lone parenting raises the issue of the greater diversity of family forms and the variety of household and family structures that can be experienced in the course of one’s lifetime. It also raises questions about the consequences these variations have for children. In other countries numerous studies have associated adverse outcomes with lone parent family status. Children of lone parent families perform worse at school than children of two parent families (Downey, 1994). Pre-adolescent children of lone mothers exhibit more behaviour problems, lower social competence, and poorer school performance than children of married mothers (Gringlas and Weinraub, 1995). The school drop out rate for children of single mothers is double that of children in two-parent families. Children in one parent families have lower grade averages, worse school attendance, are less likely to graduate and have a greater chance of being single parents themselves (McLanahan, 1996). Boys in lone mother families are more likely to be rated as aggressive than boys in mother-father or mother-male partner families (Vaden - Kiernan, Ialongo, and Pearson, 1995). In regard to educational attainment the “negative effect of the lone mother family” was greater in the late 1980s than in the late 1970s (Dronkers, 1994). In an appraisal of

research on adult outcomes associated with childhood family structure, Gee concluded that single parent family homes and marital disruption have a modest, negative impact on adult children. Single parent families (and marriage disruption due to divorce and separation) were associated with lower educational attainment, lower income and socio-economic status in adulthood, higher incidence of divorce, younger age at marriage and lower well being (Gee: 298, 1993). Clearly it cannot be assumed that these negative features of lone parent families prevail in the Irish context. Supports for such families may be better in Ireland than in some other countries and compensate for some of the disadvantages.

Population Ageing

Estimates of Increases in the Elderly Population

As Drew has pointed out one of the consequences of improvements in life expectancy and lower fertility is that the population throughout Europe is ageing. While the population of Ireland shares this characteristic, its proportion of the population aged 75 years and over in 2020 will be considerably lower than the EUR 12 average, 6.3 per cent compared with 8.6 per cent. While this appears to be a small increase the numbers involved are considerable. According to Connell's projections the percentage of the total population aged 65 years and over will increase from 11.4 in 1991 to 14.1 in 2011, an increase of about 119 thousand. The percentage of those over 80 years of age will increase from 2.2 in 1991 to 3.5 in 2011, an increase of about 51 thousand (Fahey, 1995: 94-95). The CSO (1995) projections (low migration assumption) estimate smaller increases than these, an increase of 77 thousand for those over 65 and an increase of 34.2 thousand for those over 80 years of age between 1996 and 2011 (CSO, 1995).

Consequences of an Ageing Population

Some recent reports have examined some of the consequences of the ageing of the population. Fahey and Fitz Gerald have concluded that the ageing of the population referred to by Drew will, in respect of dependency levels, be balanced by reduced child dependency and increasing participation of females in the labour force. They base this observation on the 1996 Forfás/ESRI projections which show that the high dependency rate of 220 dependants for every 100 workers which prevailed in the mid-1980s will fall to 133 by 2010. They also observe that the number of elderly dependants per worker will fall from 35 in 1986 to 31 in 2010. The reduction in the number of child dependants, though up to now primarily the responsibility of the family rather than the state, may reduce costs for the state. However, they observe that the increase in the number of elderly people will result in increased costs for the state, mainly through the extra costs of pensions and other forms of income maintenance. They suggest that the effect of the increase in the number of elderly people on health costs for the state is uncertain because in the past state spending on health has been affected in a minor way only by population ageing, and that increasing life expectation is likely to be associated with better health. They also

suggest that the family will provide the social care for the increasing numbers of frail elderly, partly because higher proportions of elderly people will have children and/or spouses to rely on than previously (Fahey and Fitz Gerald, 1997). They consider this is likely despite the decline in average family size, the increase in the number of elderly people living alone, and the increasing participation of women in the labour force.

The National Council for the Elderly has taken issue with the health implications of our ageing population suggested by Fahey and Fitz Gerald, in particular it questioned the proposition that increased life expectancy is associated with better health. It advised that there is little evidence that mental illness or morbidity associated with senescence will decrease. It also referred to the high levels of unmet needs in our social services and community care services for the elderly (The National Council for the Elderly, 1996). The inadequacy of community care supports have been referred to in many reports including: Blackwell *et al* (1992, 1995); Finucane *et al* (1994); O'Connor and Ruddle (1988); and Ruddle and O'Connor (1993).

The attribution of responsibility for the social care of the dependent elderly to spouses and children may not be well received, especially at this time, when as Drew has observed the "family" has many different forms, and we must be cautious in making assumptions about what can be expected from it. While many carers willingly accept responsibility for dependent relatives, it is often in a context where they have no alternative because of the low levels of subvention available from health boards for care in private nursing homes, and the decreasing supply of health board accommodation. People today, and perhaps more so in the future, may have higher expectations both for themselves and their dependent relatives, and this in time may result in higher standards of care being effectively demanded from the state. Moreover, women who do and have done most of this "informal" caring in the past, are now more likely to establish their own agendas.

Conclusions

As indicated above much concern has been expressed about the opportunities of children of lone parent families, especially those in poorer families. Many of the arguments made in favour of giving greater support to deprived lone parent families apply to two parent poor families. However, low income lone parents often have added disadvantages, and require some additional inducements and supports to facilitate their education and training and participation in the labour force. It has been observed that lone parents in Ireland would avail of educational and training opportunities to a greater degree if the necessary supports were made available (McCashin, 1996).

Commenting recently on the ESRI's Medium Term Review 1997-2003, Fahey observed that Ireland's investment in human capital has been one of the driving forces of our economy. He cautions us not to waste our human capital and this

includes lone parents and their children. He adds that social investment must incorporate all children and extend beyond schools to include the whole childhood environment, particularly the family (Fahey, 1997). Given the scale of the lone parent family in Ireland it would appear that we have been remarkably slow in investigating its dynamics or its needs.

We must be alert to the fact that interpretations of the implications of our demographic restructuring have been inevitably coloured by the remarkable performance of the Irish economy in recent years, and rest on the assumption that strong employment growth will continue. We have seen great expectations end in tears before. Both Fitz Gerald (1997) and Walsh (1997) introduced a note of caution about the prevailing high levels of optimism about the future; the latter because the reasons for our recent economic performance are not well understood. The currency pressures in recent days underlines the necessity for such caution and must remind us of our vulnerability.

We must also remain cautious in our expectations about what people will be willing or able to pay for, either through market mechanisms or taxation, and be able to justify policies and their costs in human and financial terms. We must question why families or individuals are expected to bear the costs in some circumstances while the state is expected and prepared to do so in others. Why for example is so much often expected of families, and as Drew observes, of women in particular, in regard to the care of the elderly? Is this arbitrary, inevitable, just, or simply expedient?

While in this response I have not demonstrated the full benefit of Drew's approach I think it is important that she continues this kind of investigation. Looking at ourselves in a European context is a vital first step but we should not restrict ourselves to Europe. We must also look more behind the statistics as Drew has done, explore their meaning, and accordingly make our comparisons more valid. This is essential for the creation of more informed and better policies.

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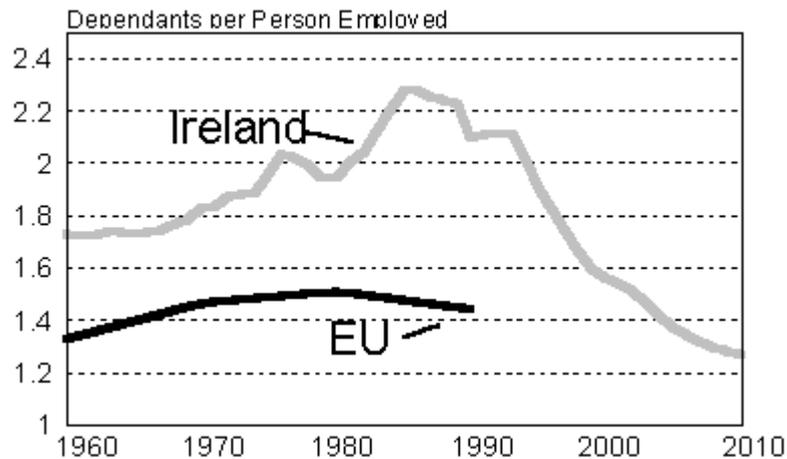
John Fitz Gerald: This paper plays a very useful role in raising our horizons from the limited nature of Irish experience to look at the wider picture of demographic developments within the EU. This examination of a broader set of experience is of considerable importance in trying to understand recent developments in Ireland and in considering where current developments are likely to take us in the future.

The work undertaken by Tony Fahey, published in Fahey and Fitz Gerald, 1997, suggests that there should not be a rush to judgement on the dependency implications of current demographic changes. Before any future crisis hits us we must first enjoy the fruits of the "demographic dividend", which is almost inevitable. The dependency crisis which we are currently emerging from will, hopefully, prove to have been much more serious than anything we will experience in the foreseeable future. In particular the turnaround in economic dependency (the ratio of those not at work to those at work) is particularly striking as shown in the attached figure.

In considering needs for care and assistance in the future the most striking feature will be the reduction in numbers unemployed. In addition, the very considerable reduction in numbers of children will reduce substantially the amount of time spent "caring" for youth dependency.

While the numbers of those aged over 65 will begin to rise from the end of the next decade, their needs for care and assistance may well be different from the elderly of the past. Firstly, a much higher proportion of them will have been married and had children. While marriage, at least in the past, has significantly increased life

expectancy, it has also reduced the amount of care which has had to be provided by the state. The very large number of elderly single people living in remote rural areas has, in the past, been a major social problem with which state services have had considerable difficulty coping. This contributed to relatively high rates of institutional care for the elderly in the past.



Even with children playing a smaller role in providing intensive care for elderly parents, the casual support which they provide may be sufficient to ensure that a high proportion of the lives of those over 65 is spent out of institutional care.

Nonetheless, the pattern in the past has been that most of the burdens of youth dependency (child rearing) have been a private burden, falling on individual families, whereas the burden of caring for the elderly is much more a burden for state services. Thus the shift from high rates of youth dependency to increasing rates of old age dependency has implications for the demand for state services.

The paper provides valuable information on patterns of fertility across time and across countries in Europe. The implications for Ireland remain to be considered. As discussed by Dr. Drew, the rising opportunity cost of having children (lost potential earnings) is an important factor in the fall in fertility in Ireland and elsewhere. The rising educational attainment of the population increases the potential earnings of parents raising the opportunity cost. However, there are wider forces at work changing attitudes in society throughout Europe. The growing importance of people's work or employment in determining their place in society plays possibly a more important role in driving changes in fertility and the related changes in labour force participation.

Ireland is not a very “parent-friendly” society and this militates against combining paid employment with child rearing. However, changes in policy to facilitate parents combining paid employment with bringing up children might well influence the pattern of fertility in the future. Thus, even if one could identify the forces driving changes in participation and falling fertility, these forces could well change in the future. This makes simple projections of current trends in falling fertility most uncertain.

In the paper Dr. Drew quotes figures for other countries on the cost of lost earnings by women as a result of child-rearing. It would be interesting to understand better how these figures are arrived at and to see comparable data for different groups of women in Ireland today.

Past experience suggests that society generally is quite resilient to demographic shocks and if a very low level of fertility were to pose dangers to society generally, and the economy in particular, there could well be a change in behaviour. This has been observed in the past on occasions such as the immediate post-war baby boom which succeeded a prolonged period of death and destruction. The changes we can foresee in the future are much less cataclysmic than the demographic shocks of the past but the lesson, in terms of the resilience of human society, is nonetheless relevant.

In measuring welfare in economics we tend to use GNP as a suitable statistic. However, with the large-scale movement of women into the paid labour force it is likely to overestimate the increase in national output and, therefore, welfare. Where women or men care for their own children outside the labour market this “output” is not counted in GNP. However, when those parents work and pay someone else to look after their children both the output of the parents and the output of the carer will be treated as output. This results in a big rise in measured GNP which takes no account of the work previously done by parents outside the paid labour force.

A very important question for policy, which we can not at present answer, is the nature of the cycle of lone-parenting. For policy makers it is important to know to what extent the single parent (generally a woman) has the support and assistance in child-rearing of a partner. However, the existing data are not very satisfactory at providing answers to this question. The figures for number of lone parent households, cited in the paper, seem unduly high and this may reflect measurement problems rather than the reality on the ground.

Apart from the possible long-term economic pressures which may require the introduction of more “parent friendly” policies, there are clearly social reasons which suggest such a move. It would appear that potential parents’ choices are being restricted by the rigid way we organise our work. Experience in Scandinavia suggests that changes to allow parents to have children and deal with the normal requirements of child rearing, while still pursuing a career, can evoke a response from citizens. The nature of the economy is such that individual employers can not

easily make many of the necessary changes; the positive externalities from such changes will accrue to society generally. This argues for state intervention in the future though this can not avoid the fact that “parent friendly” policies may, in the short-term, have significant economic costs which must be reflected in a reduction in money incomes.

Some of the problems touched on in the paper suggest that it may be necessary to move to basing our social welfare and tax systems on individual rights rather than taking account directly of family units. The changing environment, in particular the decline in marriage, in any event makes changes in the treatment of adult dependants in the social welfare system necessary. In a world where most men and women work individuals will qualify for their own pensions rather than as dependants. Payments to “true dependants” - such as the mentally handicapped and physically disabled, will have to be protected and the gradual improvement in economic dependency may provide the opportunity for further developing services for these disadvantaged groups.

Finally, the import of my comments is that there is no need to fear an apocalypse in the immediate future! Prudent planning for the gradual change in our demographic circumstances may well see a wider sharing of the current increase in economic well-being. Old age can be provided for; the question is how best to do it.

Response by Dr. Drew: I wish to thank both discussants for their positive and informative responses to my paper on families in the EU. Not surprisingly Professors O’Connor and Fitz Gerald have focused on some key points relating to demographic and family changes in Ireland. In this conclusion to the paper I will revisit some important points raised in their respective contributions.

Prof. O’Connor refers to differing cohabitation patterns, notably in a changing Irish society. Since presenting my paper to Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, I can refer to recently published data on cohabitation in Ireland. The Census 96 Principal Demographic Results was the first in which information on cohabiting couples was explicitly sought, through a formulation which distinguished persons living together as a couple. The results show that there were 31,928 family units consisting of cohabiting couples, of whom 60 per cent were couples without children (accounting for 10.7 per cent of all childless couples). In the remaining 12,658 cohabiting unions, 52 per cent had one child and a further 28 per cent had two children (accounting for 2.5 per cent of all couples with children). Given the age structure of cohabiting couples in Ireland, among whom 43 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men were aged 30 years or more, the Central Statistics Office suggest that cohabiting ‘is not just a precursor to marriage but a more permanent form of union in many cases’.

The dearth of research on lone parenting in Ireland, as Prof. O'Connor points out, is lamentable, given the social and economic changes in household structures in Ireland. This is even more important in the light of the, generally negative, findings which she refers to on the impact of lone parenting e.g. in relation to children's school performance and behaviour. These possible outcomes would need to be examined against the motivation for lone parenting. At one end of the decision spectrum there may be parents (mostly mothers) who seek to maintain their autonomy by remaining single and rearing a child(ren) by themselves, possibly with the aid of a partner or family members. Other lone parents may decide to reject what may be inadequate support (financial/emotional) from the other parent or to disengage from an unhappy marriage. At the other end of the spectrum some lone parents may involuntarily experience abandonment by the other parent, through desertion or, temporarily, by imprisonment of the partner. These grossly oversimplified 'family' situations point to the complexity of the nature of lone parenting on which more information is needed for those families in need of financial and other forms of support.

Prof. Fitz Gerald justifiably questions the figures for the number of lone parents in Ireland, cited in my paper, as unduly high, reflecting problems of measurement rather than reality. This is born out by closer examination of country specific data on Ireland, which would not have been possible in a paper on EU patterns and trends. According to the Irish Census 96, Volume 3, Household Composition and Family Units, one parent families accounted for 11.2 per cent of all private households in Ireland. However these figures do not take account of the number and ages of children co-resident with that parent. Taking lone parent households in which all children were aged less than 15 years, lone parents accounted for 4.8 per cent of all family units in 1996 within the Republic of Ireland. Among these, 91.1 per cent were headed by lone mothers (35,196 out of 38,654 lone parent family units). It is not possible to distinguish the additional number of lone parent families in which one or more child is aged 15 or over, and where there are also children under 15 years, from others in which there are no dependent children.

In conclusion, I would concur with Prof. Fitz Gerald's optimistic note concerning the potential demographic dividend for Ireland, relative to our EU partners. However I would add a cautionary note that society must value its human resources as an asset and make provision for the forms of care (for children, persons with a disability, older people) which have hitherto fallen on female family members and introduce more family-friendly patterns of flexible working which will appeal to, and be availed of, by men and women.