

## **Cover page**

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#### **Themed Issue on ‘Family change, intergenerational relations and policy responses’**

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#### **Guest Editorial: Family change, intergenerational relations and policy implications**

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## **Family change, intergenerational relations and policy implications**

### **Abstract**

Since the 1990s, international social science research has made a major contribution to the evidence base on changing family forms and household structures by collecting and processing data about family composition, dissolution and reconstitution, as well as household living, working and caring arrangements. Social scientists have exploited the available data to analyse the social, economic and financial impacts of family change on relations between the generations and their implications for policy. This article explores the varied conceptual understandings of family, household and generation. It reviews international socio-demographic data that track trends in family relations and identifies the contributions of different disciplinary perspectives to the evidence base. The authors consider intergenerational relations both within families and in wider society, covering property, finances, care and value systems, in addition to public policies determining the provision of benefits, goods and services supporting family life. They highlight the challenges facing social scientists in collecting and evaluating evidence about changing intergenerational relations and in assessing policy responses. Acknowledging that many factors contribute to policy development and implementation, they conclude by recognising the extent to which governments in different societal contexts vary in their responses to apparently similar challenges.

**Keywords:** family change, intergenerational relations, multi-disciplinary perspectives, evidence-based policy, policy learning

## **Introduction**

The links between changing family forms, household structures and relations between generations, and the impacts of these changes on policy formation and delivery, are topics of enduring interest for researchers and policymakers across different disciplines and countries. This article examines evidence about family and household change in different national contexts, using country-case studies to exemplify the ways in which family change shapes relations between generations within families and in society as a whole, and the implications of such change for public policy.

Both providers and users of evidence frequently have recourse to international data to track and analyse socio-demographic change and its effects on intergenerational relations. Yet the quality of the available evidence is variable and is confounded by conceptual, methodological and contextual factors. In this article, our interest lies in understanding the socio-economic and political contexts to which data refer, the disciplinary positions and theoretical and methodological perspectives of the researchers who produce or analyse them, and the ideological standpoints of the policy audiences that the research is seeking to inform.

The article begins by reviewing the main conceptual definitions of family, household and generation underlying debates about intergenerational relations both within families and in wider society. It considers the various methods employed in collecting and processing socio-demographic data with the aim of informing policy responses to changes in intergenerational relations. The authors explore the content and coverage of the knowledge base and the challenges that arise in assessing evidence and brokering it through engagement with policymakers, before going on to analyse the public policy responses in different societies or country groupings, and to consider how they interact with informal familial support.

## **Conceptual understandings of family change**

The availability of purportedly harmonised datasets has grown exponentially since the mid-twentieth century, as amply demonstrated by international institutions such as the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations (UN), and the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS-International) Project. Despite efforts at international standardisation of definitions for the conduct of population censuses, the lack of common understandings continues to bedevil comparative analysis of family forms and living arrangements. In addition, issues of comparability and compatibility over time and space may arise because national census counts are generally undertaken only once every ten years, between which socio-demographic changes of relevance for policymaking may occur. Between censuses, most countries therefore carry out their own national sample surveys. They also maintain registers and other forms of records to enable analysts to track change and to inform policy. A wide variety of definitions and concepts of family, household and generation is in use among social scientists, policymakers and the general public (Daly, 2019). In this section, we examine some of the definitions in common international usage and provide examples of how they have been applied in recent years in studies across a selection of countries and continents, drawn mainly from East Asia, Europe and South America.

### ***Defining relationships within families and households***

Definitions of ‘family’ and ‘household’ were initially created for national census purposes in the nineteenth century. The UN sought to standardise these definitions in 1974 for worldwide use in population and housing censuses, and worked with the European Commission for Europe (ECE) to ensure greater compatibility of data collection in national censuses within Europe. As a result, the UN/ECE statistical definitions of family and household are widely applied today in national and international surveys compiled by the United Nations Statistical Division (n.d.).

In some datasets, the term family is coterminous with household and refers to living and eating arrangements. The UN definition distinguishes family nuclei within households. The UN/ECE's early 'recommendation' for defining a family unit in population censuses was based on the conjugal (marital) family concept. Subsequent revisions were made in response to the growing importance and official recognition of alternative living arrangements, including unmarried cohabitation. For the 2020 census round, the concept was further refined:

783. A 'family nucleus' is defined in the narrow sense as two or more persons who live in the same household and who are related as marital, registered, or consensual union (that is, cohabiting) partners of either opposite or same sex, or as parent and child. Thus a family comprises a couple without children, or a couple with one or more children, or a lone parent with one or more children. (UN/ECE, 2015)

For the 2020 census, a definition was inserted for 'reconstituted families' (also termed 'blended families') to record changes in family structure following widowhood, divorce or separation (UN/ECE (2015, § 788)). Such changes in definitions of family forms have important implications for the shape and content of intergenerational relations, and for potential issues of prioritisation and conflicts when it comes to resources of time or income and wealth.

Unlike some definitions of families that refer to children's ages (for example, to describe 'families with dependent children'), the biological relationship defined by UN/ECE does not infer age limits for people living in households defined as 'children', and the definition does not imply dependence. Accordingly, for the 2020 census round, UN/ECE recommends:

785. Within the context of the definition of family nucleus a 'child' refers to a blood, step-, or adopted son or daughter (regardless of age or marital status) who has usual residence in the household of at least one of the parents, and who has no partner or own child(ren) living in the same household. Grandsons and granddaughters of at least one grandparent who have usual

residence in the household but where there are no parents present may also be included.

(UN/ECE, 2015; see also § 784 below)

Age is often, however, an important criterion in determining entitlement to public resources (Daly, 2019). UN/ECE (2015, § 809 1.1, § 814 3.1) advises countries requiring a more detailed age-based analysis of family living arrangements to use age 25 as the break point for defining a ‘child’. Some UN policy documents use different definitions. Article 1 of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example, defines a child as a person below 18 years of age, albeit with the proviso: ‘unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier’. By contrast, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, promulgated in 2000, does not specify the age of children or older people in ascribing rights.

The intricacies of these statistical definitional and conceptual issues are of interest in international comparative studies of intergenerational relations for use in policy formulation. For example, policymakers may want to know at what age children leave the family home and/or are deemed to be independent; or at what age older people should become entitled to welfare payments if they are living with their adult children, their spouse, alone or in an institution. Increasingly, researchers also refer to the different stages in the life course in combination with age categories to determine dependence and needs within households and families (Daly, 2019; Kluge, 2017).

### ***Statistical and sociological definitions of generation***

The concept of ‘generation’, as defined in statistics by UN/ECE, refers to family members (familial generations) within households. For example, UN/ECE guidance describes households with two or more generations:

787. A ‘three-generation household’ consists of two or more separate family nuclei or one family nucleus and (an)other family member(s), containing at least three generations. The youngest two generations should always constitute one family nucleus. For example, a woman who is

living in a household with her own child(ren) and her own parent(s) should be regarded as being in the same family nucleus as the child(ren) even if she is never married. Her own parents would then constitute a second family nucleus within the same household. (UN/ECE, 2015)

The UN/ECE definition was found to be useful in a study of lone mothers living in extended families in Chile (Palma & Scott, 2019). In taking account of diverse kin relationships within households, UN/ECE definitions of families may include grandparents residing with and caring for grandchildren without the presence of parents, as is not uncommon in rural China (Liu & Cook, 2019) or in other countries from which parents migrate temporarily for work (Kilkey & Merla, 2014). For example:

784. ... In some countries, numbers of 'skip-generation households', that is, households consisting of grandparent(s) and one or more grandchild(ren) but where no inter-generational parent (that is the parent of those grandchildren) is present, are considerable. (UN/ECE, 2015, see also § 785 above)

However, the term generation also has meanings other than those identified in international statistical definitions of families and households (Alwin & McCammon, 2004). Generation is widely used to refer to an age cohort within a society that experiences the same set of historical conditions over the life course, for example the baby-boomers born in the western world after the Second World War through to the mid-1960s. In the early twentieth century, the sociologist Mannheim (1953, p. 290) defined generations as: 'Individuals who belong to the same generation, who share the same year of birth, are endowed, to that extent, with a common location in the historical dimension of the social process.' Nonetheless, in practice the concept usually refers to a wider window of time than precisely the same year of birth.

Another related meaning of generation emphasises collective belonging and identity (Biggs et al, 2007; Mannheim, 1953). An analysis of the experience of three different generations living in twentieth century Lithuania, clearly illustrates how identities and value systems are determined and transmitted within changing ideological frames (Žilinskienė & Ilic, 2019). However, some historical generations have been found to lack a subjective collective generational identity, for example ‘The Lost Generation’ who fought in the First World War in Europe, or the ‘One Child Generation’ in the People’s Republic of China (Hu & Shi. 2019; Liu & Cook, 2019). Clearly, not every age cohort is necessarily a generation in this sense of having a collective identity (Daly, 2019), and membership of a specific historical generation does not mean that lives are automatically affected in the same ways either between or indeed within societies (Brannen, 2014).

The concept of generation has been in vogue in recent years to highlight the effects of socio-economic and political events on different generations. Demographers and sociologists have also alerted policymakers to issues raised by changing relations between generations, whether in the biological family sense or as birth cohorts, particularly in countries in which declining fertility in combination with increased longevity has resulted in population ageing. In populations with declining fertility, the dependency ratio has been found to fall (due to declining child dependency) before rising. In the ‘Asian Tiger’ economies, for example, the initial fall has been linked to the economic boom (Lee & Mason, 2011). Policies are therefore required to deal with the health and social care needs of more older people and to facilitate material transfers between generations.

Reference is made increasingly to ‘a generational divide’ associated with tensions between the generations (Daly, 2019). In the early twenty-first century in European societies, for example, a widening gap was recorded in the labour market prospects of younger versus older workers as job security declined and unemployment increased among 25–39-year-olds compared to the 40–64 age group (European Commission, 2017). The associated intergenerational divide is said to be

undermining the intergenerational contract on which the welfare state stands. Observers in France, for example, have commented on the relative difficulties experienced by the ‘millennials’, who share diminished life chances since they are growing up at a time of economic instability and austerity (Chauvel, 2006). The French government has therefore called for a broader social contract between the generations and for policymakers to adopt an ‘intergenerational approach’ (Letablier, 2019). Based on evidence from longitudinal studies in the UK, it has been argued that the ‘baby boomer’ generation has ‘taken their children’s futures’ (Willetts, 2010), leading to calls for ‘a new generational contract’ (Resolution Foundation, 2018). In South Korea, the millennials have been described as the ‘give-up generation’, since they have been forced to forego dating, marriage and childbirth due to low levels of employment, financial insecurity and the impossibility of entering the housing market in the absence of supportive policies for young newlyweds (Chong, 2016).

Issues of ‘intergenerational justice’ are being addressed in a synchronic analysis of 29 OECD countries based on an Intergenerational Justice Index (Vanhuyse, 2014, pp. 4, 12). The author argues the moral case for ‘enough and as good’ capabilities and resources being left by each generation for the next, and identifies the least and most ‘intergenerationally just’ countries. Intergenerational equity has also become a major theme in the climate justice debate (Gough, 2017), understood as ‘fairness between generations’, and seen as ‘a universal concept across the world and across cultures’ (Mary Robinson Foundation, 2018).

### **Building the evidence base for policy on intergenerational relations**

For both practical and ideological reasons, reliable comparable datasets are not readily available across countries to track many of the variables of interest to an understanding of changing intergenerational relations (Hantrais, 2004, pp. 38–50). However, it is possible, using widely applied definitions, to identify broad trends in behaviour and legislation associated with the ‘second demographic transition’, characterised by the spread of unmarried cohabitation, extramarital births

and lone parenthood in the western world since the 1970s (Lesthaeghe, 2014). This section considers quantitative and qualitative methods employed in collecting and processing reliable data cross-nationally. It explores the content and coverage of the knowledge base about changing intergenerational relations and assesses the value of the available evidence for policymaking, while also analysing how governments attempt to influence trends in relations between generations.

### ***Responding to the demand for evidence***

For centuries, demographers and policymakers have had a mutual interest in tracking social change at national level. Political criteria have shaped definitions used in official statistics and informed national traditions of statistical analysis (Desrosières, 1993). Governments have created national statistical institutes to collect and analyse data about population change at national level both for their own use and to serve businesses, researchers and the wider public, as illustrated by examples from countries as diverse as Chile, China, France and Japan.

Chile has one of the oldest national statistical institutes, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística de Chile (INE), created in 1843 to conduct a national population census every ten years, providing longitudinal information about population and household change in Chile's departments and provinces (Palma & Scott, 2019). Japan has conducted large-scale population censuses almost every five years since 1920, administered by its National Statistics Centre (Izuhara, 2019). The French government created a national statistical service, Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (Insee), in 1946, charged with providing socio-demographic and economic data to inform and underpin public policy (Letablier, 2019). China conducted its first national census in 1953, with plans to hold censuses every ten years from 1990 (Liu & Cook, 2019).

The international institutions set up after the Second World War – the European Communities, UN agencies, the Council of Europe and the OECD – provided a major stimulus for the collection of

harmonised statistics across countries to inform and support national and international policy formulation. Eurostat was established in 1959 to supply the Commission and other European institutions with comparable statistics enabling them to implement and analyse Community policies. The European Commission has demonstrated a perennial concern with changing intergenerational relations by funding research projects, networks, consortia and infrastructures to examine the causes and consequences of socio-demographic change in European societies, most notably the Generations and Gender Programme (set up in 2001), the FamiliesAndSocieties Project (2013–2017), and the MULTILNKS Framework Programme 7 Project (2008–2011).

In the early 2000s, the OECD, in response to what it perceived as a growing demand for cross-national indicators (and in conjunction with the European Commission's Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion), developed a Family Database on family outcomes and family policies. Despite problems of comparability, researchers use OECD data in studies of, for example, EU member states (Letablier, 2019) and countries in South America (Palma & Scott, 2019) to analyse intergenerational relations and inform policy. A European Commission funded panel project, the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE), has become a valuable data resource for researchers seeking to compare the implications of socio-demographic change for intergenerational transfers within families, and to stimulate the development of appropriate policies for ageing populations. Floridi (2019), for example, used SHARE in a comparison of intergenerational relations in Italy and South Korea.

Such large-scale data sources produced or funded by international organisations must frequently rely on relatively small national sample sizes, incomplete country coverage and the limited number of questions that can be asked in different socio-political contexts (Hantrais, 2009, 76–85; Jowell et al., 2007, pp. 6–9). Some researchers have overcome such data limitations by carrying out qualitative ethnographic or biographical studies that contextualise specific conditions for the

transmission of values, financial resources, goods and services in different countries, for example Izuhara (2019) in Japan, Liu & Cook (2019) in China and Žilinskienė & Ilic (2019) in twentieth century Lithuania. Findings from studies such as these yield reliable, comparable and replicable evidence for identifying changes in patterns of relationships within families and households over time, and for eliciting policy responses.

### **The implications of changing patterns of family life for intergenerational transfers**

Socio-demographic survey data about population change compiled by international organisations indicate that most countries in the global North are following similar trends, though not necessarily at the same rate. In many countries, family biographies have become more diverse as a result of serial partnering (often outside formal marriage), repartnering/blended families, lone parenting by choice and more open same sex relationships, among other developments. Complex families and households are highly heterogeneous: they encompass elderly parents living with their adult children and/or grandchildren, lone parents, households including young adults who have not yet left the parental home, and shared living arrangements between siblings, friends or other housemates. Due to delayed childbearing and older family members generally living longer, the age gap between generations may be widening. Thus, findings from international studies indicate that families with four or more generations are a minority in twenty-first century Europe (Dykstra & Komter, 2012, p. 500; Vono de Vilhena, & Oláh, 2017, p. 10). Most adults are, however, part of three-generation families, consisting of grandparents, parents (children) and grandchildren, whether or not they live together in the same household.

This section examines the impact on intergenerational relations, and consequently for policy, of the trends identified by statisticians and other analysts in different societal environments. The focus is primarily familial generations rather than age cohorts within societies. Our intention is not to carry out a systematic comparison across countries, but to provide illustrations of a variety of practices.

First, we draw on (often seemingly contradictory) findings from studies carried out in diverse cultural contexts using international data sources as well as new empirical work to explore transfers within families and households. We distinguish between transfers ‘up’ and ‘down’ familial generations – covering care and values (including filial obligations), property and finances (including gifting and inheritance) – from those involving public policies determining the provision of benefits, goods and services. Secondly, we examine the relationship between familial and public policy provision, whether the latter is developed to influence the behaviour of family members or in response to the needs created by changing family and household living arrangements and value systems, or perhaps both.

### ***Changing patterns of intergenerational transfers within families***

Three types of intergenerational support are examined in studies of intergenerational behaviour within families: financial and other material transfers; exchanges of instrumental support in the form of time, including care for children and grandchildren, personal care and help with daily activities or household chores; and intergenerational co-residence, which facilitates support through in-kind transfers and cost-sharing. The life course is generally characterised by two stages of economic dependence: childhood and old age. In the second half of the twentieth century, particularly in the western world, the principal direction of intergenerational transfers within families was from the working-age population to their children and to their parents, the frail elderly population. Based on SHARE data, a comparative study of European countries at the turn of the twenty-first century found that cash gifts at that time flowed instead mainly from older to younger generations, whereas time transfers were generally directed both upwards and downwards. Intergenerational solidarity remained alive within European families in general, ‘despite changing family forms’, with the population aged 50 and above ‘at the centre of a complex exchange network within the family where they both give and receive support’ (Attias-Donfut, Ogg & Wolff, 2005, pp. 170–171).

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, several countries saw an increase in the support provided in cash and kind by better-off parents and grandparents to their adult children and grandchildren. In the UK, the so-called ‘bank of mum and dad’ had become ‘the 9th biggest lender...fund[ing] a quarter of all mortgages’ (Moshinski, 2017), and the ‘Bank of grandma and grandpa [was created] as babyboomers bankroll grandchildren’ (Agencies, 2014). In addition to enabling young adults to set up home, one advantage of the transfer of wealth for donors is that it can avoid inheritance tax on property. In France, where the rules regarding gifts to family members are quite restrictive, and where children are protected from being disenfranchised from the family estate, parents and grandparents also continue to support their adult children financially. When they have left the family home and become students, are unemployed or suffer family breakdown, parents often contribute to their children’s housing and other living costs (Letablier, 2019).

Studies of changing family and household composition in European and other countries in the OECD produce divergent findings about the effects on intergenerational relations of the postponement of family formation, lower fertility rates, the rise in childlessness and increased female labour market activity in the postwar baby-boomer generations (Centre for Policy on Ageing, 2014, pp. 10, 12). They show that, while smaller family size reduces the number of children available to become carers, greater male longevity increases the potential availability of spouses as carers. By creating more complex family relationships, trends in partnership formation and dissolution (consensual unions, lone parenthood, marriage, remarriage and divorce) may compound the impact of the decline in some countries in co-residence between generations and family support for relatives, as care becomes more complicated to organise.

Analyses in European societies, using SHARE indicators of psychological and physical health and the financial situation of family members suggest that caring for elderly dependants can have a

negative impact on the mental and physical health and life satisfaction of carers, whereas care for children by older relatives appears to improve their wellbeing (Karpinska et al., 2016, p. 10). Based on four waves of the SHARE data, Tosi & Grundy (2018) found that across Europe, while co-resident adult children may provide emotional and instrumental support for older parents, such co-residence may also be a source of conflict and stress. A European study, using the methodology developed in the National Transfer Accounts project (Agenta) produced complementary findings regarding perceptions of financial transfers within families: support for children was generally seen positively as an investment in the future, while transfers to the elderly population were more likely to be perceived as a drain on resources (Furnkranz-Prskawetz, Hammer & Rengs, 2017, pp. 46–47).

Family dissolution and reconstitution frequently involve the geographical separation of family members and necessitate the restructuring of living arrangements, as do urbanisation and international migration. Studies in European societies find that exchanges between parents and adult children are more likely the closer they live and that, in Central and Eastern European (EEC) countries, the migration of younger generations is an important factor challenging traditional family models based on strong intergenerational solidarity and co-residence (Karpinska et al., 2016, pp. 3, 6–7). Sustaining intergenerational relations and exchanges from a distance has been significantly facilitated by the advent of cheap air travel, social media and other digital technologies, which have also enabled easier transmission of international remittances between separated family members. The World Bank (2018) reports, for example, that global remittances, including flows to high-income countries, increased 7% in 2016–17 to reach \$613 billion. In their investigation of the various types of long-distance emotional relationships in today's global age, Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2014) explore 'distant love' in 'global patchwork families' and 'global networks'.

Outside Europe, differences in the timing and intensity of family change may be associated with variations in patterns of intergenerational relations, particularly regarding care and gender. An

ethnographic study of ageing in rural China shows, for example, that families remain the principal focus of intergenerational support, despite changes in living arrangements due to geographical separation (Liu & Cook, 2019). The authors examine how the large-scale migration of younger workers from rural to urban China since the 1990s has separated many adult children from their ageing parents, thereby challenging traditional patterns of familial support. They illustrate the problematic nature of intergenerational relations when grandparents are left to bring up their grandchildren while their adult children are away for long periods working in cities and sending back sometimes meagre remittances.

In a quantitative sociological study using China Family Panel data for 2010, Hu & Shi (2019) show that at the time of the survey, as predicted, parents were investing more financial resources and time per child in educating singleton than non-singleton children. Their findings about the effects of the one-child policy on gender equality problematised a widespread assumption: little discrepancy was found in intergenerational investment in the education of boys and girls, irrespective of 'sibship' structure; however, larger differences were found between rural and urban boys and girls in perceptions of societal 'pressure' to conform to traditional gender roles.

In Japan, where low fertility rates have combined with high life expectancy to create a caring deficit, increasing numbers of ageing parents are living with their unmarried adult children. This expansion in intergenerational co-residence is largely due to precarious employment and falling marriage rates among the younger generation, associated in turn with low fertility rates, exacerbated by persisting social disapproval of extramarital births. Using census data and attitudinal surveys, Izuhara (2019) examines changing postwar patterns of co-residence and then conceptualises its shifting functions. From being motivated by social norms and family reciprocity, co-residence has become a more cost-effective option for young adults on low incomes in a difficult housing market.

The situation in Chile provides another socio-cultural perspective on changing patterns of co-residence. In a study of the implications of changes in living arrangements for intergenerational relations, Palma & Scott (2019) explore two different explanations for the observed increase in extended family living for young women in the early stages of family formation. Firstly, due to the rise in female employment rates, young women need greater assistance from their extended families to reconcile the demands of work and family responsibilities, resulting in grandchildren often residing with their grandparents. Secondly, declining marriage rates and, more especially, rising rates of unmarried cohabitation and lone parenthood increase the need for extended family support.

In richer societies, the combined impact of longer schooling, later labour market entry and the postponement of marriage has focussed attention on the age at which children leave the family home, or return to it, if they separate from partners, become unemployed or cannot afford to live independently. Eurostat data for 2015 (Coyette et al., 2015) show that the average age at which young people left the parental home was 26.1 years old (27.2 for men and 25.1 for women). Marked disparities were found between southern and eastern European member states, where multi-generation households were a more common phenomenon, and northern and western member states, where children were more likely to leave the family home at an earlier age. Shared living arrangements can potentially protect family members whose living standards are otherwise threatened. One study of European countries suggests, however, that ‘leaving the parental home does not mean that individuals have reached full residential independence, as they are unlikely to have achieved a stable and sustainable housing situation’ (Berrington et al., 2017, p. 4).

These examples illustrate the complexity, diversity and dynamic nature of the relationships between generations within families in different societies, as well as the variety in the likelihood of generations being co-resident. Other analyses reveal further variations within and across societies,

explained by social class and income (Kluge, 2017; Vanhuysse, 2014), education (Chauvel, 2016) and, not least, social welfare systems.

### ***Links between intergenerational relationships and social policy***

Much has been written about the legitimacy and acceptability of policy intervention in family life in different societies in response to socio-demographic change and the impacts of policy on family life (Hantrais, 2004, chapters 6, 7). European comparisons illustrate how relationships within families can be shaped (or institutionalised) by legal systems prescribing family obligations (Millar & Warman, 1996, p. 50). Within Europe, some countries – France, Germany and Portugal – formally recognise the legal responsibility of the state to protect the family as a fundamental social institution. In France in particular, political, economic and civil society actors cooperate closely in pursuing explicit integrated family policies in response to changing needs (Letablier, 2019). In southern Europe, family support policy is more fragmented and segregated (Floridi, 2019). By contrast, Central and East European (CEE) countries are more averse to state intervention in family life, in reaction to the legacy of the Soviet era, as exemplified by Lithuania (Žilinskienė & Ilic, 2019).

In responding to socio-demographic challenges, governments may formulate policies to curb, accommodate, support or reverse change. In the immediate postwar period, the primary concerns of social policymakers, particularly in northern Europe, were the housing supply, the numbers of places in schools for pupils in different age groups, and how to balance the demand and supply of labour. By the 1970s, governments were also developing policies that would encourage female labour market activity and bolster labour supply, while simultaneously facilitating childbearing/rearing and improving gender equality. By the turn of the twenty-first century, in countries as diverse as France and Japan preoccupied with the risk of population decline, a major concern was to sustain the birth rate (Izuhara, 2019; Letablier, 2019). In recent times, governments

of countries such as China, Iran, and the Republic of Korea have also adopted pronatalist policies. Goldscheider, Bernhardt & Lappegård (2015) argue that, whilst support for families has been seen as influential in reversing the decline in fertility in industrialised societies by reducing work–family conflict, a major influence may be the ongoing gender revolution, which is beginning to show an increase in men’s involvement in the home.

The ageing of the population also moved on to the agenda in the late twentieth century, stimulating researchers internationally to consider how public and private provision of social and health care could be organised to meet the challenges. Because female labour was seen as a means of combatting the negative effects of population ageing, the demand increased for more public support to enable the ‘sandwich generation’ to reconcile paid employment with family caring to relieve care deficits (Vono de Vilhena & Oláh, 2017, p. 13).

Public opinion is divided in many countries regarding the extent to which the state should bear the main responsibility for delivering or funding child or elder care. In responding to changing demands on public resources, governments may seek to influence the behaviour of family members. By setting the parameters within which family obligations are enacted, the generosity of a state’s welfare provision and the patterning of the allocation of welfare between the state, market and family can enable or constrain the capacity of families to deal with the needs of their members (Silverstein & Giarusso, 2011, p. 39).

Different theories have been developed and tested to explain the interactions between public policies and family norms concerning intergenerational transfers. According to the ‘crowding out’ argument, adapted from the Bacon & Eltis (1976) thesis in economics, a generous welfare state crowds out private financial support. By contrast, ‘crowding in’ implies that, for example, older people with generous pensions have the financial means to support their offspring. When these

theses are tested empirically in different countries, some analysts have found that family support levels may be greater in countries with higher levels of provision, since the state enhances private familial support, giving rise to the ‘specialisation hypothesis’ (Deindl & Brandt, 2011, pp. 647–648). Socio-demographic evidence also indicates a greater weakening of norms of filial obligation in western Europe than in CEE and southern European countries, or those in East Asia (Karpinska et al., 2016, p. 15). In CEE and southern European countries, the connection between filial obligation and instrumental support for ageing parents appears to be strong when public support is limited.

Analysis of the legal frameworks attributing rights and responsibilities to family members highlights how social policies regarding intergenerational relations are packaged and interact with one another in various forms of familialism, where priority rests with the family rather than the individual or society (Hantrais, 2004, pp. 199–206; Saraceno, 2016, pp. 316–317). The French case exemplifies the concept of de-familialism due to generous public provision of subsidies and services, thereby reducing family responsibilities and dependencies, while using social solidarity to support and complement family life (Letablier, 2019). In Floridi’s (2019) comparison of the relationship between policies and intergenerational relations in 2012–2013 in Italy and South Korea, which she classifies as ‘familialistic’ societies, she argues that both welfare provision and societal norms make family members strongly reliant upon one another for support. Using SHARE data, she finds that in Italy, where societal transfers favour older people, intergenerational support appears to be mainly directed from parents to children, with complementary forms of filial help for ageing parents. In South Korea, where old-age state protection is limited, older parents are more heavily dependent on children in cases of need. She concludes from her comparative analysis that exchanges of support within families tend to complement societal transfers to different generations.

The results from an ethnographic study in China (Liu & Cook, 2019) suggest that current welfare provision in rural areas remains deeply embedded in a familial ideology, with market, state and community sectors indirectly or directly relying on the family sector. Rather than being located in a dichotomised debate between familialism and de-familialism, the article reveals that villagers' preferences are situated along a continuum between the two, shaped by local socio-cultural economic circumstances and different types of old age support. By contrast, a study of Lithuania shows how the experience of living through dramatic societal change before, during and after the Sovietisation process shaped family values and their intergenerational transmission in that country, and determined different patterns of behaviour and methods of adaptation. In the absence of state intervention to support family life, intergenerational solidarity (by default) was severely tested (Žilinskienė & Ilic, 2019).

Research in Japan (Izuhara, 2019) finds that, in response to low fertility, population ageing and low economic growth, policy discourse and initiatives are promoting co-residence. While the process of de-familialisation, with the rapid increase of elderly-only households, underpinned the development of long-term care away from families in the 1990s, current policy rhetoric and measures largely focus on re-familialisation. In Chile, the pervasive patriarchal culture would also seem to militate against de-familialisation as young lone mothers are unable to live independently in households without a male head (Palma & Scott, 2019).

An important factor determining the age at which adult children leave the family home in different countries was found to be the availability of affordable housing. Relatively little attention has been paid by researchers to the role played by the public sector as a provider of housing. A review of how young adults' housing transitions are shaped by social and housing policies in the UK demonstrates, however, that housing remains an important welfare service (Berrington & Stone, 2014). Affordable housing is an area also identified for policy interventions in Japan and Chile (Izuhara, 2019; Palma

& Scott, 2019). The Japanese government has responded to the challenge of an ageing population by encouraging ‘two-household housing’, in which parents and their adult children live in separate but interconnected dwellings, thereby preserving their independence while removing problems of isolation and distance for family carers (Izuhara, 2019).

## **Conclusions**

As argued by Daly (2019), and as illustrated by the examples in this article, the relationship between generation and social policy can best be understood by analysing both structural and relational dimensions. Familial and societal generations are seen to interact in different ways. For example, in France they are described as working in a partnership, in which the interests of family members are ‘mainstreamed’ with a view to ensuring that social solidarity facilitates their reproductive, productive and caring roles through provision of welfare benefits and services (Letablier, 2019). In China, by contrast, particularly in rural areas, the state has played a constraining role due to its limited support for family life (Liu & Cook, 2019); and in Japan and Chile, pressures are exerted on families to provide more support for their members to reduce the burden on society (Izuhara, 2019; Palma & Scott, 2019).

Despite commonalities in the direction of socio-demographic change, the evidence in this article from studies tracking its impacts on relations between the generations in families and societies highlights the great diversity in policy responses. We would concur with the conclusion drawn from the MULTILINKS research, which calls into question common assumptions about the homogeneity of groupings of countries in the regime clusters of welfare state typologies, and about the consistency of policy arrangements, even at national level between different sectors (Dykstra & Komter, 2012, p. 500). The studies reviewed here show how, in different policy contexts, changing political ideologies regarding the legitimacy of state intervention in the relationships between familial generations may result in policymakers seeking to promote, mitigate or reverse change in

family life. Policies can be designed to discourage family breakdown, or to encourage family building, gender equality (at work, in the home, and in public life), co-residence of family members or intergenerational care. However, policy aims are often contradictory, as exemplified by measures to extend working lives and those based on assumptions about caregiving within families.

The body of research evidence about changing family dynamics suggests that researchers and policymakers, in the public and private sectors and in civil society, need to give careful consideration not only to potential conflicts, trade-offs and the unintended consequences of policy but also to the socio-demographic and politico-economic environments in which policy is formulated and implemented. Only then may they be able to draw meaningful lessons from the experience of other societies and cultures.

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