

State-of-the-art report
Changes in the life course

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Abstract:

The dynamics of family formation and disruption have changed in contemporary societies. Compared to previous decades, more people cohabit, have children outside marital unions, experience the dissolution of their unions, re-partner, enter stepfamilies, live separately from their children or remain childless. Family life courses have become increasingly diverse as the sequence of events and the pace at which they occur have become less standardized than before. Moreover, new types of households such as single parent families, Living-Apart-Together relationships and same sex couples are emerging. This report contains a comprehensive literature overview of state-of-the-art knowledge about the dynamics of the development of family constellations and non-standard families. It discusses how current research can be further developed to improve our understanding of determinants of changes in family structure. It underlines that future research needs to consider the family as a dynamic entity.

Keywords: life course, transition to adulthood, separation, single parent families, step families, Living-Apart-Together relationships, same sex couples, multiple residence

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Introduction

Half a century ago, sociologists like Talcott Parsons considered the nuclear family, i.e. a married couple and their biological children who followed a gendered division of work, to be the most appropriate family arrangement for industrialized societies (Parsons, 1959), and this arrangement was indeed the dominant family form. It is now clearly in retreat in nearly all European countries, however. Indeed, during the past five decades, remarkable changes in family and household structures have occurred in European countries. The average household size has declined as extended family households have become rarer, and the share of people living alone and as single parents has increased. These behavioral changes have been accompanied by substantial shifts in attitudes towards marriage, cohabitation, single parenthood, divorce and childlessness (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2004). Marriage is no longer considered as the only framework in which it is possible to live as a family and to have children.

The dynamics of family formation have also changed in contemporary societies. The sequencing of life stages over the life course is becoming more diverse and more unpredictable than in the past. Some life events are experienced by smaller shares of the population, occur at more diverse ages and for durations that vary more widely (Brückner and Mayer 2005).

Moreover, individual life trajectories are increasingly heterogeneous, with the appearance –or greater visibility– of “new” types of households such as large multi-generational families, single parent families, Living-Apart-Together relationships and same sex couples. Family situations are also becoming blurred since the process of changing family status takes time; these intermediate and ambiguous family arrangements correspond to situations of multi-residence. All of these non-traditional family forms deviate from the traditional nuclear family.

These major changes and trends in family structures are quite well known (Uhlendorff et al. 2011; Farrer and Lay 2011), but some gaps still need to be filled. This article contains a comprehensive literature overview of state of the art knowledge about the dynamics of the development of family constellations and “non-standard” families. It discusses how current

research can be further developed to improve our understanding of changes in family structure. It underlines that future research needs to consider the family as a dynamic entity.

1. Reconceptualising the standard life course

1.1. Cohabitation and cohabiting parenthood have become standard

The increase in cohabitation is one of the main changes in family behaviour that advanced societies have witnessed in recent decades. While marriage was close to universal in Europe in the 1960s, today a large number of couples live together without being married (Festy, 1980; Kiernan, 2002, 2004). This rise in the frequency of cohabitation occurred much earlier in Northern than in Southern and Eastern Europe. In Northern Europe, cohabitation is perceived as a legitimate or normal family form. Yet countries in Southern and Eastern Europe are now experiencing an increase in cohabitation. This trend is reflected in the increasing number of births occurring within co-residential relationships. The share of first births to cohabiting women has increased over time in all European countries (Klüsener et al. 2012) (Table 1). While in some countries, like Italy or Romania, most parents are married, elsewhere in Europe, particularly in the Nordic countries, cohabiting parenthood has become a standard family arrangement (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004; Kiernan, 2002; Raley, 2001; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008).

From a life-course perspective, it has been shown that couples who have a first child outside marriage often marry at a later stage in life. This means that cohabitation is not necessarily a substitute for marriage but that the sequencing of cohabitation, births and marriage has changed over time (Brienna Perelli-Harris et al., 2012). The timing and spacing of family-related life-course events varies considerably across countries. While in some places cohabiting parenthood usually results in marriage soon after the first birth, in others, such as East Germany and Norway (Brienna Perelli-Harris et al., 2012), marriage might be postponed for several years after the first child is born. In some Eastern European countries, by contrast, so called “shotgun marriages,” i.e. marriages after conception but before birth, are a common pattern (Brienna Perelli-Harris & Gerber, 2011; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008). This indicates that in these countries non-marital births may be still stigmatized.

With the spread of cohabitation, a large body of literature has appeared that investigates the prevalence, causes and consequences of cohabiting parenthood. While some scholars, particularly in the US-context, view cohabiting parenthood as a growing social problem (McLanahan, 2004), others have pointed out that the decline of marriage and the spread of cohabitation is an indication of modern family change that is accompanied by growing individualization and the rejection of traditional family values (Lesthaeghe, 1995, 2010). In a similar vein, economic studies provide a framework that also suggests that female education and economic independence is the driving force behind a decline in marriage intensities (Becker, 1993; Raymo, 2003). According to this so called “independence-hypothesis”, highly educated women should be less likely to marry and more likely to cohabit.

Empirical evidence on the educational gradient of marriage behaviour has not provided much support for a positive link. Most studies have shown that female education leads to postponement of marriage, but, if differences in timing are taken into account, highly educated women seem to be more prone to getting married than those with little education or those who are economically less advantaged (Goldstein & Kenney, 2001; Ono, 2003; Oppenheimer, 2003). Studies focussing on marriage intensities of cohabitees have provided similar results (Duvander, 1999; Kravdal, 1999). A recent study on family behaviour in eight European societies has shown that a negative educational gradient exists for cohabiting parenthood in a number of countries (Brienna Perelli-Harris et al., 2010).

In addition to differences in cohabiting parenthood, cross-country variations in the sequencing of cohabitation, marriage and births is striking. These national patterns might be related to institutional variations (Klüsener et al., 2012). While some countries’ legislation treats cohabiting and married couples nearly the same, legislation in other countries favours married couples (Brienna Perelli-Harris & Sánchez Gassen, 2012). Yet in other countries, for instance in France, cohabitees can institutionalize their partnership without getting married but by registration of their cohabitation (Festy, 2001). However, the causal relationship between family forms and legal regulations is complex. On the one hand, policies shape the context of behaviour (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hantrais, 2004). On the other hand, legal reforms might simply be a reaction to the emergence of new family forms such as cohabitation and cohabiting parenthood (Neyer & Andersson, 2008).

1.2. Diversity in life courses has become standard

In nearly all European countries, family forms have also become more diverse. Compared to previous decades, more people cohabit, have children outside marital unions, experience the dissolution of their unions, re-partner, enter stepfamilies, live separately from their children, remain childless or live in same-sex partnerships. These changes in demographic behaviour comprise changes in family life courses, that have also become increasingly diverse as the sequence of events and the pace at which they occur have become less standardized than before (Brückner and Mayer 2005; Buchmann and Kriesi 2011).

This process of de-standardization and de-institutionalization of family forms is the result of increasing individualization and a weakening of the normative constraints that shape possible, acceptable and desirable transitions over the life course and their sequencing (Hoffman-Nowotny and Fux 2001; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2004). In other words, individuals have more choice in lifestyle and personal arrangements and more freedom to plan out their own lives.

At the same time, however, adaptation to norms depends on the opportunities and resources available to individuals and families and the constraints they face. Structural factors such as increasing labour market participation of women and their changing role in society thanks to their higher level of education have also led to changes in the family model. Some observers assume that growing diversity and instability of individual life trajectories is linked to the growing insecurity that characterizes modern societies, caused by deregulation, internationalization, and globalization (e.g., Blossfeld et al. 2006; Blossfeld and Hofmeister 2006). Increasing youth unemployment, the prevalence of term-limited work contracts, and unstable employment are now viewed as major causes of the postponement of childbearing and partnership formation in contemporary Europe (Blossfeld and Mills 2005). The onset of the financial crisis and economic instability in Europe in 2008 has fuelled interest in how economic uncertainty relates to family dynamics.

2. Events in the “standard” life course

The frequency and timing of events of the “standard” life course have changed dramatically in most European countries. The transition to adulthood has become more complex. Some events have become increasingly frequent, in particular union dissolution, single parenthood and stepfamilies.

2.1. Changes in the transition to adulthood

2.1.1. A diversification of pathways to adulthood

Following a secular trend of standardization (Modell, Furstenberg & Hershberg, 1976), patterns of transition to adulthood changed substantially in most Western countries from the late 1960s onwards. Typically, the demographic events of the transition to adulthood have included such markers as leaving home, finishing education, securing a job, marrying or cohabiting, and having children. In the post-War years, the transition occurred quickly (usually by age 25 for both men and women) and in an orderly sequence beginning with school completion, full-time work, and home-leaving. Since the late 1970s, this transition has lengthened and become more circuitous and complex (Aassve et al. 2002; Settersten et al. 2006; Sironi 2008; Furstenberg 2010; Rindfuss et al. 2010).

“Traditional” markers of the transition to adulthood, like leaving home, couple formation and parenthood, no longer have the significance that they once had. The frequency and timing of these events has changed dramatically in most European countries. Most of these events occur much later than a few decades ago (Table 2). Moreover, the sequence of events has changed. Transitions between different states take longer, for instance living on one’s own has become widely accepted as part of the transition to adulthood. Alternative sequences of events have also emerged (Table 3). Except for couple formation that still most often precedes childbirth, and completion of education that still precedes entry into the labour market, the transition to adulthood has become more complicated, with a proliferation of pathways (Lesnard et al. 2010; Toulemon 2010).

Social expectations for adult status have also evolved over time and across generations. Holding a job and being economically independent have gained importance over the years as the main markers of adult status. In fact, the 2006 European Social Survey has shown that having a job and leaving the parental home are the most important requirements for being considered an adult, according to young respondents, while living in a union or having a child is considered less important, especially for men (Toulemon 2010). Conversely, many young people (age 19 to 28) in the US do not consider themselves “financially independent enough” to assume the responsibilities of adulthood (Yelowitz 2005). Hence, “adulthood” and “self-sufficiency” seem to have become more intertwined in the early phases of the life course. Yet, the main requirement for being considered an “adult” is to have a full-time job. In Europe,

completion of education and getting a first job have been postponed everywhere, but they still most often occur before the first union and the first child, especially for men (Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Toulemon 2010). The main change is a decline in the proportion of young adults who leave the parental home before having a full-time job. Moreover, in many countries, moving towards self-sufficiency has become a longer process for youth, a process which often comprises several episodes of unemployment and family support.

There is little evidence for convergence between countries with regard to the timing or sequencing of events. There are, for example, clear differences with regards to the age at union formation, marriage and entry into parenthood, and entering a first job. Postponement of marriage and motherhood usually began the earliest in Northern Europe, followed by Western and Southern Europe (Van de Velde 2008; Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Lesnard et al. 2010; Toulemon 2010). In Eastern Europe, postponement usually appears only for the youngest cohorts.

2.1.2. Drivers of change

Changes in demographic and economic contexts are often considered key drivers of changes in patterns of entry into adulthood. The mechanisms at work are still unclear, however. From the 1970s until the late 1980s, most European countries experienced periods of great economic instability. At practically the same time, the large baby boom cohorts entered the labour market, creating what has been called the Easterlin effect, i.e. large cohort size reduces the economic opportunities of cohort members and reduces income relative to smaller parental generations (Pampel and Peters 1995; Macunovich 2011). Low relative economic status in turn leads to lower fertility, higher rates of female labour force participation, later marriage, and higher divorce rates. Findings related to Easterlin's theory have been mixed, some studies providing support (Jeon and Shields 2005; Macunovich 2011), others claiming that changes in relative cohort sizes are not powerful predictors of changes in labour market outcomes and social behaviours (Pampel 1993). At most, the Easterlin effect can help to explain the deterioration in the economic situation of young adults that has occurred since the 1970s. Predicted cycles in economic opportunities and financial independence over the ensuing decades have not been observed.

Yet, other structural changes in educational patterns, labour markets contexts, and working and living conditions are cited as the main explanations of the changes in the entry into adulthood (Billari 2004; Blossfeld et al. 2005). Prolongation of the average duration of enrolment in educational systems is clearly identified as a key reason why young people delay departure from their parental homes and/or starting a family (Blossfeld 1995). Changes in job standards and in career development have led to greater insecurity in the labour market, which is also seen as a factor leading to postponement of family formation (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Farber 2007). Increases in the cost of living, such as housing cost, which rose drastically in most OECD countries, are also structural factors that slow down the process of leaving the parental home (Yelowitz 2007).

The on-going recession has hit youth very hard, with youth unemployment rates rising from 12% in 2007 to 16.7% in 2010 on average in the OECD. There is considerable cross-national variation; unemployment is especially high among young people in Southern Europe. For instance, nowadays, more than half of women and men under age 30 looking for a job are unemployed in Spain (INE 2013). Other socioeconomic outcomes are affected with some young people prolonging their enrolment in education, while the most disadvantaged face greater financial difficulties in maintaining school enrolment. There is also some sparse evidence that the crisis has greatly increased young people's level of indebtedness (Economist 2012). At the same time, young people's access to independent housing, and/or to health care and health insurance has also declined (Surkcke and Stuckler 2012).

This deterioration in their economic situation generates various difficulties for young people in achieving self-sufficiency. Youth now entering the labour market may experience long-lasting difficulties which may damage their medium to long term prospects. The theoretical arguments on the medium to long term effects of entering the labour market during a time of economic crisis are mixed. On the one hand, skills may be lost during long periods of non-employment or job mismatch. On the other hand, being unemployed during a recession may send a less negative signal than being unemployed during an economic boom. Furthermore, initial wages may determine all subsequent wages if inter-firm mobility is costly; on the contrary, if it is costless, entry wages must be revised upward to prevent workers from being drawn away by other firms. Empirical evidence is also quite mixed: The effect of previous economic recessions on employment is estimated to have disappeared within 3 years in

Canada (Oreopoulos et al. 2012) and in the US (Genda et al. 2010), and after 6 years in Germany (Stevens 2007).

2.1.3. Are differences increasing across genders and socioeconomic groups?

Men and women are affected differently by these changes. For men, steady employment and earnings are positively associated with marriage and childbearing (Becker 1993; Blossfeld and Drobnič 2001; Blossfeld et al. 2005; Gibson-Davis et al. 2005; Gibson-Davis 2009). For women, the picture is less clear (Kreyenfeld et al. 2012). The new home economics hypothesis (Becker 1993) states that women's economic independence is the main cause of delayed marriage and delayed motherhood in industrialized countries. Better education and greater career opportunities enable women to postpone or forgo marriage. Gains from marriage and role specialization within marriage dissipate with women's growing investments in human capital and careers. An alternative hypothesis is that women's earnings contribute to a couple's higher standard of living, which encourages marriage (income effect), preferably between equally educated partners. Furthermore, the spread of education increases opportunities for contact between equally educated men and women at an age when young people start to look for partners and form couples (Blossfeld 2009). It is not yet clear which scenario dominates. It appears to depend on other factors such as the local and national context, birth cohort, labour market conditions, and the educational attainment and social status of the family of origin (Sweeney 2002; Blossfeld and Timm 2003; Harknett and Kuperberg 2011). For instance, Harknett and Kuperberg (2011) suggest that, in the US, better labour market conditions at the local level are positively associated with marriage only for women with a high school diploma or less, suggesting that the "income effect" dominates among the low educated, but not among the highly educated who seem to place greater value on their individual "independence". Yet, country context also matters, since lower transition to marriage (and higher cohabitation rates) is found in countries where the transition to the service society took place earlier, where the emphasis on social and gender equality is high, and where the segmentation of the school system is low (Blossfeld and Timm, 2003; Hamplova, 2005).

Institutional constraints influence young adults' decisions on whether or not to leave the parental home or get a first job at an early age, but everywhere these requirements are more stringent for a man than for a woman. This difference is very stable across cohorts, with

noticeable exceptions (Toulemon 2010). For instance, gender differences have increased in Eastern European countries since the fall of the Iron Curtain, because women's transitions are more oriented towards family and less to economic independence: more and more women have a child before working full-time, and fewer women leave the parental home before entering a union. The trends are the opposite in Spain and Portugal where women enter first employment earlier and before making the other transitions; differences between men and women have therefore been reduced. Yet, once a child is in the household, gender differences increase, with women adapting their labour market situation to childcare needs.

Pathways to adulthood are not identical in different socioeconomic groups. Individuals who postpone family formation have the highest level of education. A long period of educational enrolment is associated with late entry into partnership and parenthood. Late departure from the parental home often concerns poorly qualified young adults, whose position in the labour market is quite insecure (Blossfeld et al. 2005; Robette 2010). Among women, those who quit full-time employment to work part-time or to become inactive after childbearing are better qualified than those who stay inactive for most of their lives after leaving school (Robette 2010).

2.1.4. Early school leaving and early motherhood: a challenge for the future?

Diversification of pathways to adulthood might also have consequences for the future lives of young adults. Difficulties faced during the early stages of the transition to adulthood may have a profound influence on later work, family and well-being. For instance, it is well-established that long and/or recurrent spells of unemployment lead to delayed union formation and delayed parenthood (Blossfeld et al. 2005). Moreover, in many cases, the first job obtained when entering the labour market does not guarantee sufficient resources or stability to achieve self-sufficiency. Many young working adults receive some support from their parents to help make ends meet. Overall, these economic constraints create non-standard situations that are not fully captured by traditional household surveys, for example when young adults work at the same time as completing their education or when they live in their parents' homes occasionally or over week ends.

Two experiences in adolescence are particularly challenging: dropping out from the educational system early and early motherhood. First, many countries have quite a high

proportion of adolescents between age 15 and 19 who are neither enrolled in school nor employed (Figure 1). Adolescents from disadvantaged family backgrounds are more likely to be in this situation. The transition from school to economic independence is longer for young people who fail to get a diploma or are from disadvantaged families, and they may ultimately face a higher risk of poverty as well as a higher risk of mental health problems (OECD 2011, 2012; Eurofound 2012). The later consequences of such a situation on the transition to adulthood and the adult life course are not very well-known, however, due partly to the fact that this population is hard to reach through surveys.

The increasing use of contraceptives has led to a large decline in adolescent fertility rates over the past decades (Figure 2). Nevertheless, “teenage motherhood” , i.e. at ages 15-19, remains high in some European countries, for example in the UK. Women from poorer backgrounds and from areas with high unemployment rates are more likely to become adolescent mothers (Berthoud and Robson 2003). Women who have a teen-birth fare worse in the “marriage market” in the sense that they partner with men who are poorly qualified and more likely to be unemployed. This reduces their standard of living. The extent to which this is due to a selection process or caused by early motherhood is still unclear, however. But it seems that age at birth actually has only a minor effect in the UK (Duncan, 2005).

2.1.5. Research gaps

An in-depth comparison of new types of transitions of pathways to adulthood and economic independence in European countries still need to be conducted for young men and women. Moreover, one needs to focus on the primary targets of social policies, i.e. young people with low qualifications or no qualifications and those who have been jobless for more than 6 months. Patterns of support, especially family support, need to be described. More specifically, the effect the current economic crisis has had on the economic and social situation of the youths and their transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency needs to be addressed since it challenges public policy concerning youth.

2.2. Union dissolution

Union dissolution, i.e. the end of a marriage or a cohabiting relationship through divorce or separation, has become a widespread phenomenon in contemporary societies. The break-up of

a conjugal union is an increasingly common life course event (Andersson, 2003) and life-long marriage has given way to increasingly diverse partnership trajectories (Poortman and Lyngstad, 2007).

Although most societies have seen a long-term increase in union instability, there are still major cross-national differences. In the US, which has traditionally had an unusually high rate of divorce (Amato and Irving 2005), the lifetime probability of marriage disruption has hovered around half of all marriages for the last two decades (Castro-Martín and Bumpass 1989; Raley and Bumpass 2003). Divorce rates have never been as high in European societies (Andersson 2003), but there has been a marked rise in recent decades. Yet, within Europe, there is considerable variation in the degree of prevalence and acceptance of divorce (Kalmijn 2007, 2010; Rijken and Liefbroer 2012).

After decades of continuous increase, the propensity to divorce has levelled off in several countries with traditionally high divorce rates, such as the US (Schoen and Canudas-Romo 2006) or Sweden (Andersson and Kolk 2011). Rising age at marriage and increased education have contributed to this recent stabilization (Heaton 2002). As legally married couples increasingly represent a more conservative selected group, the risk of divorce might decline in the future. However, increases in non-marital cohabitation may be concealing the overall instability of couple relationships (Raley and Bumpass 2003). As cohabitation becomes more prevalent (Seltzer 2000; Heuveline and Timberlake 2004), divorce rates are becoming a poor indicator of partnership instability (Raley and Wildsmith 2004). Hence, the risk of separation is generally greater for cohabiting couples than legally-married couples (Liefbroer and Dourleijn 2006; Andersson 2003), even if the partners have children together (Manning et al. 2004; Wu and Musick 2008). But observed differences in the risk of separation by union type tend to be smaller in societies where cohabitation is more prevalent since cohabitation is a heterogeneous phenomenon, with a variety of meanings attached to it (Hiekel and Castro-Martín, 2014).

2.2.1. Explaining the increased instability of marital and non-marital unions

There is no single explanation of why union dissolution rates have soared, or why they vary so markedly across societies. Many scholars view the widespread increase in family instability as part of the second demographic transition (Lesthaeghe 1995), fuelled by

modernization, women's growing economic independence, secularization, and a shift in attitudes towards greater gender equality, personal fulfilment and freedom of choice in family behaviours (Thornton and Young-De Marco 2001).

The changing gender system has also been linked to rising union instability. The so-called gender revolution has been profoundly asymmetric, changing women's lives much more than men's (England 2010). Conflicting demands for balancing parenting and work, autonomy and commitment, time and money, remain largely unresolved (Gerson 2010), and this may have taken its toll on family stability. The effect of the gendered division of paid and care work on union instability, however, has been found to be contingent on socio-political context (Cooke 2006) and on partners' value orientations. Kalmijn et al. (2004), for instance, find that there is no destabilizing effect of wife's work for women with more egalitarian attitudes. Other studies also show that while a specialized division of labour might strengthen the ties between husband and wife, cohabitators are more likely to remain together under conditions of equality and power-sharing (Brines and Joyner 1999).

The liberalization of divorce laws –particularly the introduction of no-fault and unilateral divorce– has also been argued to contribute to rising divorce rates, by making divorce processes easier, faster and less conflictual (González and Viitanen 2009). Yet most studies find that changes in divorce legislation have short-term but not lasting effects on the rate of divorce (Kneip and Bauer 2009). Also, legal differences may have explained cross-country variation in divorce rates in the past, but contemporary divorce laws are rather homogeneous across Europe and hence unlikely to account for the wide variation in divorce rates across countries.

2.2.2. Risk factors of union disruption

Decades of research have resulted in a large body of literature on the risk factors for union disruption (for detailed reviews, see Amato 2010; Amato and James 2010; Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010; Härkönen 2013). A broad range of sociodemographic and economic factors related to various stages in the life course have been shown to influence the propensity to end a marital or non-marital union. They include partners' experiences during childhood, their partnership and childbearing histories, their educational and employment careers, the organization of domestic life, and the surrounding social context. Most sociodemographic and

economic predictors of divorce and separation tend to point in similar directions in all societies (Amato and James 2010; Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010), but the strength of the observed associations often varies from country to country and across time periods (Wagner and Weiß 2006) and causal relationships cannot be readily inferred from observed correlations. Also, the predictors of women and men leaving a conjugal union do not necessarily coincide or operate similarly (Kalmijn and Poortman 2006; Sayer et al. 2011).

One sociodemographic factor that has consistently been shown to influence the propensity to divorce is age at marriage or union formation (Bumpass et al. 1991; Lehrer 2008). Common explanations for this observed association between younger ages at marriage or union and higher risk of union disruption include lack of psychological maturity, potentially less realistic expectations, and a shorter search period for a suitable partner in the marriage market resulting in relatively poor matches (Oppenheimer 1988).

Second and higher order unions have also been found to be more likely to break up than first unions (Teachman 2008). Formerly partnered persons may face a more restricted pool of eligible mates than the first time around (Gelissen 2004) and ties to former partners – particularly among parents with children from a prior union – may produce greater complexity in subsequent unions. Also, those who have gone through a separation once may have a lower threshold of tolerance and therefore be more prone to separate in a subsequent union. Yet recent studies have found that, once selection on unobserved characteristics is taken into account, a previous partnership breakdown has no influence on the odds that a later cohabitation or marriage will dissolve (Poortman and Lyngstad 2007).

A similar selection argument has been used to explain why marriages preceded by cohabitation are more likely to end in divorce than marriages not preceded by cohabitation (Jose et al. 2010). One might expect the opposite, since cohabitation can serve as a screening period to evaluate the quality of the match with the prospective spouse and only good matches are likely to lead to marriages (Axinn and Thornton 1992). The prevailing explanation of this counterintuitive link is that those with the least commitment to the institution of marriage are, at the same time, the most prone to cohabit and to divorce (Lillard et al. 1995). Studies that have modelled jointly the choice of union type and the risk of dissolution confirm have generally confirmed that, once selectivity into marriage is taken into account, premarital cohabitation does not entail an increased risk of marital dissolution (Svarer 2004), and may

actually increase subsequent marital stability (Kulu and Boyle 2010), supporting the notion of “trial marriage.” Other studies have shown that the increased risk of divorce only applies to women who have cohabited and then married a different partner, and not to women who have cohabited with the man who became their husband (Teachman 2003). Furthermore, a comparative study of 16 European countries reported that the risk of divorce for former cohabitants is higher than for people who marry without cohabiting only in societies where premarital cohabitation is either rare or very widespread (Liefbroer and Dourlejin 2006).

The longer a conjugal union has lasted, the less likely it is to end (Castro-Martín and Bumpass 1989). Suggested reasons for the decline in the risk of separation with longer duration include selective attrition of less satisfied couples over time, a mutual learning process between the partners, and increasing assets and non-material investments in the relationship, such as common social networks and children. In effect, children constitute an important barrier to the dissolution of both marital and non-marital unions (Andersson 1997; Guzzo and Hayford 2014), although the stabilizing effect of having children depends on the country and the time period (Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010). The effect is strongest when the couple’s children are very young and weakens as they grow older (Waite and Lillard 1991; Steele et al. 2005). Lower risk of separation for couples with children may be explained partly by selection, because partners who have little trust in the continuity of their relationship are less likely to have children (Rijken and Thomson 2011; Creighton et al. 2014).

The impact of the socioeconomic positions of spouses on the risk of divorce or separation has also received considerable attention in the literature. Numerous studies have shown that stress caused by economic hardship or insecurity is a common source of conflict among both married and cohabiting couples (Hardie and Lucas 2010). Yet what is peculiar in this area of research is that men’s and women’s socioeconomic resources were initially assumed to have different influences on union stability. That assumption was built on the microeconomic approach to family life, which views husbands’ and wives’ roles as complementary (Becker et al. 1977; Becker 1993). From this perspective, men’s socioeconomic resources – such as education, employment, and earnings – are expected to stabilize marriages whereas wives’ resources are expected to destabilize them, because they decrease their dependence on husbands and lower the barriers to exiting unsatisfying relationships (the “independence hypothesis”). These predictions have found general support concerning men’s resources

(Jalovaara 2013), but findings are less consistent regarding wives' resources; there is also evidence that patterns have changed over time (de Graaf and Kalmijn 2006).

In many European countries, highly educated women had higher divorce rates in the past. But over time, the divorce rates of less educated women have risen at a faster pace, leading to a reversal in the educational gradient for divorce. These developments are in line with the hypothesis formulated by William J. Goode in the early sixties. He maintained that the positive relationship between socioeconomic status and divorce would gradually weaken, and eventually reverse, as the legal, normative, social and economic barriers to divorce fell away and divorce became accessible to people with fewer resources, who are often subject to greater economic and marital stress (Goode 1962). The framework of the second demographic transition suggests a similar pattern of change, with new family behaviours such as divorce emerging first among highly-educated innovators before spreading throughout the population. Empirical evidence is largely consistent with these theoretical patterns of change. Recent comparative studies have shown that educational differentials in divorce have declined over time (Härkönen and Dronkers 2006; Matysiak et al. 2011). There is also evidence that the initially positive female educational gradient for divorce has reversed to a negative one in an increasing number of societies, such as the Nordic countries (Hoem 1997; Jalovaara 2001; Lyngstad 2004) or the Netherlands (de Graaf and Kalmij 2006). The positive gradient has also disappeared in Italy (Salvini and Vignoli 2011) and Spain (Bernardi and Martínez-Pastor 2011). In the US, where lower education – for both men and women – has been associated with increased risk of divorce for a long time (Castro Martín and Bumpass 1989), inequalities by education have increased, with the highly educated leading the way to increased marital stability (Martin 2006).

A similar reversal might be underway in the effect of women's employment on union disruption. Earlier research assumed that wives' employment and earned income increased the risk of divorce, as it weakened the benefits from a gender-specialized household division of labour (Becker 1993) and improved opportunities for maintaining independent households (England and Farkas 1986). Although the specialization model seems anachronistic in contemporary Western societies, many empirical studies point to a positive link between wives' resources and union dissolution in many countries. More recent evidence, however, is mixed about the strength and even the direction of this link (see the literature review in Lyngstad and Jalovaara 2010; Härkönen 2013). On the basis of research from the last decade,

Paul Amato (2010) concludes that wives' employment can either undermine marital stability – for example, because of perceived unfairness in the household division of labour (Frisco and Williams 2003) – or reinforce marital stability because it improves economic security, and because emotional intimacy is enhanced when men's and women's roles are similar rather than different. These offsetting effects may explain many of the inconsistencies found in the research literature. An increasing number of recent studies have questioned the destabilizing effect of female employment. Some scholars have claimed that dissatisfaction with current relationships and anticipation of separation may actually lead to increases in women's employment, rather than increases in women's employment leading to separation (Özcan and Breen 2012). Other scholars have argued that wives' employment and earnings may help them to exit unhappy marriages rather than destabilizing all marriages (Sayer and Bianchi 2000; Schoen et al. 2002; Sayer et al. 2011). Several studies have shown that the effects of female economic activity are contingent on partners' gender role attitudes (Hohmann-Marriot 2006; Oláh and Gähler 2012) and on the legal status of the partnership, as moving away from income equality toward a male-dominant pattern lends stability to marriages while it tends to destabilize cohabiting unions (Kalmijn et al. 2007). Recent studies also indicate that social policies supporting gender equality and encouraging a more equitable household division of unpaid labour may reduce and even reverse the relative separation risk associated with female employment (Cooke et al. 2013).

The influence of patterns of homogamy and endogamy on union dissolution also figures prominently in the literature. Homogamy, that is, similarity in partners' characteristics, has usually been assumed to strengthen unions because of enhanced mutual understanding and the higher level of social support the couple may receive (Kalmijn 1998). Several studies have confirmed a higher risk of dissolution among couples who were heterogamous regarding race/ethnicity (Kalmijn et al. 2005; Dribe and Lundh 2012), education (Tzeng 1992), or religion (Lehrer and Chiswick 1993). Recent evidence suggests that changing assortative mating patterns over time do not contribute to rising union disruption (Frimmel et al. 2013), but it is possible that patterns differ substantially across national contexts.

2.2.3. Consequences of union disruption

A large body of research has been devoted to examining the consequences of union dissolution, in particular the emotional, economic and social impact of this family transition on adults' and children's life courses (Amato 2000, Tavares and Aassve 2013). The disruption

of conjugal unions is generally associated with a decline in the economic well-being of both former partners (McManus and DiPrete 2001), although the decline tends to be more substantial for women than for men (Andreß et al. 2006), and more marked for marital than for non-marital unions (Manting and Bouman 2006). National differences in the legal rights of cohabiting couples also have an important bearing on the financial consequences of relationship dissolution (de Regt et al., 2013). The breakup of a conjugal union remains one of the main life events that can lead to poverty (Callens and Croux 2009; Vandecasteele 2011). Nevertheless, welfare state arrangements that provide income support or that promote employment of single mothers may temper the negative economic consequences of family disruption (Uunk 2004).

One of the main concerns about the increase in union dissolution is its effect on the well-being of children (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Cherlin 1999). Most studies show that children with separated parents tend to do worse in a variety of emotional, behavioural, social, health, and educational areas (for reviews, see Amato 2000, 2010; Garriga and Häkonen 2009). Nevertheless, once socioeconomic factors are taken into account, the negative effect of parental separation on children's lives weakens considerably. In fact, there is no consensus on whether it is the experience of parental separation itself that causes difficulties in children's life course trajectories and detracts from their well-being (Bhrolchain 2001). Couples who break up differ from those who remain together in terms of socioeconomic resources, demographic characteristics and level of conflict. All of these family characteristics affect well-being, and children whose parents separate might have fared worse even without going through their parents' separation (Sanz-de-Galdeano and Vuri 2007). Several studies show that the negative effects of parental separation on children are contingent on the quality of family relationships prior to union dissolution (Dronkers 1999) and on the standard of living and quality of family relationships afterwards (Amato and James 2010). Some studies have also shown that changes associated with the dissolution of cohabiting relationships, such as changes in finances and parenting, are not as disruptive to children as the changes that occur following parental divorce (Wu et al. 2010). The broader societal context also matters: The effects of separation are weaker in countries where family support is stronger and where separation is more common (Kalmijn 2010).

A long-term effect of parental separation concerns the family life experiences of the children themselves (Liefbroer and Elzinga 2012). Children of separated parents have been shown to

enter into coresidential unions younger, to be more prone to cohabit, and more likely to separate themselves (Amato 1996; Wolfinger 2005; Hofferth and Goldscheider 2010). Several mechanisms may contribute to the so-called “intergenerational transmission” of union dissolution, including parents’ economic resources, childhood socialization, parental social control during adolescence, and attitudes towards divorce. Cross-national comparative research on the link between union dissolution of parents and their offspring has found large differences in the strength of the association across societies and has stressed the role of the surrounding norms and practices concerning marriage (Wagner and Weiß 2006; Dronkers and Härkönen 2008).

An increasingly influential approach focuses on the series of family transitions that children may experience before reaching adulthood rather than on parental separation as an isolated event. This approach views the number of family transitions, rather than parental separation itself, as the central variable that affects children’s well-being (Fomby and Cherlin 2007). In a time of increased diversity in individuals’ partnership trajectories, the question of how advantages or disadvantages cumulate over the life course, depending on the pathways individuals choose and the type and number of unions they form, is becoming increasingly relevant (Poortman and Lyngstad 2007).

2.2.4. Research gaps

A vast amount of research has accumulated over the past decades concerning the process, antecedents, and consequences of union disruption. Yet there are still large gaps in knowledge and challenges in gathering data. It is essential that the dissolution of non-marital unions be fully incorporated into analyses of family transitions. While earlier literature focused mainly on divorce, as more data become available, the number of studies that incorporate the break-up of cohabiting couples into analyses of family disruption is rapidly growing. This practice should be generalized. Yet cohabitation is a heterogeneous phenomenon and there is a need for more systematic cross-national research on the stability of various forms of cohabitation. We also need to know more about how differences in institutions, policies and culture influence the antecedents and the consequences of family disruption. Comparative analyses, facilitated by survey programmes such as the recent Gender and Generations Surveys, can help to address the challenging question of how the wider societal context affects family

stability and why the implications of family disruption on adults' and children's well-being vary across societies.

2.3. Single parenthood

With the decrease in marriages rates and the rise in non-marital births and divorce, the number of single-parent families has increased substantially in the last few decades. On average across European countries, nearly 15% of all children live with one parent only (OECD 2011). Women are over-represented amongst single parents –they represent 85% of sole-parent families in OECD countries–, since women live with children more often than men and they are more often granted physical custody.

2.3.1. Difficulties in mapping single parenthood in Europe

Cross-national differences in the definition and tracking of different family arrangements make it difficult to map single parenthood in Europe. Single parenthood can be measured in different ways in national data. For instance, there are differences across countries regarding the legal age at which a child ceases to be a dependent. In addition, censuses and sample surveys provide different results for the numbers and proportions of single parents. Figures may also depend on the unit of observation. One approach centres on children and measures the incidence of single parenthood as the proportion of all children who are in single-parent families. Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden) and English-speaking countries (the UK and Ireland) have similar proportions of children living with one parent only (more than one out of five). Continental Western European countries have relatively low shares, and Greece, Spain and Italy have the lowest proportion of sole-parent families (less than one out of ten). Another approach centres on families and measure the proportion of single-parent families among all families or alternatively, the proportion of single-parent families among all families with children. At the same time, we know that many more children will live in a single-parent family over their life course than will be observed in cross-sectional data. The risk of exposure to life in a single-parent family over the life cycle varies between children and across countries. High quality longitudinal surveys on children, which are currently lacking, are essential for international comparisons (Chapple 2009).

Lone parenthood comes either from never having partnered, having separated/divorced or being widowed. In most European countries, single parents are mainly divorced or separated; about 20% of single parents are widowed and another 20% are unmarried. The proportion of widows is larger in countries where single parents are older and there is a higher prevalence of unmarried single parents in countries where single parents are younger. Among the unmarried, a minor (although increasing) group of women are choosing lone motherhood through adoption –in countries where lone parents can adopt, for instance, in Spain or France –, “accidental” conception or in vitro fertilization (Bock 2000). Family formation is intentionally chosen and does not result from separation either at the child’s birth (lone mother births) or subsequently (separation and divorce) (Bock 2000). Alternatively, early births – often unintended and outside marriage– occur among disadvantaged social groups, especially in countries with “liberal” welfare regimes, like the UK and the US (McLanahan 2004, Schoen et al. 2009, Mokhtar and Platt 2009).

2.3.2. The risk of poverty among single -parent families

In all contexts, poverty is higher for single-parent families than for dual-earner families with children (Christopher et al. 2002; Whiteford and Adema 2007; Thomas and Sawhill 2005). However, single parenthood is not comparable in terms of poverty across all affluent societies. Sweden and Norway have almost the same proportion of children living in single-parent families as the UK, but child poverty rates in these countries are one-fifth of those in the UK. It is often argued that the high rate of single motherhood is the main cause of persistently high poverty rates in the US and the UK (McLanahan and Kelly 1999). But related research suggests that the risk of poverty among women would remain high even if there were fewer single mothers because of the lack of market/welfare state income (Meyers et al. 2001; Uunk 2004).

With only one potentially active parent, lone-parent households are more vulnerable, particularly if the household head is a female, due to women’s lower labour force attachment and wages. In most countries, more than 60% of sole parents are in work, this percentage being considerably lower in the UK or Ireland. In these contexts of low employment rates in sole-parent families, social transfers and income support account for a large share of those families’ resources, although they very often remain below the poverty line (OECD 2011). Despite increasing lone-parent employment rates, poverty rates remain high on average since

employment is no longer a guarantee for preventing poverty (Ponthieux, 2010). Lone mothers are often in low-paid jobs or part-time jobs with insufficient in-work benefits to reduce their poverty rates (Meyers, Gornick and Ross 2001).

The group of Nordic countries, and to a lesser extent France, maintain a high level of lone-parent employment rates, as well as relatively low poverty risks. Nordic systems put the emphasis on employment participation among all adults, regardless of partnership status, via greater access to childcare support, in-work benefits and income support (OECD 2011). Where public provision is less generous and intra-familial support is strong, like in the Mediterranean countries, it is generally accepted that members of the extended family help to raise the children of sole parents, without any remuneration. Intergenerational co-residence and family-provided support may partially offset the negative implications of singlehood or divorce via direct provision of economic, instrumental and emotional resources (direct interaction, increased monitoring, increased income) or by facilitating single mothers' employment and reducing maternal stress (Kalmijn 2010). However, they may also be a major source of social stratification and inequality amongst single mothers, as has been shown in other contexts (Raymo and Zhou 2012).

2.3.3. The effect of living in a single-parent family on children's well-being

Research on the impact of family structure (married, cohabiting, single parent households) on child well-being is predominately from English-speaking industrialized countries. This predominance is partly due to a higher prevalence of single parenthood and the consequent heightened concern with lone parenthood as a social and policy problem. Furthermore, the longitudinal datasets available in these countries allow researchers to assess more accurately the impact of single-parent families and to measure children's exposure to such family structures over their life course (Chapple 2009). Child well-being has different dimensions across a variety of outcomes and over the life cycle (Pollard and Lee 2003). Research has primarily focused on the effect of family on children's economic conditions and on their social, cognitive and emotional well-being (McLanahan and Sandefur 1994; Cherlin 1999; Amato 2000; Amato 2010).

The double burden of paid and unpaid work is heavier for single parents who have little leisure and are subject to more stress. Parental time and supervision may be more limited in

single-parent families (Schiller, Khmelkov and Wang 2002). Parental divorce often implies less contact with the non-custodial parent and consequently, a loss of the time, the skills and the networks of that parent (Amato 1998). Many non-custodial parents limit their contact with their children to entertainment, which implies insufficient involvement in the socialization of their children (Kelly 2007). A significant proportion of young people who do not live with their biological parents cohabit with so-called "social fathers" who can take on some of the functions of the non-residential or absent parent. However, bonds between social parents and children tend to be less robust than bonds between children and their biological parents, and they are often subject to tensions arising from the ambiguous role of these figures in the network of pre-existing intergenerational relationships (Cherlin and Furstenberg 1994; Sarkisian 2006) and tensions between step-siblings (Gennetian 2005). That said, once parenting roles are taken into account, the negative effect of family dissolution on children's lives and well-being becomes much weaker. Research demonstrates that the negative impact of single parenthood on children depends on the parents' standard of living and the quality of relationships after marital dissolution (Amato and James 2010). In fact, children in joint custody, which is increasingly common in Western societies, seem to be as well adjusted as their counterparts in two-parent families (Bauserman 2002; Jablonska and Lindberg 2007). Allen et al. (2011) reported that joint-custody compared to sole-custody settings provide incentives for non-resident fathers to pay child support and provide emotional, economic and social support because they can spend more time with their children and control how child-support payments are spent. This joint-custody effect may result from a selection effect since cooperative parents are more likely to opt for joint physical custody than other parents. But this positive effect of joint custody on father-child contact holds after taking selection into account (Gunnoe and Braver 2001).

Research has consistently shown that children from single-parent families have poorer outcomes than children who grow up in traditional families: they drop out of school more frequently, perform less well in school, become teen parents and engage in risky behaviour more often. However, the magnitude and sign of the effect depends on the variables involved, the method used, the sample selected and the country examined.

Adding father-child closeness as a control variable is important to an understanding of adolescent problem behaviours or psychological maladjustment since it is protective and beneficial to children regardless of residential status (King and Sobolewski 2006; Booth et al.

2010). Educational outcomes are adversely affected only in very precarious and disadvantaged single-parent households where non-resident parents do not monitor and supervise the activities performed by their children in school (Schiller et al. 2002; Marí-Klose and Marí-Klose 2010). Similarly, variations in adolescent psychological distress related to divorce are best explained by the quality of parent-adolescent relationships (Falci 2006). Moreover, when divorced or single mothers perform well in education and work and have access to high-quality subsidized childcare and equal earnings, their children experience successful transitions to adulthood (Mather 2010). Thus, the disadvantages of some families and the extent to which such families are marginalized in certain societies, not the family structure *per se*, are the factors that put children living with only one natural parent at risk of negative educational outcomes compared to their counterparts in two-parent families.

Some selection may therefore exist when unobserved variables which imply non-random selection into different types of family structure are not taken into consideration. Parents may have personalities or a disadvantaged economic position that make them more likely to divorce or to become a single parent. The child inherits or must deal with these traits, which may provoke poor well-being in the child's future. A significant number of studies do not control for all the individuals' socioeconomic resources, demographic characteristics and level of conflict that may lead to single parenthood, and therefore overestimate the effect of family structure on child well-being. All of these individual/family characteristics affect well-being, and children may have fared worse anyway, even without going through single parenthood or their parents' divorce.

Moreover, child well-being outcomes may be a cause of family structure rather than a result. For instance, research shows that couples with a child in poor health, especially those whose socioeconomic status is low, have a higher risk of divorce in the US (Fertig 2004). Thus the literature on the impact of lone parenthood on child well-being proves nothing about causality (Bhrolchain 2001; Moffitt 2005; Chappel 2009; Amato 2010). Non-standard higher-quality methods, such as models using repeated observations of the same child outcome, sibling comparisons, differential exposure to divorce laws, parental death or behavioural genetic approaches, show a smaller and less statistically significant effect of lone parenthood on child well-being than the most common research design based on retrospective datasets and simple multivariate regression techniques (Chapple 2009). But results are mixed and they do not always go in the same direction, so they do not provide strong evidence of a causal link

(Bhrolchain 2001; Francesconi et al. 2006). At the most, the size of the causal impact of growing up in a single-parent family is likely to be moderate to small (Amato and Keith 1991; Amato 2000, 2003; Chapple 2009). Furthermore, the strength of findings differs from country to country and across time. In fact, the average observed effect is likely to be higher in the US (and the UK) than in other affluent societies. The effects of single parenthood on children are weaker in countries where family support and social protection are more developed. The overall conclusion is that despite the literature suggesting that the effect of lone parenthood on child well-being is extensive and growing in sophistication, there is no consensus on the idea that it is the experience of single parenthood itself that causes difficulties in children's life courses and adversely affects their well-being (Chapple 2009).

Another issue is that a child may be exposed to different family structures for varying durations and at different periods during childhood. The interesting research question is whether there are decisive points in time during which a given family structure has a greater impact on child well-being. When changes in family structure occur early, the potential negative effect on a child's life may be greater (Steele, Sigle-Rushton and Kravdal 2009). Small children spend more time within the family than adolescents, who spend more time in school and with their peers. Younger children may also find it more difficult to understand changes in their families. They are more immature and less developed cognitively, and more dependent on their parent. However, the absence, decrease or loss of parental supervision, skills and/or networks may be more critical for young people in mid-adolescence, so changes in family structure occurring later in the child's life could be more harmful (Chase-Lansdale et al. 1995).

The literature on whether there are critical periods during which single parenthood has greater effects on child well-being than during others lacks a clear consensus. For instance, findings from the US and a handful of European countries on the effect of timing of parental divorce in relation to the age of the child are mixed (Amato 2001; Antecol and Bedard 2007). Hill, Yeung and Duncan (2001) show some evidence supporting the "earlier is worse" proposition for years of schooling for boys in single-mother families in the US, but none of the effects are statistically significant. For girls, the effects are positive and statistically significant in early childhood and negative and statistically significant in late childhood. The effect of family instability related to the age at which children experience it also depends largely on the outcome under consideration (Garriga and Häkonen 2009). Non-marital births for girls are

proved to be negative when their parents separated during early childhood while positive in mid- and late-childhood (Hill, Yeung and Duncan 2001). Once again, there are too many dimensions – countries, estimation techniques and outcomes – to draw clear conclusions (Chapple 2009). However, there is a broad consensus that longer experiences of single parenthood are associated with higher risk of child poverty (OECD 2011, Gennetian 2005).

2.3.4. Research gaps

Many countries have experienced a substantial rise in lone parenthood and a remarkable proportion of children will experience a single-parent family at some point in their life course. Single parenthood is a greater research and policy concern in countries with high rates of single parenthood, such as the US or the UK, but family structures are changing, and these changes have put single-parent families on the policy agenda in most European countries (OECD 2011). Apart from individual characteristics, the large variation in public support (welfare benefits) and marriage and labour market conditions (female wage levels, labour market attachment and job opportunities) are considered the main causes of poverty among single mothers across countries and over time (González 2005). However, the impact of lone parenthood on child well-being is difficult to establish and so is the extent to which different welfare systems influence that impact.

There are other differences across countries, not only regarding welfare regimes, which may account for differences between countries in outcomes for children in single-parent families and children in two-parent families (Burstrom et al. 2010). We need to know more about the extent to which selection into single parenthood varies across societies, due in part to factors like the other alternatives available to marriage, the legal and economic barriers to divorce or the social stigma attached to divorce (Chapple 2009; Kalmijn 2010). Another question that requires further research is to know whether the cost of living with only one parent differs systematically across groups of children within countries, in order to ensure that policies are targeted efficiently within each particular setting (Page and Stevens 2005). Single parents' children cannot be treated as a homogeneous group. Researchers should consider the specific position of children and adolescents in non-traditional families and recognize that this position may vary depending on their living arrangements (Jablonska and Lindberg 2007).

2.4. Increasing numbers of step families

Increases in family dissolution and reconstitution have led to an increase in the number of stepfamilies across Europe (Prskawetz et al. 2003). A stepfamily is commonly defined as a co-residing household unit of adults and children, where at least one child in the household stems from a prior partnership (see e.g. Allan, Crow, & Hawker, 2011; Martin & Le Bourdais, 2008; Teachman & Tedrow, 2008b). While literature from the US often focuses only on married couples, most European research and recent US research on this topic includes both marital and non-marital unions (Bumpass, Raley, & Sweet, 1995; Cherlin, 1999; Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Mignot, 2008). Research on stepfamilies has frequently been criticized for merely focusing on the household context, ignoring the fact that that stepfamily “constellations” may develop from non-residential relationships (Pryor, 2008; Stewart, 2007; Teachman & Tedrow, 2008a). More extensive definitions of stepfamilies that include relationships outside of the household, have, however, not yet been applied much in empirical studies.

Like lone or cohabiting parenthood, stepfamilies are not a “new” type of living arrangement. What makes investigations of the stepfamily a distinct new area of research is the fact that trajectories into this family form have changed radically over time. Historically, widowhood was the most common path into a stepfamily (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1994; Juby, Marcil-Gratton, & Le Bourdais, 2006). Today, it is single parenthood and separation or divorce after the birth of a child are the main pathways. Another difference with the past is that stepfather families –defined as families where stepfathers co-reside with the children of a new partner– are now much more common than stepmother families (Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2000). Since children usually remain with their mothers after divorce or separation, most stepfamilies revolve around the mother. From the children’s perspective, the typical experience “is to have a stepfather residing in their household” (Robertson, 2008). In the past, when maternal mortality rates were high, stepfamilies mostly revolved around the father, i.e. the stepmother entered the household. However, if non-coresident families are taken into account, stepfamilies revolve around the fathers, who are more likely to repartner.

Due to the increase in separation and divorce rates, it may be expected that the proportion of stepfamilies has increased in recent decades all over Europe. However, little recent comparative data is available on this topic, partly because household statistics do not

commonly identify stepfamilies (Juby & Bourdais, 1998; Martin, 2008; Mignot, 2008). Most of our information on stepfamilies comes from social science surveys, like the Family and Fertility Surveys and the Generations and Gender Survey. These studies have shown that there is substantial variation in the share of stepfamilies across Europe. Kreyenfeld and Martin (2011: 138) examine the living arrangements of respondents who have co-residential children below age 19. They find that stepfamilies represent 9% of families in France, 18% in East Germany and 13% in West Germany. In general, stepfamilies are larger than nuclear families, an observation usually explained by couples' tendency to cement a new relationship with a common child (Fürnkranz-Prskawetz, Vikat, Philipov, & Engelhardt, 2003; Henz, 2002; Henz & Thomson, 2005; Holland & Thomson, 2011). However, cross-national research reveals country differences in the desire to have further children in stepfamilies (Thomson, 2004). Likewise, it has been shown that the socioeconomic composition of stepfamilies varies by country. In France and the US, adults in stepfamily households have been found to be less educated and more likely to be unemployed than adults living in nuclear families (Mignot, 2008) while they do not differ much in their socioeconomic characteristics in Germany and Russia (Kreyenfeld & Martin, 2011).

Some research compares the stability of stepfamilies and nuclear families. Results show that stepfamilies are subject to much higher risks of separation and divorce than nuclear families; this is commonly attributed to the complexity of stepfamilies (Henz & Thomson, 2005; Martin, Le Bourdais, & Lapierre-Adamcyk, 2011; Saint-Jacques et al., 2011). Children in stepfamilies may be exposed to several union transitions of their biological parents before reaching adulthood, an aspect of stepfamilies that has been addressed in studies dealing with child outcomes and well-being (Bronte-Tinkew, Horowitz, & Scott, 2009; Cherlin, 1999; Thomson, Hanson, & McLanahan, 1994; Thomson & McLanahan, 2012).

Research gaps

This emerging family form has not been thoroughly researched. Relations between family members in different households and their obligations to one another often lack clear legal underpinnings, which makes negotiations between family members a challenge. Future research needs to provide estimates of the prevalence and characteristics of stepfamilies and focus on the ways in which they are formed and dissolved, how they are characterized by members and non-members, and how they carry on negotiations.

3. Diverging from the “new” standard

Much less research has been devoted to other family forms that are emerging from this new standard, such as LAT relationships, same-sex families and people with multiple residences. While these "new" family forms are now recognized more openly, the data available are fragmentary, so information is very incomplete.

3.1. “Living Apart Together” (LAT) relationships

With the increase in union separation, repartnering at advanced ages has become more and more common (de Jong Gierveld, 2002; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008), and has resulted in an increase in LAT relationships. “Living Apart Together” relationships or “non-residential partnerships” are becoming more and more popular and hence more “visible” in Western countries, both to researchers and the public in general (Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Levin, 2004).

3.1.1. LAT relationships are on the rise in Europe

Throughout Europe, differences are huge regarding the prevalence of LAT relationships, ranging from 16 % of individuals aged 18-80 in Austria to 1 % in Estonia (Table 4). As yet, very few data give an insight into trends in the number of LAT-relationship but it is assumed that the prevalence of this type of relationship is on the rise. Several reasons are given for this trend. First, the increase in educational attainment for both men and women has caused an important shift in relationship types. With women reaching higher levels of education and higher earnings potential, women’s labour force participation has changed and the dual-career couple has become common. Higher degrees of specialization and higher levels of education are required from job applicants, which makes it more difficult to find good job matches in the same location for both partners (Costa & Kahn, 2000). With the emergence of dual-career couples, it is no longer assumed that the woman’s job will be put on hold. In this case, LAT relationships can forge a compromise between a job and a relationship with someone who lives and works elsewhere (Castro-Martin, Dominguez-Folgueras, & Martin-Castria, 2008; Cooney & Dunne, 2001; Cullen, 2007; de Jong Gierveld, 2002; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Gross, 1980; Levin, 2004; Régnier-Loilier, Beaujouan, & Villeneuve-Gokalp, 2009).

Another structural factor is improvements in transportation and IT communications (Levin, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999) that increase the liveability of LAT-relationships. These both

increase the probability of falling in love with someone who lives far away, and make it easier to maintain a relationship over a long distance (Cullen, 2007; Kim, 2001; Levin, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999).

Finally, increased emphasis on individualism and self-fulfilment heighten the incidence of LAT relationships. As seen previously, individuals have more opportunities to create their own life course and pursue their own goals without the approval of the extended family. With the individual life course becoming increasingly complex or even “messy,” as Haskey and Lewis (2006) put it, individuals have more choice about the timing and ordering of education, work and family roles and diversifying relationships; LAT is one available option (Cooney & Dunne, 2001; Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Levin & Trost, 1999).

3.1.2. Defining LAT relationships

In the literature, little agreement exists in how to define a Living Apart Together relationship. A first, broad definition is found in Levin (2004) who defines a LAT relationship as “*a couple that does not share a home. Each of the two partners lives in his or her own home, possibly with other people. They define themselves as a couple and they perceive that their close surrounding personal network does so as well.*” These relationships, which may involve same-sex or opposite-sex partners, are characterized by social and emotional bonds that are potentially sexual and that Levin (2004) defines as “marriage-like” relationships (Bawin-Legros & Gauthier, 2001; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Haskey, 2005).

De Jong Gierveld and Latten (de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008) use a broad definition, which includes young people still living with their parents, young people who already live on their own and have partners that live elsewhere, as well as a phenomenon that is more recent, namely non-cohabiting older men and women that are separated or widowed and have partners with whom they do not share a household. LAT relationships among young people are generally considered less stable and mostly seen as a transitory phase or a prelude to marriage or non-married cohabitation. Older partners have deliberately chosen not to share households and do not intend (or hope) to live together in the near future. Not all scholars agree with this view. For example, Haskey (2005) limits the definition to older people and sees LAT relationships as “*monogamous in nature and an arrangement that is more than a temporary, fleeting or casual relationship.*” Roseneil (2006) and Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson and

Borell (2002) also distinguish between non-residential relationships that are “steady” or “regular” and relationships that are more transitory and lead to cohabitation, within or outside marriage.

Age is one issue that complicates the definition of LAT. Another issue is the question of stability, or at least the perceived stability of the LAT. On the basis of one of the largest qualitative studies on LAT relationships, Levin (2004) distinguishes between two groups with different attitudes towards their non-residential relationships: those who would like to live together but have decided not to for reasons that are external to the relationship (the “regretfully” apart) and those who would not want to live together even if they could (the “gladly” apart) (Levin, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999; Roseneil, 2006).

The “regretfully” apart are in a LAT relationship for reasons that are external to the relationship. This group can be further divided into two subgroups depending on the reason why the couple is not able to live together, either due to a feeling of responsibility for others or due to work or study in another location (Levin, 2004; Levin & Trost, 1999). “Regretfully” apart couples do not want to choose between a relationship and an interesting job or studies in another location. For them, a non-residential relationship is a way of having a partner and feelings of responsibility for a significant other at the same time as having an interesting job or doing interesting studies.

Levin discerns three circumstances in which people are “gladly” apart: people with previous experience of a broken relationship who do not want to repeat the same mistakes; older couples who are retired; couples that have previously cohabited and decided to move apart while maintaining the relationship (Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006).

In addition to the “regretfully” and “gladly” apart, Roseneil (2006) distinguishes a third category of people in a LAT relationship in her research, namely the “undecidedly” apart. Both partners are emotionally and sexually attached to one another, but this does not create the need to move in together.

3.1.3. Making the transition to a LAT relationship?

The issue of including age or stability in the definition of LAT shows that heterogeneity among LAT relationships is considerable. Both dimensions refer to the form of the LAT and its meaning as defined by the LAT-partners. A different insight is given by selection into a LAT-relationship. In the literature, five domains have been identified as possible explanations of the diversity in entry into a LAT relationship.

First, social-demographics are most often cited as factors differentiating people in a LAT relationship from people in other forms of relationships. Women seem to prefer LAT relationships more than men, and women are most likely to advocate this form of relationship within the couple (de Jong Gierveld, 2002; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Ghazanfareon Karlsson & Borell, 2005).

Researchers do not agree on the relationship between age and LAT relationships. Some authors find older people more inclined to be in a LAT relationship (de Graaf & Loozen, 2004; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Haskey, 2005), while other authors perceive considerably more LAT relationships among young adults (Haskey & Lewis, 2006; Milan & Peters, 2003; Régnier-Loilier et al., 2009; Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, & Mays, 2009). An explanation for this lack of agreement is linked to the definitional issues mentioned earlier. If the broader definition of LAT relationships is used, it is evident that young people are overrepresented. However, when the focus is only on non-residential relationships that are more committed or regular, as opposed to casual or transitory, we find this form of relationship more often among older men and women.

Other socio-demographic factors that are positively linked to LAT relationships are having children (de Graaf & Loozen, 2004; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008), living in an urban area (de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Strohm et al., 2009) and having divorced parents (Strohm et al., 2009).

Second, work status and economic factors matter. Milan and Peters (2003) find that having a low income is positively related with being in a LAT relationship. Since young adults in non-cohabiting relationships who live with their parents and are perhaps still studying are included in the broader definition of LAT relationships, it seems logical that their overrepresentation

results in overrepresentation of lower incomes. The level of education and of work status also seems to be related to being in a LAT relationship. While having reached a higher level of education favours LAT relationships, the association between work and being in a LAT relationship is less straightforward. Haskey and Lewis (2006) and Roseneil (2006) find that men and women in a LAT relationship tend to have higher status occupations, such as managerial functions, and a higher probability of being in a dual-career couple (Roseneil, 2006). Other researchers present results that contradict their findings (Castro-Martin et al., 2008; Régnier-Loilier et al., 2009). But these researchers have adopted the more all-embracing definition of LAT relationships including the large group of young adults at the start of their careers who have a high risk of unemployment or instable jobs.

Third, cultural factors are positively related to preferring a LAT relationship: having a more modern attitude towards partnership (de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008; Strohm et al., 2009), attending church less frequently (de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008), having a more individualistic attitude and being more work-oriented (Strohm et al., 2009). Researchers have also found widows, widowers and divorcees to favour LAT relationships. De Graaf and Loozen (2004) see this as an expression of an ideal of independency among the older, widowed and divorced population and a decline in the importance they attach to being in a relationship (de Graaf & Loozen, 2004; de Jong Gierveld & Latten, 2008).

Fourth, the occurrence of certain events can trigger the start of a LAT relationship or transform a cohabitating relationship into a LAT relationship. For example, married or unmarried couples with jobs or studies in a different location than their partner often transform their existing relationship (temporarily) into a LAT relationship (Cullen, 2007; Kim, 2001; Levin, 2004). For (older) women, de Jong Gierveld (2002) sees this as an expression of these women “moving away from a male-dominated first marriage towards a power-sharing type of repartnering.” Women who have already experienced a divorce or the death of their partner are financially and emotionally able to live by themselves. Due to their increased self-confidence, they may not feel the need to remarry (de Jong Gierveld, 2002).

Finally, social benefits or property are factors that may influence the decision to start a LAT relationship. If one of the partners has social benefits, the couple may not want to risk losing them through cohabitation and therefore may choose a LAT relationship. Older retired couples may choose to live apart because they do not want to give up their own homes; they

may have many memories attached to their homes and keeping them makes contact with children and grandchildren easier (Ghazanfaraeeon Karlsson & Borell, 2002; Levin, 2004). Protecting the inheritance of one's children is another motive for not living together (de Jong Gierveld, 2002).

3.1.4. Research gaps

There is little comparative research dealing with LAT relationships in Europe. Thus, one needs to gain insight into the different types of LAT relationships and their spread across cohorts in Europe. New international comparative data such as GGS will allow studying the characteristics and individual determinants of LAT couples throughout Europe. Particular emphasis should be given to economic and sociodemographic conditions and to the value systems of both men and women, which affect the choice of a LAT relationship. Another question is what will become of LAT. The longitudinal design of GGS data will enable use to evaluate whether LAT is a short or long-lasting stage in the life course. Moreover, an investigation of care relations of people in LAT relationships with their family networks needs to be implemented, in comparison with people in other types of relationships. This question is particularly topical in a context of ageing societies and the need to define relevant social policies.

3.2. Same-sex partnerships, sexual orientation and the family

Same-sex families are defined by the presence of two or more people who share a same-sex orientation or by the presence of at least one lesbian or gay adult rearing a child (Allen and Demo 1995). In spite of higher social visibility and legal recognition, these families are often absent from social scientific research and existing research on same-sex partnerships has mainly focused on legal questions. Enumerating same-sex couples is a challenge for research (Festy, 2007); best-guess estimates suggest they represent between 0.5 and 1.2% of total unions in European countries in the first decade of the 21st century. The proportion of same-sex couples registered or married each year is easier to measure, and higher, e.g. 2.5% of marriages in Spain in 2011 were same-sex.

3.2.1. Legal recognition of same-sex couples

The opening up of marriage and other legal arrangements to two persons of the same sex in a growing number of countries is changing the visibility of homosexuality, even if there is no real acceptance of the sexual diversity of the individual per se and equality is far from being reached (Rydström 2011). While discrimination on sexual grounds is generally prohibited by law, homosexuals are still stigmatized in society (Baiocco et al. 2012; Digoix 2013a).

With regard to the decriminalization of homosexuality and to the opening up of marriage and parental status to same-sex couples, European countries are not at the same level (Waldijk 2005, 2013). The Nordic countries have pioneered the simultaneous adoption of laws in this area (Digoix 2013b) while the timing of legalization varies among Southern European countries. Studies have rarely been conducted in a comparative perspective but in most cases, they have shown that equal citizenship has been put forward as a political means to reach equality, from the first case in Denmark in 1989 to the most recent case in France in 2013 (Albæk 1988; Bauer 2006; Calvo 2010; Paternotte 2011).

Up until recently, homosexual couples diversified their types of unions, finding a different balance between sexual and social relations and living arrangements because they were not allowed to marry like heterosexual couples (Schiltz 1998). They now have the choice of marriage which brings a legal visibility and support they did not have in the other configurations invented previously (Pichardo Galán 2011). Yet, marriage has become more symbolic, especially since countries have allowed same sex couples to register civil contracts or other legal forms of union with economic and practical rights granted previously by marriage alone. However, the symbolic importance of marriage has proven to be essential to the people concerned, who regret the lack of ritual or create new ones to substitute for the ritual of marriage (Rault, 2009), and who complain about symbolic inequality with respect to heterosexuals. In any case, the fact that nearly all the countries that pioneered a different legal framework (registered partnership or private contract) have opened marriage to same-sex couples or are in the process of doing so (Digoix 2006; Pichardo Galán 2009, 2011) proves that marriage remains the target for reaching equality.

In countries where family formation is no longer mainly based on marriage, the focus on parenthood is more paramount. Whereas the opening up of marriage has drawn homosexual

couples towards the conjugal norm, homosexual parenthood provides homosexuals with a means to assert their difference that some perceive to have disappeared with the opening up of marriage.

From a policy point of view, laws usually address the establishment of filiation within marriage (Herbrand 2012; Mécary 2012; Segalen 2012). New laws opening up marriage and partnership call for a new perspective on heterosexual parenthood, especially in the light of new forms of parenthood (multiparenting, surrogacy, etc.). In this domain, in most countries, the law has lagged behind behaviour, and homosexuals have found solutions for procreation that are not covered by law, such as multiparenting, surrogacy, etc. International differences should help reveal the level of correlation between the law, behaviour and well-being (Sou 2001; Rannveig and Þorvaldur 2003, Descoutures 2010; Fine 2012).

3.2.2. Demographic characteristics of same-sex couples

Social scientists' interest in the demographics of same-sex couples has been spurred by the development of legal recognition in Europe since the end of the 1980s. Research has been based mostly on time series of the various forms of recognition (marriage, registered partnership, etc.) in countries where gays and lesbians have benefited from this kind of legal innovation. Researchers have tried to determine the impact of legal recognition on the prevalence of same-sex couples (Festy 2006). The conclusions have been somewhat surprising: no correlation appears between the ratio of marriages and/or registered partnerships to total population and the number of legal consequences attached to being married or registered. Going one step further, it has been suggested that recognition is most frequent in countries where conditions for separation of same-sex couples are the least stringent (Festy 2006; Banens 2012). Nevertheless, these conclusions remain tentative since the number of countries covered was small, the period of observation too short and data on separation are available in only a few countries.

More generally, data on same-sex marriage and other forms of registration have been poor so far, especially comparative international data. Little is known about the demographic characteristics of partners (except for gender), and still less on socioeconomic characteristics. Some evidence exists, however, on the specificities of matching of same-sex couples, basically showing higher levels of social heterogamy (Andersson et al. 2006; Schwartz and

Graf 2009) and also larger age gaps between partners. Efforts should be made to identify “populations at risk” in order to measure the frequency of registration more accurately. No attempts have been made so far to relate the number of marriages/registered partnerships to a denominator other than total population, a heterogeneous denominator that includes persons of any age and any sexual orientation. It would be a decisive leap forward if the number of marriages/registered same-sex couples were compared to the number of unmarried/unregistered same-sex partnerships.

The challenge is to combine flow statistics (marriages/registrations) that are routinely produced from administrative records like vital statistics, with statistics on stocks (the number of same-sex couples), obtained from censuses, large surveys or population registers. Up to now, such data have been used mainly in the US since the 1990 decennial census, and in other English-speaking non-European countries like Australia, Canada and New Zealand. In Europe, estimates have been made here and there (e.g. France, Germany, the Netherlands), but information has shortcomings that make analysis complicated and comparisons over time and/or space difficult (Turcotte et al. 2003; Festy 2007; Buisson and Lapinte 2013; Cortina and Cabré 2010). There are two main obstacles in census data: errors in the declaration of gender and under-declaration of couple relationships. Errors in the declaration of gender may have a large effect on identification of same-sex couples. In fact, errors are not due to same-sex partners but rather different-sex partners (Toulemon, 2005). The numbers of the two categories of couples are very different, with a ratio of about 1 to 100; infrequent errors among different-sex couples (when filling out or recording the information from forms) create “false” same-sex couples that may result in massive overestimation of the number of same-sex couples (Black et al. 2000, 2007; Gates 2009; O’Connell and Lofquist 2009; O’Connell and Feliz 2011). On the other hand, some same-sex couples sometimes fail to declare themselves as such and prefer to be considered “friends” or “relatives” (Digoix et al. 2004; Steenhof and Harmsen 2004).

Gay and lesbian households can be characterized by the presence or absence of children. Children in these households have been counted in a few countries, but same-sex couples’ childbearing strategies are also relevant issues and are difficult to analyse and clearly depend on legal contexts (Krivickas and Lofquist 2011; Goldani and Esteve 2013). Extensive studies of children’s performances in various fields have been carried out only in the US. It is not clear that children differ depending on the sexual orientation of the couple that raises them. In

2005, a meta analysis by the American Psychological Association (2005) asserted, “Not a single study has found children of lesbian or gay parents to be disadvantaged.” This finding has been challenged recently as being based on unreliable studies using small and distorted samples (Vecho and Schneider 2005, Marks 2012). Opposite conclusions have been reached by Mark Regnerus (2012a, 2012b), but again from small or ill-defined samples. There are few indisputable studies. On the basis of the 2000 US census, Michael Rosenfeld (2010) shows that children of same-sex couples are at a disadvantage in progress in school only when compared to children of heterosexual married couples, mostly due to the higher socioeconomic status associated to marriage. Daniel Potter (2012) concludes similarly that the apparent disadvantages of these children do not reflect the same-sex family structure, but rather the disruptions, instability and changes inherent to the formation of this non-traditional family type. Finally, studies comparing children of same-sex couples to those raised by heterosexual couples finds few differences. Similar studies could be envisaged in Europe.

3.2.3. Research gaps

The impact of the various forms of recognition of same-sex couples in different countries, the steps that have been taken and how they affect people’s lives, still need to be analysed. For this first challenge, three main topics need to be addressed: timing and modernization of family policies through the inclusion of same sex families in the law, the effect of legal changes on family formation, and their influence on homophobia and on individual well-being. The process of legislative change is ongoing and has reached different levels in terms of status recognition (marriage, partnership, private contracts) and its associated rights in the countries studied. Homosexual families must address the challenge of either acting to change the prevailing norms or adapting to their particularities, with new family forms which represent the diversity of our society. The way in which laws interact with behaviour also needs to be analysed. Part of the research should be linked to different legal contexts, ranging from Iceland, where same-sex couples enjoy full legal rights, to Italy, where they have none. How do homosexuals respond to these different frameworks?

A second challenge is to estimate the numbers of same-sex couples and their characteristics, since this requires overcoming several difficulties, as discussed above. When using data on “stocks” of couples in European countries, based on censuses or large surveys, measurement errors must be taken into account. Population registers are less likely to be affected by such

biases, but the Dutch example reveals other types of difficulties, since relationships between unmarried partners remain undocumented by administrative sources. These difficulties are compounded in international comparisons.

3.3. People with more than one home

Except for the homeless, people normally have one home, one place of residence. However, with new transitions occurring in the life course, increasing numbers of people have more than one “usual” residence. This concerns, for example, people in the process of entering or leaving a union, children whose parents are separated, young adults who live on their own while returning regularly to their parental home, retired couples who live in two homes. The definition of their place of residence is far from obvious and defining the place of residence of each individual raises several issues: defining the main residence of people who have more than one usual residence, and counting them once and once only; collecting accurate data about “commuters between households,” especially on their family situations in each of their homes; revisiting routine basic statistics in order to take people with more than one home into account.

3.3.1. Defining the main residence

The seminal paper by Saraceno (1994) describes the situation of people who commute from home to work and back, not daily but on a weekly, monthly or yearly basis, that is, between two homes or two households. She calls these people “commuters between households” and explains how their situation is a challenge for the sociology of the family because describing the complex family network of these commuters between households implies going beyond the usual definition of a family as a group sharing the same house.

A first challenge concerns the accuracy of population counts. The UNECE-Eurostat *Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing* proposed several definitions of the “place of usual residence [which] is the geographic place where the enumerated person usually resides” (UNECE 2006: 35):

- a) The place where he/she actually is at the time of the census; or
- b) His/her legal residence; or
- c) His/her residence for voting or other administrative purposes.

Only those who have been living in their place of usual residence for at least 12 months, or intend to do so, and for whom the dwelling is the place “at which he/she spends most of his/her daily night-rest” are to be counted. Eight special cases are then enumerated, but the risk of omission or double counting is nevertheless high for these people with two homes. Double counting is most likely for two groups: children whose parents are separated (both parents may wish to include their children as members of their household, even if they do not spend most nights in the dwelling); students who may be included in the census in their place of residence during the week, and at the same time be registered by their parents in their “family home” where they return each week end (Toulemon 2010). The risk of double counting increases when the census is based on a series of annual surveys, like in France: in surveys it is unlikely that both dwellings will be covered during the same year (Toulemon 2012). Some countries that base their census on a population register (Ralphs and Tutton 2011) use a personal identification number, such as the social security number in the Swiss census, or other means in order to ensure that no individual is registered twice, which can be the case when local registers are not centralized. This prevents double counting.

When register or other administrative data are used for the census, different definitions of resident population may be used, in addition to the “population present” on the night of the census and the “population at main residence” (Smith et al. 2004). After a specific effort in 2001 to collect census forms in all usual residences (Renaud 2007), the Swiss federal statistical office simplified the forms and is now counting people with more than one home based on register data, where people are also included in their secondary residence (a residence where they live for a period of at least three consecutive months or three months spread over the same year): in 2010, 1.7% of inhabitants were counted as having such a “secondary residence” (Swiss Federal Statistical Office 2011). National statistics are based on totals where inhabitants are counted only once, at their main residence.

3.3.2. Describing the housing and family situations of people with more than one home

In order to collect accurate data about “commuters between households,” especially on their family situation in each of their homes, it is necessary to add specific questions about a possible “second usual residence.” This was done in many surveys during the 2000s in Italy (Fraboni 2006), France (Toulemon and Pennec 2010) and Australia (Smyth and Parkinson 2003). In France, 7% of the respondents declare that they have a second usual residence and,

due to likely double counting of these people, the actual proportion is 4% in 2004, about the same level as the 3% found in Italy.

The number of children with two homes is probably increasing, due to the greater frequency of shared physical custody after parental separation (Bjarnason & Arnarsson 2011, Sodermans et al. 2013). In Sweden the proportion of two-home children has dramatically increased, from 1% of children with separated parents in 1985 to 28% in 2007 (Lundström 2009), but this is not the case in all countries. For instance in France, there are large variations from one survey to the next, but no time trends appear over the 2000s, the proportion remaining stable at 10% (Toulemon and Denoyelle 2012).

One way to take these situations into account is to consider them explicitly. This is often done for children when their separated parents share custody, so that the children split their time between paternal and maternal homes. The definition of families with children is thus becoming more complex, especially since family members may not share the same idea of who is living “in the family” (Lapierre-Adamcyk et al. 2009). In Norway, children of separated parents more often have two homes when their mother is highly educated and their father has a high income (Kitterød and Lyngstad 2012); some separated fathers have contact with their children only during the day-time hours, and their children do not sleep in their homes (Smyth and, Parkinson 2003). Multiple residence lasts the longest for children, as it is often the consequence of a court decision (Toulemon and Pennec 2009), but many family situations may be related to multiple residence: Partially co-resident couples, people around retirement age who spend more and more time in a second home, elderly people who spend some months in a retirement home and the rest of the year in their home or with relatives, etc.

3.3.3. Research gaps

Explicitly considering these situations raises a major challenge for research and social statistics. In fact, most of the indicators used in official statistics can be biased by the occurrence of two-home situations. For instance, how can one-person households be counted if some of these households are sometimes occupied by one person, sometimes by more than one (a permanent resident and a “usual” resident who also lives elsewhere), and if others are sometimes unoccupied, and sometimes occupied by a “usual” resident who also lives elsewhere (Toulemon and Pennec 2011)? The same question can be asked for one-parent

families (the parent may live part of the time in a couple; the children may sometimes live elsewhere) and most family situations. Economic indices such as standard of living and consumption units, which are used to define the rate of poverty and other indices of inequality, may also be sensitive to whether family members are counted or not as “sharing the same budget” (Toulemon and Denoyelle 2012).

Considering multiple residences is thus a new challenge for family sociologists and for demographers as well as for government statisticians. One needs to examine how people who have more than one “usual residence” are identified and counted in censuses and surveys. One also needs to look at the prevalence of these types of households in Europe and at family transitions in these households.

Conclusion

In nearly all European countries, family forms have become more varied and individual and family life courses increasingly diverse. The sequence of events and the pace at which they occur have become less standardized than before. Moreover, some events are becoming increasingly frequent in the “standard” life course: more people dissolve their unions, experience single parenthood, re-partner or enter stepfamilies. Finally, some other family forms, now recognised more openly, have been emerging from this new standard. These “new” family forms are Living-Apart-Together relationships, same-sex families and people with multiple residences. All these changes have been part of the de-standardization and de-institutionalization of family forms.

For all these changes, three main drivers have been identified: changes in norms, changes in economic context and changes in legislative context. Cultural factors have been the main driver. Increasing individualization and the rejection of traditional family values have made it possible for individuals to create their own life course and pursue their own goals. The changing gender system, women's increasing economic independence and their changing role in society thanks to their higher level of education have also led to changes in the family model. The economic context also matters. Growing economic insecurity, changes in job standards have been major causes of the transformation of the life course. Institutional

variations have also contributed to family changes, in particular countries' legislation that both accompanies and contributes to changes.

Several challenges for research have been underlined in this article. The first challenge concerns data collection. New and rare family types have not yet been studied much, partly because these new types are not easy to identify. They are not always well captured by existing data sources because these types of families are rare, but also due to lack of comparative definition or because of inconsistencies with the definition of the household usually used in socio-demographic surveys. The development of new datasets will help to fill this gap.

Second, the search for the determinants and causes of changes in family structure is high on the research agenda. This requires the development of causality analysis. In particular, the specific impact of some types of family status on risk of poverty or well-being needs to be analysed. For such analyses, proper analytical designs, that control for selectivity and endogeneity bias has to be developed.

Third, since large cross-national differences in family-life trajectories exist, comparative analyses should be developed. We need to know more about how differences in institutions, policies and culture influence the antecedents and the consequences of different family forms. We need to analyse more deeply the extent to which differences in welfare systems explain the impact of some types of family status on well-being. This is a key issue in the context of the current economic crisis.

Fourth, heterogeneity within a single situation needs to be analysed more deeply. Since most research does not consider the family and households to be a dynamic entity, future research should recognize the dynamic character of families and households and aim at understanding these dynamics and transitions within traditional and new types of family forms.

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Appendix

Table 1: Percentage of first births that occurred to cohabiting women in 11 European countries

Country	1985-1994	1995-2004
Austria	23%	38%
Bulgaria	10%	22%
France	31%	46%
W. Germany	cohorts 1971-73: 29%	
E. Germany	cohorts 1971-73: 46%	
Hungary	7%	18%
Italy	4%	9%
Norway	42%	54%
Netherlands	8%	26%
Romania	8%	12%
UK	15%	29%

Source: Brienna Perelli-Harris et al. (2012: 173).

Table 2: Transition to adulthood occurs later for younger cohorts (Median ages of women per birth cohorts)

	Age at leaving parental home			Age at entry into a first union			Age at first childbirth		
	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979
Austria	21.4	20.5	20.5	21.8	21.8	22.5	25.5	24.5	27.8
Belgium	20.8	21.6	21.9	21.3	22.4	23.4	25.3	26.2	28.4
Switzerland	21.8	20.9	22.8	22.5	22.7	22.8	27.4	29.1	29.2
Germany	20.3	20.8	20.6	21.4	22.5	23	24.6	27.9	30.1
Denmark	18.9	18.5	19.5	20.8	20.3	21.6	25.7	27.3	28.3
Estonia	19.7	19.3	20.1	21.8	20.9	22.1	23.1	22.4	26
Spain	23.3	23.4	25.8	23.8	24.3	27.1	25.4	27.6	31.7
Finland	19.7	19.2	19.2	22	21.5	21	25.4	28.2	29.9
France	20	20.1	19.9	21.4	21.7	21.5	24.3	26.7	28
United Kingdom	19.8	19.5	19.5	21.4	22.3	22.7	26.4	27.8	28.7
Hungary	21.9	20.8	21.3	20.7	20.6	20.8	23.1	22.6	23.7
Ireland	21.2	21	21.3	24.2	25.1	26.2	26.1	27.2	29.3
Italy	22.1	24	26.9	22.8	25.1	27.9	25.3	28.6	31.7
Netherlands	20.3	20.1	20.1	22.1	21.8	22.3	26.6	29.4	29.9
Norway	18.8	19	19.2	21.9	21.4	22.8	25	26.3	28.3
Poland	22.3	21.7	23.9	21.8	21.9	23	22.8	23.3	25
Portugal	21.8	22.5	23.8	21.7	22	23.8	22.8	24.2	26.7
Sweden	19	18.9	19.3	20.7	21.2	21.4	25.6	27.3	28.9
Slovenia	22	21.9	23.4	21.7	21.7	23.7	22.6	22.1	26.3
Republic Slovak	22.3	21.8	22.3	21.7	21.3	22.4	22.8	22.2	24.1
OECD-21	20.9	20.8	21.6	21.8	22.1	23.0	24.6	25.8	27.8
Variance	1.6	2.2	4.9	0.8	1.7	3.6	2.4	6.8	6.7

Source: European Social Survey, round 3 (2006) – Billari and Liefbroer 2010.

Table 3: Emerging new patterns of transition to parenthood (Percentage of women per birth cohort)

	Women who left home before entry into a union			Women who had a first child before or outside marriage		
	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1979
Austria	34	42.1	38.9	21.2	31,1	42,9
Belgium	27.4	26.4	38.3	6.8	12,4	35,5
Switzerland	65.6	59.1	58.6	13.3	8,5	12,1
Germany	40.1	45.1	49.8	16.7	19,2	31,1
Denmark	63.6	57.7	64.7	31.3	52,3	50
Estonia	54.4	51.7	47.5	17.2	23,9	41,8
Spain	21.9	22.4	30.7	5.1	12,7	19,6
Finland	62.1	59.7	64.1	16.7	28	45,8
France	37.9	44.7	46.1	17.5	21,1	51,8
United Kingdom	38	50.4	55.3	10.5	19,4	48,9
Hungary	14.7	15.9	15.2	6.2	14,1	21
Ireland	39.9	49.3	59.8	9.9	24,9	56,6
Netherlands	48.7	47.9	50.5	12.7	17,6	42,3
Norway	71.9	67.9	68.4	24.5	42,7	63,3
Poland	25.1	29.1	36.8	8.4	11,1	13,9
Portugal	12.8	20.2	22.9	11.7	21,4	25,7
Sweden	59.7	62.5	62.4	53.8	55,3	58,7
Slovenia	26.4	19.7	30.5	20.3	28,4	52,4
Republic Slovak	17.2	14.4	24.8	13.9	11	17,2
OECD-21	40.2	41.2	44.5	16.4	23,4	37,5
Variance	328.3	285.4	261.4	119.7	177,0	265,3

Source: European Social Survey, round 3 (2006) – Billari and Liefbroer 2010.

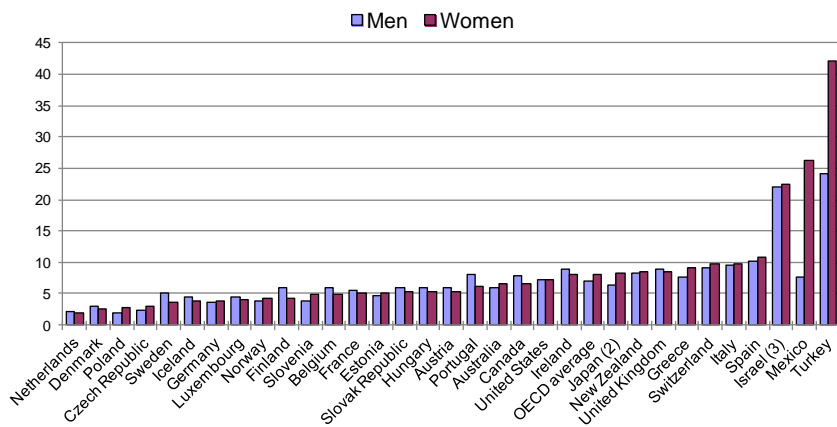
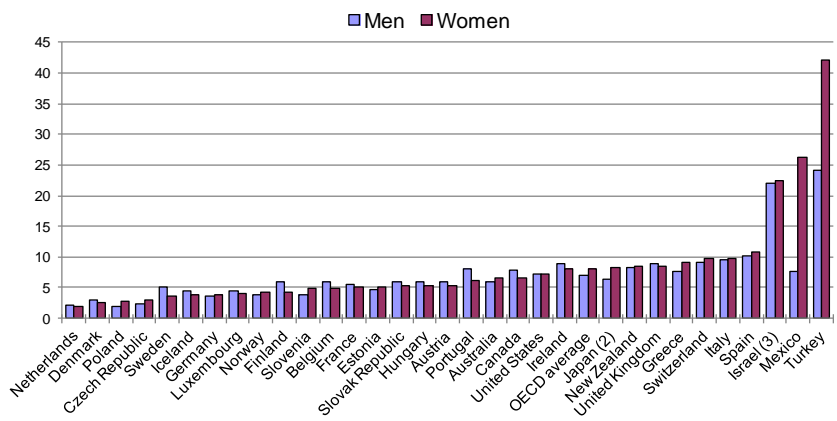
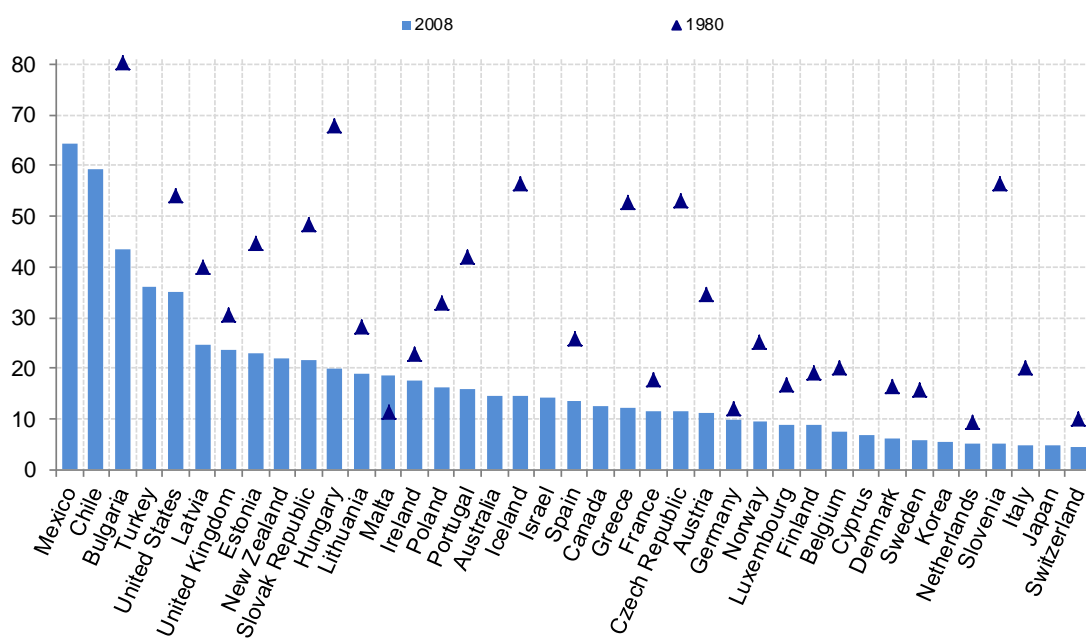
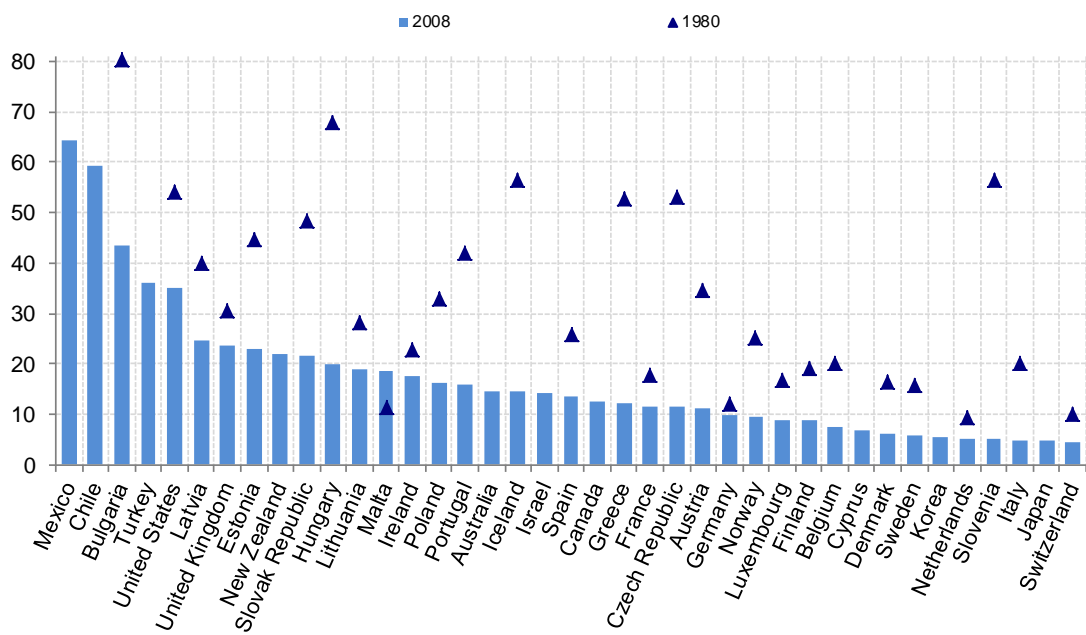


Figure 1: Percentage of people aged 15-19 who were not in education or work in 2008



Source: OECD Family database.

Figure 2 Adolescent fertility rates, 1980 and 2008

Table 4 Share of LAT relationships among individuals aged 18-80, by country

COUNTRY	% LAT	COUNTRY	% LAT
Austria	16.3%	Netherlands	7.4%
France	10.2%	Bulgaria	5.4%
Russia	9.7%	Lithuania	4.7%
Belgium	9.6%	Hungary	4.3%
Norway	9.2%	Romania	3.4%
Italy	8.7%	Georgia	1.5%
Germany	8.7%	Estonia	0.9%

Source: Own calculations (with the help of David Dewachter), GGS data

LAT: people answering yes to the question "Are you currently having a stable, intimate relationship with someone you're not living with?"