FamiliesAndSocieties
Working Paper Series

49 (2015)

Changing families and sustainable societies:
Policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations

Vulnerability of families with children: Major risks, future challenges and policy recommendations

Monika Mynarska, Bernhard Riederer, Ina Jaschinski,
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A project funded by European Union's Seventh Framework
Programme under grant agreement no. 320116

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Monika Mynarska[1], Bernhard Riederer[1], Ina Jaschinski[1], Desiree Krivanek[1], Gerda Neyer[2], and Livia Oláh[2]

With the participation of and support from:
Eloïse Leboutte, Pablo García Ruiz, Ignacio Socias, and Irena Kotowska

Abstract:

The study employs qualitative methodology to investigate what challenges for social policy might appear in the future, given different economic and cultural developments. We seek to understand what factors might be crucial for the wellbeing of families and what policy measures might improve it. Drawing on the previous findings of Work Package 10 of the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project, we concentrate on vulnerable families. First, we explore what types of families are considered as vulnerable. Next, we discuss various factors and drivers that are likely to affect the situation of such families in the future. Finally, we investigate what policy measures might be crucial to prevent the "reproduction of vulnerability" within families. We use data from focus group interviews (FGIs) that were conducted in five European countries with policymakers and stakeholders. Discussions with these informants gave us rich and unique insights, outlining the most important areas of interest for future policy measures to be designed in order to improve the situation of European families.

Keywords: focus groups, family futures, vulnerable families, inequality, family wellbeing

Affiliation:

1) Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital (IIASA, VID/ÖAW, WU)
2) Department of Sociology, SPaDE, SUDA, Stockholm University

Acknowledgement: The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement no. 320116 for the research project *FamiliesAndSocieties*.

Contents

Foreword

The focus group discussions with policymakers and stakeholders—described in this report—constitute a segment of foresight activities conducted in Work Package 10 (WP 10), coordinated by Dimiter Philipov and Thomas Fent. The focus groups were coordinated at the Vienna Institute of Demography by a team consisting of Monika Mynarska, Bernhard Riederer, Ina Jaschinski and Desiree Krivanek. A number of other colleagues have been involved as well, and we are extremely grateful for their support. In the first step, the research goals and the scope of the focus group discussions were decided in collaboration with Dimiter Philipov who coordinated the "Futures task force workshop" in Tallinn in January 2014 (Philipov et al., 2014), a direct predecessor of the focus group discussions. His insights from the workshop and his general expertise were invaluable in setting the scene for the current study. When the scope of the research was defined, we faced the challenge of organising the focus group discussions in five different settings. It required managing logistics in different countries, with different cultural and institutional idiosyncrasies and in different languages. This would not have been possible if not for our colleagues in several institutions:

- The focus groups in Madrid and Brussels were organised by Eloïse Leboutte and Ignacio Socias of the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD). Additionally, Pablo García Ruiz supported us with moderating the group discussion in Madrid.
- The focus group in Stockholm was organised by Livia Oláh and Gerda Neyer of Stockholm University.
- The focus group in Poland was organised with a generous support from Irena E. Kotowska of Warsaw School of Economics.

While the aforementioned colleagues were directly involved in the research, we should mention a few others, who supported us with their insights, comments or advice. Our gratitude goes to Caroline Berghammer, Laura Bernardi, Sonja Blum, Anna Matysiak and Michaela Potančoková.

We would also like to express our deepest gratitude to all participants of the study. We appreciate that you managed to find time for us in your busy schedules. In the report, we did our best to accurately present your opinions and to abstain from expressing our own viewpoints. The discussions were extremely rich in information, but we sincerely hope we have managed to document your key points and messages.

We are grateful to all of you who supported us. All the mistakes or omissions are ours.

Executive Summary

What will the future(s) of families in Europe look like? Work Package 10 of the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project is dedicated to various foresight activities trying to answer this question. Within the work package, several qualitative studies were designed to explore what challenges for social policy might appear in the future, given different prospects of economic and cultural development. The study reported here focused on the outlook for vulnerable families with children. We explored factors that might be crucial for the wellbeing of these families in order to define prime areas for policy interventions.

The topic of vulnerable families was debated in five focus group discussions with policymakers and civil society actors engaged in family-related issues. We made use of their expertise to enrich our knowledge about their views on most important areas for future policy interventions. Discussions were conducted between November 2014 and January 2015 in Brussels, Madrid, Stockholm, Vienna and Warsaw. We aimed to learn about practitioners' perspectives on the following three issues:

(1) Which types of families with children might be particularly vulnerable and why?

(2) In what ways might different future developments affect these families?

(3) What policy measures would be crucial to prevent the "reproduction of vulnerability" within families in the future?

The experts discussed various aspects and dimensions of vulnerability (economic hardship, social exclusion, stigmatisation, lack of stability, etc.). Thus, they presented different reasons for which families might need more attention and support. While some informants argued that no family configuration causes vulnerability inevitably, there was a general consensus that some family types are more "at risk". Single parents and families with many children (large families) were perceived as most vulnerable. These families may face a higher risk because the reconciliation of work and family is particularly challenging for them. The ability to combine family life with paid employment was identified to be decisive for family wellbeing.

Notably, the link between paid work and family life appeared central for the concept of vulnerability as it conveys economic, social as well as emotional dimensions. The inability to reconcile the two spheres of life is likely to lead to serious economic problems. Parents can get trapped in precarious jobs or they may feel forced to limit their working hours which, in turn,

substantially reduces their income. In extreme cases, they might need to leave the labour market altogether. Consequently, they would no longer be able to meet the financial needs of their family. Being out of the labour market can also reduce the social contacts parents have, limiting their social embeddedness. Facing substantial difficulties regarding the reconciliation of work and family, parents might also choose to greatly reduce quality time with their offspring for the sake of economic safety but this may have a negative impact on the relations with their children and on the children's emotional wellbeing. Problems with the reconciliation of work and family life are also related to time pressure and high stress levels. Indeed, the link between paid work and family life was central throughout the discussions with the experts.

In the second part of the group discussion, the informants considered various directions of macro level developments and named numerous forces that might be crucial for the wellbeing of (vulnerable) families. These forces were related to work-life balance: changes in institutional childcare provision, changing gender roles (women's higher participation in the labour force but also the higher engagement of fathers in the care after their children) as well as the role of the "culture of workplace[1]" and employers' attitudes towards family responsibilities of their employees. Also other drivers possibly important for the futures of (vulnerable) families were named, such as the general economic development (crisis versus growth), cultural and social shifts in intergenerational relationships, and a possible weakening of social ties related to the liberalisation of social norms.

Importantly, the experts expressed ambivalent opinions about the possible consequences of various future developments. For example, on the one hand, economic growth was perceived as necessary to sustain low levels of unemployment and to ensure decent levels of wages as well as substantial public support for families which reduce poverty and thus vulnerability. On the other hand, the experts also pointed out that economic development might bring more pressure to families if not being accompanied by more general changes in the workplace culture (e.g. if employers are not considerate of parental duties) and lifestyle in general (e.g. if individuals neglect interpersonal relationships because of too much focus on work).

A similar ambivalence was visible in how the experts spoke of the increasing female labour force participation. On the one hand, higher engagement of women in paid work has a positive

[1] The experts used term "culture of workplace" to describe organizational culture, as well as values, attitudes and practices shared by the employees and employers that shape an overall working atmosphere.

impact on family incomes and improves women's situation in terms of financial independence, also with regard to their future pensions. On the other hand, several experts pointed out that the pressures it imposed on women should not be overlooked. Without family-friendly workplaces and sufficient childcare, and without changes in men's roles women may run the risk of being overburdened, given increased pressure to do their best both in the role of a mother and of an employee. We believe that all ambivalences about possible economic and cultural developments need to be carefully considered, as they may require different policy measures. Even the most positive changes may raise new challenges for policy-makers.

Finally, our informants discussed various policy measures that, in their opinion, would be crucial to improve the situation of vulnerable families and, in particular, to prevent the "reproduction of vulnerability" from one generation to another. The ability to combine childcare responsibilities with paid employment was identified to be decisive for family wellbeing, as *reconciliation policies* were seen as a central aspect of any political strategy to counteract vulnerability. A better future for children requires both secure financial means and time for parents to be there for their children. Therefore, the informants did not only discuss institutional childcare provision but also options that enable parents to reorganise or reduce their workload when more time for parenting is needed. In their opinion, flexible measures are necessary also to meet the challenges of new ways of living (e.g. to enable divorced parents to share physical custody of their children).

One key challenge for the future is to help vulnerable families not only temporarily (by mitigating the most urgent needs) but to improve their situation in a sustainable manner. In all five focus groups participants strongly emphasised the importance of *education* in this respect. Early childhood education in formal childcare empowers children from vulnerable families, providing them with the skills necessary for breaking the "cycle of reproduction of vulnerability" as it also improves their position in the labour market when they enter adulthood. Also parents should be educated, to understand the importance of schooling for their children's future, and to improve their parenting styles. Finally, employers need to be educated about the importance of family-friendly working environment.

The experts also discussed the situation of children from the most disadvantaged families, confronted with poverty, social exclusion and high levels of conflict (or even violence), hence with the most urgent needs. In addition to concrete measures (e.g. daily assistance for children

in need) state support strategies in general were also addressed, especially how *social support services* could be improved. The development of perceptive preventative actions and early support (e.g. psychological support for families with conflicts or on the verge of divorce) were identified as key challenges for the future. The difficulty for policy is to design measures so families in need will not be punished or stigmatised for their difficulties. Instead of dictating what to do, social services should be sensitive to people's situation and their specific needs and offer relevant support.

In general, the experts recognised a necessity for a comprehensive strategy and complementary policies in supporting vulnerable families and children in them: single measures have to go hand in hand with each other. Education, employment and the creation of a more family-friendly society were seen as indispensable. While financial transfers are required to address the most urgent needs of vulnerable families, they alone do not solve the problem of reproduction of vulnerability, but might even lead to the socialisation of state dependency. Instead, it is crucial to facilitate for families to sustain themselves. Economic growth, the availability of jobs and wages matter greatly, but most important is the ability to combine childcare responsibilities with employment. The views of the informants encourage us to consider employment from the family perspective. As governments aim at increasing the levels of labour force participation, the balance between family life and paid work should be a starting point for any policy measures.

Our study addressed the future of vulnerable families in Europe, especially those with children. The discussions with policymakers and stakeholders concerned with family issues provided valuable insights into the "drivers" relevant for the wellbeing of such families and allowed for delineating several areas where policy interventions are essential. The study illustrates the necessity for a closer dialog between researchers and practitioners. Practitioners can draw the attention of researchers to important dimensions and show the complexity of relevant issues. Researchers should incorporate these insights into their research and, in turn, provide policymakers and stakeholders with improved evidence-based policy recommendations. Such collaboration would allow us to predict the futures of families more precisely, and to design actions that promote the wellbeing of families. Some of the most important areas pointed out in our report are already investigated by our colleagues in *FamiliesAndSocieties* (see: Working Papers on the project's homepage, www.familiesandsocieties.eu), making the project one step in the right direction.

1 Introduction

In recent decades and years, European families have undergone tremendous change that has resulted in a great diversity of family forms and relationships. Even though, among families with minor children, the married couple with one or two children is still the most common family form, children nowadays are raised in many different family settings. There are families with a larger number of children growing up together, and an increasing number of children live with same-sex parents. Many children are raised by unmarried parents, while—due to increasing divorce rates—others grow up with only one of their parents or their parents share physical custody over them. The number of children growing up in reconstituted (patchwork) families has increased as well. These trends open new questions on the wellbeing of children in different families.

The general aim of Work Package 10 (WP10) of the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project is to gain knowledge about the impact that family-related policies have, in the long run, on families' and children's wellbeing and on satisfying the needs of families and children. The focus on future developments is central in the research conducted within WP10 that is entirely dedicated to various foresight activities. In the work package, quantitative methods are applied mostly to outlining possible future trends in family configurations and qualitative methods are used more to drawing policy implications. In the qualitative part, the main aim is to *explore what challenges for social policy might appear in the future given different economic and cultural developments*[2].

This general question was the point of departure of the focus group interviews (FGIs) with policymakers and other stakeholders. Our aim was to rely on their expertise to identify main areas for future policy interventions. The content of FGIs was outlined based on the results from the stakeholder workshop in Tallinn, linked to the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project, which had been organised as a part of WP10 activities in January 2014. Drawing upon the outcomes of this workshop, three themes were explored in more detail in the FGIs: (1) the family forms that might be vulnerable and need special attention, (2) the effects of divergent future developments on vulnerable families, that is, families susceptible to poverty and/or social

[2] "Cultural developments" denote a wide variety of changes in shared values, attitudes and social norms that result in new practices and lifestyles.

exclusion, and (3) policy measures to prevent the "reproduction of vulnerability" within families in need.

The above topics were addressed in five focus group discussions in selected cities in Europe: Vienna, Madrid, Stockholm, Warsaw and Brussels. The first four groups gathered policymakers and stakeholders local to the respective countries, while the last one attracted politicians and social actors at the supranational level (European Union).

The current report, documenting the outcomes of the focus group discussions, is structured as follows: Section 2 explains the background as well as the reasons for the main focus of the discussions. Section 3 addresses methodological issues including reasons for the research strategy chosen and organisational aspects of focus group interviews (FGIs). Section 4 presents the results of the FGIs that are further interpreted in Section 5. The report concludes with implications for future research and recommendations for policymakers.

2 Thematic background and focus of interviews

Since the FGIs constitute a segment of a larger research scheme, their focus was defined based on the previous findings. Most importantly, the insights from the "Futures task force workshop" set their scope. This workshop was held in Tallinn, Estonia, linked to the First Annual Consortium meeting of the FamiliesAndSocieties project, with 36 stakeholders from different European institutions (governmental and non-governmental) in January 2014. Its aim was to identify the core drivers (i.e. highly influential factors) that might shape European family forms and family wellbeing in the future. During the workshop a wide array of topics were discussed. They were presented in Deliverable 10.2: Philipov et al. (2014), "Report on the futures task force workshop".

There were a few central themes dominating the discussions of the workshop. First, the topics of vulnerable families and the reproduction of vulnerability within families permeated the whole discussion. Vulnerability has been defined as experiencing or being at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The participants discussed different types of vulnerable families and noted that it is highly important to investigate the needs of such families and the factors that might increase the risk of vulnerability. Second, the participants paid much attention to the

situation of children in families and their wellbeing. These two themes delimited the core area of interest for the FGIs.

2.1 Vulnerability and vulnerable families

2.1.1 What is "vulnerability"?

The most general definition of *vulnerability* follows from its original meaning: The root of the English word "vulnerable" is the Latin expression for "to wound" (original wording: *vulnerare*). Therefore, vulnerability can be basically described as "the capacity to be wounded" (Patterson, 2013, p. 1). In recent research many different concepts and dimensions of vulnerability are discussed. Among other things, the term may refer to violence, discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion. Considering the situation of families with minor children the increasingly dominating view in the literature is that especially childhood vulnerability is multidimensional (Roelen et al., 2012) and refers to material, social and emotional needs (Radcliff et al., 2012). *Material needs* include needs for money, home and shelter to live, health care, education and food. While *social needs* comprise aspects like mentoring, support and social networks, the term *emotional needs* primarily covers the needs for care and love (Holand et al., 2011; Lerner & Trivedi, 2013).

Based on the existing literature, we generally define vulnerability as a complex phenomenon that refers to the following dimensions:

1. Economic difficulties/lack of financial resources: poverty, low living standards, housing problems (e.g. too damp, too expensive, too cold or difficult to heat) etc.;
2. Social exclusion: limited access to facilities such as shops, schools, libraries or medical services;
3. Lack of social support from social networks: no assistance from family members, friends, neighbours or colleagues (referring to practical help as well as emotional support);
4. Stigmatisation: being a victim of stereotypes, being devalued, confronted with disgraceful behaviour because of belonging to a particular social or ethnic group;
5. Health difficulties: disadvantages resulting from poor mental health, physical health or disabilities;
6. Being a victim of crime: in family context especially of violence.

Some of these dimensions may certainly be intertwined and linked to each other. Vulnerable individuals are often confronted with multiple challenges at the same time as physical problems can trigger material, social and emotional problems (Olsson & Hwang, 2003) and people in material need tend to have strong emotional and social needs, too (Holand et al., 2011). In extreme cases, social exclusion and stigmatisation related to poverty and resulting differences in life style might all lead to a lack of social support and isolation that is harmful to the psychological wellbeing. However, it is sufficient that just *one* of the six aforementioned aspects occurs to describe a family as vulnerable. Moreover, since social and emotional needs are not easy to measure, material needs are usually the key indicator for vulnerability. In identifying vulnerable individuals or families, the European Commission refers to the concept of AROPE – "at risk of poverty or social exclusion". It refers to the situation of people either at risk of poverty, or severely materially deprived or living in a household with a very low work intensity (cf. López Vilaplana, 2013).[3]

2.1.2 Vulnerable families

Over the last decade approximately a quarter of the general population have been at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the European Union (EU-27[4], Eurostat database). There are, however, some marked differences by age. While 21 per cent of elderly people (aged 65 or over) and 24 per cent of working-age adults (aged 18 to 64) are at such risk, the proportion is highest among children (aged 17 or less), reaching 27 per cent (López Vilaplana, 2013). Also the participants of the "Futures task force workshop" (Philipov et al., 2014), were concerned with the situation of children and they found it pivotal to explore what family types are associated with particularly difficult conditions, exposing minors to vulnerability.

The employment situation of parents is crucial in this respect. Job loss is one of the most important reasons for entering poverty (McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005; Riederer & Wolfsbauer, 2011; Vandecasteele, 2011). Among the employed, work intensity of the household is decisive (Fouarge & Layte, 2005; Fusco, Guio, & Marlier, 2010), and the type of work influences income as well (Vandecasteele, 2011). Parents' weak labour market attachment might result from low or inadequate qualifications. The higher risk of vulnerability and lower

[3] For more details on the definition see Eurostat glossary and included links available at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:At_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion_%28AROPE%29.

[4] Croatia, the most recent member state, is not included in these statistics.

probability of improving their life situation among the less educated have been well documented in the literature (Fouarge & Layte, 2005; Fusco et al., 2010; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005; Riederer & Wolfsbauer, 2011; Vandecasteele, 2011). Moreover, a lack of childcare options might force parents (especially mothers) to leave the labour market, impairing their material situation (e.g. Baum, 2002; Eurofound, 2013; Keck & Saraceno, 2013). Importantly, it has been found that family configuration, that is size and composition of the family, also affects the risk of vulnerability (e.g. Andriopoulou & Tsakloglou, 2011; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005, Vandecasteele, 2011). In some family types, work and family reconciliation might be particularly difficult. Some other aspects of vulnerability—such as stigmatisation or higher stress levels—might come into play with various family configurations as well.

First of all, family size greatly influences the risk of poverty (Radcliff et al., 2012). The higher the number of children, the higher is usually the financial burden of the household, and thus the need for both parents to engage in paid work. At the same time, however, more children require more time for care and this may lead to the need for one parent—usually the mother—to dedicate more of her time and energy to childcare and to reduce or even give up her paid working time. With reduced income or even only one earner, financial problems can easily arise. Thus, households with three or more children have a higher risk of deprivation (e.g. Finnie & Sweetman, 2003; Fusco et al., 2010; Riederer & Wolfsbauer, 2011). In 2011, almost one-third of two-adult households with three or more dependent children[5] were at risk of poverty or social exclusion in EU-27 (López Vilaplana, 2013). However, the situation is often even more problematic for single parents (Graaf-Zijl & Nolan 2011, p. 29). The share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion mounts to almost 50 per cent among solo parents with dependent children (López Vilaplana, 2013). This household composition can be a major factor for low work intensity and in-work poverty in the absence of adequate support services, especially for solo mothers who are susceptible to negative income effects of divorce (Vandecasteele, 2011, p. 248). While two-parent families pool their income and have an opportunity to share various responsibilities and burdens, a single parent has to cope with all difficulties alone (Fusco et al., 2010; Vandecasteele, 2011; Holand et al., 2011). In addition—since solo parenthood is most commonly related to the parents having separated—family

[5] In statistics published by Eurostat, dependent children are individuals aged 17 years or less and individuals aged 18 to 24 years if inactive and living with at least one parent.

disruptions often have negative psychological consequences for parents and children (Gilman et al., 2003; Prevoo & ter Weel, 2014).

Besides the size and the composition of the household, specific family characteristics can also influence the risk of vulnerability. Ethnic minorities and immigrant families are mentioned in this respect (e.g. Juang & Alvarez, 2010). Their difficulties may stem from limited access to the labour market and/or discrimination in the labour market, but also from low education or their educational certificates not being accepted in the destination countries, as well as from insufficient language skills (e.g. Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004; Blume et al., 2007; Jargowsky, 2009; Kazemipur & Halli, 2001). Moreover, families with disabled family members are considered vulnerable (e.g. Osgood et al., 2010). Research shows that bad health and disability trigger the risk of entering poverty (e.g. Fusco et al., 2010; McKernan & Ratcliffe, 2005). Families with disabled individuals might also suffer from more strained emotional relationships due to the demands of care (Olsson & Hwang, 2003). Finally, same-sex couples with children are also mentioned as a vulnerable family type, albeit because of social exclusion or stigmatisation rather than economic hardship (Goldberg & Smith, 2011).

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

2.2 Previous foresight research on family futures

Although foresight research is still relatively new to social sciences, its relevance for thinking and debating about as well as for shaping social futures has been increasingly noticed.

Importantly, two family-related foresight projects have been completed in the European context recently. The first one was part of the OECD International Future Programme (OECD, 2012); the second belonged to the FamilyPlatform project (Kapella et al., 2011). It goes beyond the scope of this report to present these projects in details. They have been described (along with other foresight research) in previous Deliverables of Work Package 10 (Deliverable 10.1, di Giulio et al., 2013, and Deliverable 10.2, Philipov et al., 2014). Their main aim was to explore various scenarios of possible developments (economic, social, institutional, cultural, technological, etc.) and to discuss their role for the future situation of families. Even very unlikely developments and their consequences were explored in these scenarios. The extensive lists of factors considered in these projects are presented in Appendix I. In addition, the "Futures task force workshop" (Philipov et al., 2014) provided important insights into what forces might shape the future of families. They are also summarised in the Appendix.

All factors considered in the previous family-related foresight activities can be divided—somewhat crudely—into two dimensions: an economic and a cultural one, with special focus on gender roles. As for *economic developments*, a more pessimistic and a more optimistic line of development were envisioned in the previous foresight projects (OECD, 2012; FamilyPlatform, 2011). In the pessimistic version, slow economic growth or even recession were discussed, although previous scenarios did not really consider the possibility of an enduring economic crisis. Still, a negative line of development included high unemployment, low government investments, increasing poverty and very limited social support. Economic prosperity was seen as an antithesis to some extent. In some future scenarios it was not perceived as necessary for the state to spend more on welfare. For instance, as a hardly realistic scenario it was envisioned that a rich society could have a completely privatized social sector. (Kapella et al., 2011). Technology and IT development were considered as important dimensions for economic prosperity. In the optimistic version of future developments, technical advances were emphasized, as they would bring many important changes such as e-learning, virtual schooling or teleworking (in general: e-living), which could also lead to a growing flexibility of the labour market.

Similarly, based on the previous foresight, two general directions of *cultural development* could be imagined (although in the FamilyPlatform more ambivalent perspectives were drafted). As already mentioned, gender roles were central here. At one end of the continuum

the family was envisioned with both partners economically self-reliant, equally dividing domestic chores and childcare ("new fatherhood"). The other end was defined as returning to more traditional roles, with women doing the household work and men focusing on paid work. Greater gender equity was seen as accompanied by a more general value shift: higher individualism and importance of self-realisation, greater freedom of choice and increasing liberalisation of social norms.

In the foresight research of the OECD and the FamilyPlatform project, many other factors and forces were discussed and their role for different aspects of life was considered (cf. Appendix I). It is not our aim to outline all formulated scenarios of future developments. Only the key dimensions—described above—delineate a very complex reality, especially when we realise that any direction of economic or cultural development might bring favourable as well as unfavourable consequences for families. For instance, the negative economic scenario might lead to stronger social ties, as the support of family and local networks will become crucial. At the same time, the positive economic scenario might lead to increasing inequities because some profit more from the economic boost than others and this might lead to the exclusion of economically weak families. Similarly, any direction of cultural development might influence the situation of families both positively and negatively. For instance, more individualistic values might be seen as harmful for family ties; while traditional values—like the traditional division of labour—may be perceived as allowing to put family and community wellbeing first. Conversely, more gender egalitarian values might be seen as a pre-requisite to founding and maintaining a family, while traditional gender roles might be considered to hamper family formation, increase intra-family inequality and to put families at (economic) risks.

Drawing on the previous foresight research, we are able to formulate a long list of possible future developments and their consequences. The question remains open as to what economic and cultural developments will be crucial for the wellbeing of vulnerable families in the years to come. What changes might most impact on the situation of these families? And what combination of economic and cultural drivers might be particularly favourable, or challenging?

Looking at the future situation of vulnerable families, we should pay special attention to children's needs. Participants of the "Futures task force workshop" strongly emphasised this

necessity (Philipov et al., 2014). The parents' disadvantaged situation is easily transferred to their children who are raised in unfavourable conditions and inherit a disadvantaged status from their family of origin. Consequently, we face the reproduction of vulnerability in families. "Poverty reproduces poverty, and social exclusion reproduces social exclusion" (Philipov et al., 2014, p. 18). We need to understand what drivers might influence poverty, social exclusion or other dimensions of vulnerability. But it is equally important to look into factors that might break the cycle of intergenerational transfers of social inequalities. While some actions and policy measures might be designed to improve the general situation of families, others might be specifically directed towards the situation of children.

2.3 Present research

In our study, we conduct Focus Group Interviews (FGIs) with policymakers and other social actors involved in family-related issues. Discussions with these informants allow us to gain rich and unique insights, outlining the most important areas of interest for future policy measures that would improve the situation of European families. We seek to answer the following research questions:

(1) Which types of families with children might be particularly vulnerable?

(2) How might various future developments affect such families?

(3) What policy measures will be crucial to prevent the "reproduction of vulnerability" within families in the future?

Our research draws on previous family-related foresight projects, but it is not designed to replicate their findings. We do not aim at developing new scenarios of how different factors will impact on family life in the future. Instead, guided by the findings of "Futures task force workshop" we chose to concentrate our study on the situation of vulnerable families. Due to the focused and therefore narrow topic, our investigation allows for going more in-depth and possibly for identifying new, important aspects that may have been omitted in previous studies. To identify these aspects, we employ an open, explorative methodology: broad and open questions about future developments and trends provide different insights and perspectives. It should enable participants (and us) to think "outside of the box".

For the current foresight exercise, we decided to use the expertise of persons who are directly or indirectly involved in policy making. Policymakers and stakeholders might give attention

to different aspects than scientists because they are experts who are working on concrete problems and practical issues. They provide a valuable field perspective. The specific selection of debaters allows us to be more policy oriented and to go into more detail in this respect as well.

In the following chapter we present our methodological choices in detail, discussing their advantages and limitations.

3 Data and Methods

3.1 Research method: advantages and limitations of Focus Group Interviews

In this project five focus group discussions with policymakers and stakeholders have taken place in five European countries to gain insight into challenges for social policy that might appear in the future. As our primary aim was to reveal the practitioners' subjective views, focus group interviews were well suited for it (Morgan & Spanish, 1984).

A focus group discussion is a mix of two methods, the focused interview and the group discussion (Bryman & Bell, 2011, pp. 501 et seq.). A focused interview is a semi-structured interview with emphasis on a well-defined topic. Respondents should get the time and scope to give their opinions on the particular thematic focus. A group discussion is a conversation between several participants that is facilitated by a moderator. The number of respondents should not be smaller than five and bigger than twelve individuals (Lamnek, 2010). Thus, a focus group can shortly be defined as "a group interview centred on a specific topic ('focus') and facilitated and co-ordinated by a moderator or facilitator, which seeks to generate primarily qualitative data, by capitalising on the interaction that occurs within the group setting" (Sim & Snell, 1996, p. 189).

Similar to other qualitative methods, focus group discussions are useful for exploring complex phenomena; they aim at grasping the complete picture of a studied matter and its relationship to other elements of reality (Bryman, 1988; Maxwell, 1996). As a semi-structured, rather open qualitative approach, FGIs allow to observe and explain ambivalence in meanings and views. Compared to individual interviews, focus groups have several advantages. First, they provide information on the "dynamics" of attitudes and opinions in the context of the interaction that

occurs between the participants (Morgan, 1988). Second, they may encourage a greater degree of spontaneity in the expression of views than alternative methods of data collection (Butler, 1996). The FGI allows for "brain storming" in a group setting revealing topics that might not necessarily have been revealed otherwise. As in real life, where people do not act in isolation from each other, debaters in FGIs are challenged by additional information, alternative ideas, and divergent opinions. Thus, a major advantage of the FGI is that researchers usually get to know a variety of views. Furthermore, arguments have to be clearly articulated in case of disagreement between discussants. This often allows for additional insights (cf. Bryman & Bell, 2011).

When interpreting and analysing the data, however, we have to bear in mind certain limitations and specifics of focus groups: First, there is no one-to-one relationship between the apparent importance of an issue within a group and its importance for the members of this group. Generalising from focus groups may be problematic because we do not work with a representative sample and we get our data from a social interaction occurring in a particular context. We can therefore only generalise at a theoretical level. Furthermore, opinions expressed in focus groups cannot be used as a measure of consensus (cf. Bryman & Bell, 2011; Sim, 1998).

3.2 The choice of countries and participants

Although in all countries there are certain risk groups and types of families prone to vulnerability, even within the EU there are also pronounced differences between member states: For example, the share of children living in a household at risk of poverty or social exclusion amounts to less than 20 per cent in Sweden while it reaches 50 per cent in Bulgaria (López Vilaplana, 2013, Figure 1). Moreover, a type of family that belongs to vulnerable families in one country does not necessarily belong to vulnerable families in other countries. Living in a large family with three or more children has much more impact on vulnerability in some countries than in others (Fusco et al., 2010, pp. 147, 153). Also, specific types of vulnerable families may in some sense be more important in certain countries just because their number (and their share in total households with children) is large in some countries but small in others.[6] Differences between member states are related to their economic,

[6] For solo-parent households and large households with four or more children see Iacovou and Skew (2010, pp. 84, 86).

institutional and cultural settings. To account for these differences and to assure a sufficient variety of views and different perspectives of informants, we chose to conduct the study in countries of different welfare regimes.

The focus groups were conducted in Austria (Vienna), Poland (Warsaw), Spain (Madrid), and Sweden (Stockholm). The countries were selected to represent distinct welfare regimes and family policy models (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999; Ferrarini, 2006; Korpi, 2000). While Sweden represents the *Social Democratic Welfare Regime* with high dual-earner support, Austria belongs to central European countries with a *Conservative Welfare Regime* characterised by more general family support. Spain is an example of a *southern European Regime* with less state support. Finally, Poland as a former socialist country experienced a change in social policy from a high level of support for working mothers to a more conservative welfare policy.[7] To provide additional insights, the fifth FGI in Brussels (Belgium) was designed to also include experts and stakeholders at EU level. The welfare regimes of the selected countries are described in more detail in Appendix II. In addition to covering different welfare regimes, the selection of countries also offers some variation with respect to family types and the economic situation of the countries.[8] However, regarding the cultural background of the countries, Austria, Spain, and Poland are more similar to each other than each of them is to Sweden. The first three countries have long been dominated by Catholicism. In all three countries, the Catholic Church has played a major role in family matters and family policies (e.g. in family law, marriage, divorce legislation). In all three countries, the power of the Catholic Church has diminished over the past decades, albeit at different pace. Especially in Poland, the Catholic Church has retained much of its political and normative influence. At the moment, Sweden is a clearly secular country, Spain and Austria can be described as somewhat religious, while religiosity is still very high in Poland (Burkimsher, 2014). We need to keep the similarities and the differences in cultural backgrounds in mind when interpreting the results of our focus groups.

The main topics in the focus group discussions are vulnerable families, the reproduction of vulnerability within families and children's situation in a family as well as their wellbeing. We aimed at practitioners dealing with general family-related issues, although we did allow

[7] We have tried to include a liberal welfare state, as well, but this has not materialized by the time this report has been written.
[8] For example, large families are more prevalent in Spain than in Sweden. Furthermore, the latter shows a much higher GDP per head and was not affected as hard by the economic crisis either.

for representatives of organisations that deal with vulnerable families and children's needs. To increase diversity within the groups, we invited policymakers (governmental organisation or (federal) state representatives, parliament members) and civil society actors (representatives of various non-governmental organisations). In each country local experts were contacted (at municipality or country level), with the exception of the focus group in Brussels which gathered informants at an international level.

3.3 Fieldwork: procedure and sample

The focus group discussions were conducted on the premises of the local researchers of the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project between November 2014 and January 2015 in the following five cities: Brussels, Madrid, Stockholm, Vienna and Warsaw. The local researchers recruited the participants their own way (mostly by e-mail or phone). Each participant received an invitation letter with the necessary information about the project and the date, place and main topics of the focus group discussion (see Appendix III). If a potential participant did not respond to the invitation or declined, the local researcher invited another person of the same or a similar institution and of the same or equivalent status and relevance to the project. A few days before the focus group meeting respondents got a reminder by e-mail. Altogether, 37 participants took part in the organised discussions; the number of the focus group participants varied between six and nine informants in each city (see Table 1).

Table 1: Invitations and final size of focus groups

country	Vienna	Brussels	Warsaw	Madrid	Stockholm
size of the FG	9	6	7	7	8
invited but absent	18	1	3	10	2

On the one hand Vienna has the highest number of informants, but it also shows the highest number of absentees. While nine respondents participated in the Vienna focus group, 18 invitees refused or did not even respond to the invitation. Madrid is the city with the second largest number of invited but absent informants; 10 of 17 invited participants did not take part in the discussion. Brussels is the country with the least absentees; six of seven invited participants were able to take part in the focus group. Stockholm and Warsaw also had just a small number of absentees. As the main reason for refusal was related to timing issues (i.e. no time or conflicting obligations), we have no grounds to suspect that there was any systematic bias in who eventually took part in the discussions.

Most participants are members of non-governmental organisations (see Table 2). Despite some difficulties in recruiting policymakers, each focus group included at least two policymakers or representatives of governmental organisations. Most participants were experts on general family issues. With the exception of Brussels, each focus group contained at least one expert on single parents.

Table 2: Composition of the final sample

City	Vienna	Brussels	Warsaw	Madrid	Stockholm
Background of informants					
governmental organisation	-	1	2	3	5
non-governmental organisation	5	4	5	4	3
members of parliament	3	1	-	-	-
state representatives	1	-	-	-	-
Profile of the informants (area of interest or focus of NGO)					
experts on single parents	1	-	1	1	2
experts on large families	-	-	1	1	-
experts on children and youth	1	1	2	-	-
experts on general family issues	7	4	3	4	6
experts on intergenerational linkages	-	1	-	1	-
Sex of informants					
men	3	6	1	3	1
women	6	-	6	4	7
Size of the FG	9	6	7	7	8

Table 3: Details on Focus Groups

City	Vienna	Brussels	Warsaw	Madrid	Stockholm
date of FGI	13.11.2014	10.12.2014	08.01.2015	14.11.2014	01.12.2014
place	Vienna Institute of Demography	Committee of the Regions	Warsaw School of Economics	International Federation for Family Development	Stockholm University
moderator	Bernhard Riederer	Bernhard Riederer	Monika Mynarska	Pablo García Ruiz	Bernhard Riederer
observers	Thomas Fent, Desiree Krivanek	Eloïse Leboutte, Marina Robben	Irena Kotowska, Teresa Kapela	Eloïse Leboutte, Belén Rodríguez	Livia Oláh, Gerda Neyer
language	German	English	Polish	Spanish	English
duration of the FGI	103 min.	110 min.	90 min.	90 min.	90 min.

Although the most important criterion of participants to be invited to FGIs was to be an expert on family-related issues and thus gender played a less important role, it is interesting to see

that it was mostly men who participated in the focus group in Brussels, while in Vienna, Warsaw and Stockholm the opposite was the case and female participants were dominating.

The FGIs were designed to take approximately 90 minutes and the discussions indeed lasted between 90 and 110 minutes (see Table 3). While the FGIs in Brussels and Stockholm were conducted in English, the local language was used in discussion in the other three settings. The focus group interviews in Vienna, Brussels and Stockholm were conducted by Bernhard Riederer, the one in Warsaw by local researcher Monika Mynarska and the one in Madrid by local researcher Pablo García Ruiz. All the FGIs were observed at least by one local researcher. Participants of the focus group discussions were not paid, but in most countries they received a small "thank you" gift including some publications on family-related topics.

3.4 Discussion topics and guideline of focus groups

The team members of this project developed a standardised guideline that concerned the future of vulnerable families in the context of different cultural, economic and societal developments (see Appendix IV). The guideline covered three thematic areas that reflected our three research questions. Section 1 addressed a general question on what family types might be particularly vulnerable. The increasing diversity of family forms was our starting point. Thus, at the beginning of the section the participants were confronted with different family configurations and asked whether any of them was—in their opinion—particularly vulnerable or needed special attention.

The second section was directed towards future developments that will shape the situation of various vulnerable or potentially vulnerable families. As the diversity of family forms is still increasing, some families might remain susceptible to poverty and social exclusion in the future, the situation of others might become even worse, while the life of yet other groups might improve significantly. In this section, the participants of the focus groups were confronted with possible (only generally outlined) directions of future developments and encouraged to discuss how various changes might affect the situation of different family forms in coming years. Drawing on the previous foresight research, possible directions of future developments were sketched along economic and cultural lines. However, the discussants were encouraged to add further dimensions that might be important for the future of vulnerable families.

The third section of the guideline was designed to address policy aspects explicitly. First the experts discussed possibilities to provide equality of opportunities[9] to children raised in all types of families in Europe in the next 30 years from now. Second the FGIs were confronted with three traditional "pillars" of family policy (financial transfers, childcare, and parental leaves) and other relevant areas of state influence and support (e.g. laws regulating the parent–child relationship, the educational system or employment policy). Policy interventions can be important to prevent inequalities for children and families in the future, but depending on the family forms and the circumstances not all of these measures might be efficient. Thus, the experts discussed what policy intervention will be the most important for different family configurations, under different circumstances, and in divergent scenarios of the future to prevent inequalities and to secure equal chances for children.

3.5 Analytic strategy

Each focus group was tape-recorded (after receiving participants' consent), transcribed verbatim and translated into English (that is, for non-English groups, as two groups were conducted in English). The analysis of material was driven by the research questions and the three thematic areas of the interviews. However, even though the FGIs were divided into sections corresponding to the research questions, the themes emerged at different points. For instance, very early in the interview the informants eagerly discussed various policy measures, important for vulnerable families. Thus, the first author of this report used the combination of the top-down and bottom-up coding to analyse the material. First, passages were identified where the informants discussed the topics that are central for our research (top-down coding). The material was codded in line with three themes: (1) types of vulnerable families; (2) factors and forces shaping their future; (3) policies that might prevent the reproduction of vulnerability (top-down coding). In the next step, the bottom-up (open) coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was performed within each theme to identify all aspects mentioned and discussed. Coding was performed using the NVivo 10 software package.

Independently of the coding procedure, the second author read through the transcripts and prepared detailed summaries for each FGI content. The summaries were then compared with

[9] More precisely, by "equal opportunities" we meant an "equal" start into adulthood (equal chances). This was also explained to discussants. However, we left it open for discussion what kind of "equality" and to what extent "equality" is possible.

the outcomes of the coding procedure. Consequently, the central topics of discussions were identified and characterised in a dialogue between the two authors. Whenever the authors had any doubts on how to interpret certain statements, they contacted the scientific collaborators in the respective countries. Moreover, once all the results were described, the draft version of the report was sent to the partners in Belgium, Spain and Sweden, as well as to the colleagues in Austria and Poland, who acted as observers in the FGIs. The aim was to additionally validate our findings and to obtain confirmation from other team members that no misinterpretation had taken place.

3.6 Methodological remarks

Conducting FGIs we were confronted with some challenges that need to be considered before we present the findings. First, it was rather difficult to translate the English term "vulnerability" to the mother tongues of discussants in Austria, Poland, and Spain. In some languages the word "vulnerability" does not exist or has a totally different meaning. The moderators coped with this issue by means of descriptions of "being vulnerable" and used terms like "economic hardship" or "social integration/exclusion".

Second, policymakers and stakeholders are different from usual participants in FGIs. Most of them are trained in communication and used to discuss policies. This is an advantage from our perspective as they are well prepared and eager to share their views and to argue why they hold certain positions. However, they are also skilled in introducing additional topics that are important from their perspective. Similarly, some NGO members wanted to get in contact with policymakers for future lobbying. Their answers therefore sometimes also focused on their own goals and did not necessarily relate directly to the topics of our main interests. These parts were largely omitted in the analyses. Only the material relevant to our topics is included in the findings.

Another analytical difficulty stemmed from the fact that sometimes it was hard to separate the discussion on societal developments from the discussion on policies. Since our participants are practitioners, they were more eager to discuss possible actions and policies than to consider various future developments (especially less likely ones). Consequently, the second section of the interview was sometimes problematic and the discussion was centred on various risks and challenges which are currently important. On the one hand, we noticed difficulties to

imagine future states and developments in detail which is indeed a very challenging task (see Gilbert, 2006; Kahneman, 2011). On the other hand, however, policymakers and stakeholders are used to think of the future in terms of how to reach certain goals, and what measures are needed to get the society closer to what they see as an ideal future state. Consequently, they spoke of future developments along these lines. We shall keep that in mind, as we present and discuss our results.

It should also be noted that, due to their high motivation and profound knowledge experts did not always have enough time to answer the questions in the details they wanted to. A minor problem has arisen from the fact that especially policymakers often have a busy daily routine. In almost every FGI a phone rang or someone had to leave earlier because of another important meeting. These issues did not, however, have any large impact on the general dynamic of the discussion.

A final methodological comment refers to country differences and similarities. On the one hand we tried to sample countries that diverge in terms of welfare state regime, economic development and to also culture. Thus, differences in results might represent, or follow from, real differences between countries, just as similarities might result from similar cultural, economic, or political developments. FGIs, however, are not representative in a way such that conclusions drawn from them can be transferred to countries or their populations as a whole (non-representativeness of samples). On the other hand, evolving differences might be due to differences in the group compositions (who participates in FGIs?). Indeed, we do not know whether differences between FGIs are real country differences. In any case, readers should keep in mind that group composition is not independent of country background.

4 Results

4.1 Vulnerable families

In the first section of the interview, the informants were confronted with a growing diversity of family forms across Europe and asked which of them are, in their opinion, particularly vulnerable? In the guideline, vulnerability was defined in general terms, with reference to economic hardship and social isolation only. Nevertheless, the questions were asked in

an open, non-directive way, allowing informants to address different aspects of vulnerability in the course of the discussion.

Indeed, the experts presented various aspects and dimensions of vulnerability—different reasons for which families might need more attention and support. And these aspects intertwined as the informants discussed different potentially vulnerable family types.

Dimensions of vulnerability discussed by the experts:

- Economic hardship, poverty; economic uncertainty, instability, fear about own future; insufficient housing, low living standard;
- Social exclusion, lack of social networks (friends, family);
- Stigmatisation, disapproval from the society, discrimination by institutions and legal regulations;
- Time pressure, overwork, being overburdened; stress (especially related to work)—as a consequence: various health problems, depression, anxiety, behavioural and educational problems of children;
- Lack of family stability, risk of divorce, especially difficult for children—traumatic experiences, fights between parents etc.;
- Health problems, in particular disabilities;
- Violence, alcohol.

In the discussion about potentially vulnerable family types we relied on a demographic perspective and presented suggestions on families of different sizes and compositions (see Appendix IV). While some informants argued that no family configuration entails vulnerability inevitably, there was a general consensus that some types are more "at risk". Almost unanimously, single parents were listed as most vulnerable. Also families with many children (large families) were mentioned early on in the discussion in most settings.

> *"I think that it is hard to define this by the family constellation itself, so of course there are these two types, and I think this is undisputed, among the most frequent types of families, that it's single parents and large families, I mean with three and more, who are most at risk of being affected by poverty, this can be seen in any statistics, and then there are just aggravating factors coming into play, that is, in what conditions does this poverty risk increase or decrease." (Vienna)*

Other family configurations were mentioned too, such as "patchwork" (reconstituted) families or foster/adoptive families. The informants also emphasized other characteristics that might increase vulnerability of a family, such as migrant status or health-related issues. The types of vulnerable families that were mentioned can be grouped into five categories, although only the first three are related to family configurations:

1) Single parents and various family types related to divorce/separation (divorced parents sharing physical custody, patchwork families, but also families facing a risk of divorce).
2) Large families (families with three or more children).
3) Orphans, adoptive/foster families.
4) Migrant families; refugees (mentioned in Austria only), but also children raised by one parent or by other family members because their parent(s) migrated for work (children "left-behind", mentioned in Poland only: "Euro-orphans").
5) Families with infirm members, especially with disabled children.

Importantly, some families might belong to two or three of the above categories at the same time, for instance, a single parent (1) of migrant background (4) with a disabled child (5). Such combinations were perceived as particularly challenging. Moreover, the informants added one dimension that might further increase or decrease the vulnerability of families, that is the place of residence. Families living in rural areas may be in a more difficult situation with respect to employment opportunities and the availability of childcare facilities. Also, a rural environment might be less open to a variety of family forms and thus associated with a higher risk of social exclusion.

In the following sections we explore our informants' perspectives on the five types of vulnerable families listed above. Some related topics will be addressed as well. First, we present the situation of single parents and consider further consequences that divorce or separation have for parents and children. We comment briefly on the issue of non-marital cohabitation as well. Families with cohabiting parents were not listed as particularly vulnerable, but interesting insights related to the topic were revealed, especially in relation to separations and reconstituted families. Next we discuss the situations of large families and of foster or adoptive families. Other family characteristics not related to the size or composition (migrant status, disability) will be briefly addressed. At the end of this chapter, we discuss another family type that constitutes a special case of vulnerability related to stigmatisation and discrimination: same-sex couples with children.

4.1.1 Single parents

Single parenthood was the family constellation most unanimously seen as vulnerable, combining many aspects of vulnerability. They are all listed—with relevant quotations—in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Aspects of vulnerability in solo-parents families

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Economic hardship – one provider	*"Single-parent families seem to be particularly vulnerable to poverty and it was already the case even before the crisis. Indeed, in this type of families, only one person provides the family with financial means." (Madrid)*
	„In families with one parent only, when childcare is one parent's responsibility (…) The financial problems are most difficult, as one person—well, just one person, as there is frequently a problem with child-support money—one person needs to provide for the whole household." (Warsaw)
Difficulties combining work and childcare	*"It's really difficult for a single parent to find the equilibrium between his/her parental and professional responsibilities. We witness that these persons often don't manage to create this equilibrium, ending up in precarious jobs. In terms of daily distribution of time, these parents are confronted with questions such as: who is going to pick up my child from school if I am working late? How would I take vocational training, as my children need me at home?" (Madrid)*
	"If you have the child living with you full-time, it's also hard to keep up with a full-time job as a single parent and perhaps you will then work part-time instead, and you then will earn less money." (Stockholm)
Being overburdened by childcare responsibilities	*"The main problem is to reconcile everything. I mean childcare, work and to find some time for yourself, too. This is so hard." (Warsaw)*
	"And you can never rest (…) you need rest for at least a half an hour sometimes, but maybe you can't if you are a single parent." (Stockholm)
Stress & health consequences	*"You can't work overtime because you have a child and you can't pay for everything, so the only thing that happens is that it gets worse every month and that has a very tremendous effect on your you know on your health and so on, so that's single parents in my perspective." (Stockholm)*
Stigmatisation	*"Even though we are living in the 21st century, these children suffer from social pressure because they don't have a dad for instance or because their family is not bi-parental and it's not socially accepted everywhere." (Madrid)*
	"Sometimes, it seems that children [of solo parents] (...) suffer a lot, as they perceive they are not like other children. So, they feel different and rejected. And it is painful for the parents too." (Madrid)
Social exclusion, a lack of social network	*"I should say social exclusion because they don't have the same network (…) they mention that it's very hard, you know because if you work late, you have to find a friend to pick up your child, there is always this lack of network that could be supportive and could give you strength." (Stockholm)*
Lack of emotional support of a partner	*"Mono-parental families, I think. It's terrible. I mean having a partner to share your problems with is not comparable to living alone and having to cope with difficulties alone." (Madrid)*
Lack of support in case of various life events (e.g. illness)	*"If you become ill as a single parent and have to live on social benefits, then it's very hard if you are ill for more than a month, it's very hard to manage only that income or if you are unemployed." (Stockholm)*

The first issue is the economic dimension: there is only one provider, who alone has to combine paid work and family tasks. As he or she is the only one to care for a child (children), it is not possible to work long hours, work intensity needs to be limited or one may end up in "precarious jobs". In extreme cases, a single parent might have to leave the labour

market altogether. Consequently, they would no longer be able to meet the financial needs of their family.

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

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

> *"A handicapped child, of course is a much more serious problem for a single parent than for a two-parent family because well, there is only one person available for the caring tasks, or when another relative must be cared for, the single parent of course also has a much higher workload than when there are two" (Vienna)*
>
> *"There are children mentally challenged or children with cerebral palsies—using respirators, things like these. Where mother is not even able to leave the house. And if she's alone, she will not leave the child. This is night and day, morning to evening—sitting and watching and no life at all." (Warsaw)*

4.1.2 After divorce: shared custody and new families

Single parenthood is not always a result of divorce or separation, but it is probably the most severe consequence of breaking up with one's partner. The informants noted, however, two

other family configurations that result from separation/divorce and which might produce difficulties.

First, the issue of shared (physical) custody was mentioned—when after a divorce a child has "alternating residences" spending one-two weeks with each of his or her parents. This living arrangement was discussed in details in Stockholm only, but it was mentioned in Brussels, too. On the one hand, the informants noted *"when they [children] have alternating residences you can see they have almost the same level of living as those who are living with both parents"*. On the other hand, such an arrangement puts higher demands on the parents to collaborate which might not always be easy to accommodate. Importantly, if the parents share physical custody, they might have limited employment options as they cannot be mobile (*"Sometimes it's so difficult, you have to move to get a job, but what do you do with the child if you both have custody")*. All in all, it was noted that legal regulations are not yet fully adjusted to parents sharing physical custody over their children after a divorce or separation.

Second, the topic of "patchwork" families was brought up, although it was discussed in greater details in Warsaw and Madrid only. These families also face difficulties with childcare arrangements as needs of different actors (ex-partners, current partners, children from different relationships) should be coordinated. In Madrid, it was emphasized that reconstituted families experience higher level of conflicts. Also, a new partner may not accept a child from the previous relationship.

> *"And even if they are in a new formal relationship, they are married, but there are children from previous relationships—managing it all, conciliation of different roles, agreeing on where the children should spend time, with new parents, a new family, with new siblings—these things are difficult, too." (Warsaw)*
>
> *"I wanted to point out that single parents obviously, as you said, are facing enormous difficulties, reconstituted families, too. It seems like the level of conflict is higher in these families." (Madrid)*

Finally, we should mention one further aspect, related to divorce. In the discussion in Warsaw, the informants noted that also families on the verge of divorce are vulnerable and require additional attention with respect to the children. Children are faced with traumatic experiences, witnessing the parents' problems and fights, and they are usually left alone with their fears and worries.

"Parents on the verge of divorce. I mean from the child's perspective this is a really big drama (...) there is no support here and this drama gets more and more serious and a child is often lost in it. Mum and dad start to fight about their things and this child… well, not always obviously, but in many cases, this child is somehow…not considered really." (Warsaw)

4.1.3 Is non-marital cohabitation still an issue?

In the previous research activities of Work Package 10 ("Futures task force workshop") families with unmarried parents were also identified as vulnerable. This topic did not seem important to our informants in FGIs, however. Only in Brussels one expert noted that "*cohabiting parents tend to be more unstable settings for growing up for children."* While this opinion was not universally shared, it is worth noticing as it complements the discussion on divorce and reconstituted families. If indeed, cohabiting unions are less stable, they might increasingly face the problems related to single parenthood, shared physical custody and patchwork families. In Poland, some additional problems related to patchwork families and cohabitation could be inferred from the discussion. In particular, the informants mentioned (although did not discuss in detail) that there could be tensions between a parent's new partner and the children (e.g. *"the woman who is now sharing their father's life tells this or this to them and they are suffering a lot"*).

A few other aspects, related to cohabitation were briefly mentioned. In Stockholm, it was noted that only in some extreme—and rare—cases cohabitation might pose a problem. For instance, if a mother dies before the fatherhood was established. In Vienna, one participant noted that *"in certain villages it does make a difference if your parents are married",* while another remarked that *"in the more open-minded rural regions not to be married is no longer a cause of stigmatisation"*. Nonetheless, some (minor) issues related to legal regulations as well as social stigmatisation might still pose a challenge in some cases. Otherwise, the informants noticed that the marital status of parents is not a pivotal factor with respect to their vulnerability. As it was stated in Vienna, *"the fact whether children live with married parents or unmarried parents does not say anything about the income of those parents"*.

4.1.4 Large families: many children—many challenges

Large families were also mentioned in most focus groups and the respondents usually agreed that having many children might expose a family to vulnerability. Stockholm constitutes an exception here, as the informants noted that in Sweden having many children is more common among wealthy families who can afford it. In all other settings, the informants discussed several dimensions of vulnerability that large families are exposed to (Table 5), but economic demands were central.

First, with a larger number of children, also costs of living are higher. It is not only an issue of food and clothing or other daily products. It is also an issue of having sufficient living space and being able to cover the costs of education for a larger number of children. The financial consequences were also discussed in terms of the mother's labour market situation and retirement funds. The experts emphasized that with more children, a woman stays out of the labour market for a prolonged time. In some cases she might need to become a stay-at-home mother, as with a larger number of children the costs of childcare are too high. The loss of a second earner has a negative impact on the financial situation of the family. It also impairs the mother's situation. Having been outside the labour market for a longer period, she might face difficulties in returning to paid work. She also faces the prospect of low pension at retirement.

Importantly, the poor pension prospects for stay-at-home mothers were discussed not only in relation to large families. In fact, in any family constellation it was noted that women who leave the labour market to take care of their children might face problems at retirement age, but also in case of separation from the partner. We return to this topic in the discussion of factors important for increasing or decreasing vulnerability.

A possible stigmatisation with respect to large families was mentioned, too (with the exception of Stockholm, where—as indicated before—large families were perceived differently). In other settings, it was noted that families with many children might be perceived as "social welfare scroungers". In Poland, it was noted that some poor families with many children might actually avoid asking for financial support, because they fear that social workers would consider them as irresponsible parents who are not able to fulfil their parental roles. Consequently, children might be taken away from them and put into foster homes or put up with foster parents. This could be seen as an extreme case of stigmatisation.

Table 5: Aspects of vulnerability in families with many children

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Economic difficulties – more money needed with bigger families	*"From a purely economic point of view, it seems that some family types might be more vulnerable and more exposed to changing economic situations than others. Large families happen to be confronted to such difficulties." (Madrid)*
	"The costs of studies and so on and so forth these problems are kind of deeper or are bigger for large families because of course they have to finance the studies of three or four children for example." (Brussels)
A need for sufficient housing	*"They have to find a house that is bigger or an apartment that is bigger and so we pointed out these kinds of families as families that, yes, may face more problems than others." (Brussels)*
	"If big families don't […] find a …[large enough] housing, that's the problem then, then you can't …[have] the family […] you want." (Stockholm)
Financial consequences of breaks in employment for mothers	*"Having only one child gives you the possibility still to work in a way that you can have a higher amount [of child benefits] after birth. But as soon you have two or three children you lose the flexibility, you end up with a low wage and so you are only able to get 300 Euro. So you are punished, you are punished for having children by the government. And this is the structures we should concentrate on when small families are financed by the government and bigger families are punished by the government. (…) Many mothers are not able to get this high salary to be able to have a high retirement that means that they have seven children who pay into the retirement fund and the mother gets maximum 30 per cent of the money, 70 per cent is passed on to people who didn't have any children." (Brussels)*
Stigmatisation	*"It seems that there is on the one hand this heroic element to having more children, but then at the same time also the stigmatisation, in the sense of, I don't know [other participant: Social welfare scroungers]. Exactly, they have all those … they produce their children at the cost of society." (Vienna)*
	"Having many children is a stigma and [they] mostly say: Don't you have other hobbies? (…) that I am misusing the state allowances, yeah? This is something I often get to hear." (Brussels)

As with single parents, the topic of "combined vulnerability" was brought up also for large families. Some traumatic life event might be particularly difficult when there are many children in the family.

> *"[In large families] this task requires a lot of concentration… to manage with all the children. The main task is not to miss anything in any child's development. Very difficult task in itself. At the time when there is a divorce, there is trauma in the family, there is a disability that's all ... it's very difficult. (...) In case of divorce, not one child is suffering—but five. Five separate tragedies. (...) Any problem in the family is lived multiple times." (Warsaw)*

4.1.5 Orphans, adoptive and foster families

Orphans and adoptive or foster families were also mentioned as particularly vulnerable in the discussions. The informants acknowledged that this is not a very common constellation, but

even though the number of children concerned is not that large, children with no biological parents are in a very difficult situation.

In Poland it was discussed that foster parents are not always suitable for taking care of children and that foster or adoptive parents do not always enter the system for noble motivations.

> *"I see one other type of the [vulnerable] family that is not on the graph. Maybe it is marginal from the demographic point of view, if we look at percentages and numbers. I mean foster and adoptive families (…) In these families, all things cumulate! There is no bigger disaster than this. We have terrible deficits here. These are not pink, happy, round children. We have terrible deficits of physical, psychological and any other nature. And frequently there are also biological children in these families, and this is a highly explosive combination." (Warsaw)*

Also in other settings, a particularly demanding situation of children with no biological parents (or with parents deprived of their parental rights) was mentioned. Their vulnerability was discussed mainly in relation to psychological and social aspects.

> *"Children living without parents, they usually live in different foster families. It's very hard to get adopted as a child living without your parents and there is maybe a small debate about that in Sweden it ought to be easier because maybe you have lived with the foster parents for four years since you were born and then your biological parent wants to have you back maybe although the mother is still very mentally ill. I think they are at a very huge risk psychologically and socially too." (Stockholm)*
>
> *"The single parents, or even children without parents, so those are the ones who are worst off, regardless of what other factors we consider, like education or no matter what, those are the ones who are most hit and worst off." (Vienna)*

4.1.6 Migration: immigrants, refugees and children left behind

In the literature, migrants and ethnic minorities are also mentioned as potentially vulnerable. In the FGIs, we did not address this topic explicitly. Diversity of family configurations were our starting point in this research, therefore migrant or ethnic status was conceptualised as an additional factor. Indeed, the informants noted that, for instance, single parents or large families of migrant origin might be in a particularly difficult situation, mostly because of

problems in finding jobs (especially when poorly educated), having lower income and due to lack of social network. The issue of problems related to local language was mentioned as well, also in the context of raising children (e.g. not being able to help children with school homework).

> *"If you have high migration and the parents do not know our language and you send the kids home with homework in Swedish and they should have help from their parents at home to solve them, you will not have equal opportunities and that's the system that we have." (Stockholm)*

Importantly, the situation of migrants was discussed with different intensity and with different connotations in our research settings, clearly reflecting differences in migration patterns between the countries. Being a migrant was not perceived as very problematic in Sweden, although it was noted that they might have lower income (especially if they are not well educated or fail to integrate). An establishment allowance and support programmes addressed to the refugees coming to Sweden were mentioned as "a good incentive too, to make people come into society faster". By contrast, the issue of migrants, and especially of refugees, was seen as difficult in the discussion in Vienna. In particular, the situation of minor refugees was portrayed as extremely vulnerable, i.e. those coming to Austria without parents.

> *"When I take the migration background, considering children without parents, and these are refugees who have come here without their parents, then these kids are the poorest, in my eyes, for they won't have any aunt here or any other person to confide in. And that means they have to build their whole social network from scratch here, so they deserve particular protection." (Vienna)*

Moreover, in the Austrian setting, the issue of specific ethnic (migrant) communities was discussed and presented as a more general problem. One expert noted that some of these communities live somewhat separated from the rest of the society, with their own value systems, rules and rituals:

> *"The entire sphere of the migrants, we don't have any figures about that, we don't know a lot actually, and the way I see it, there is a massive formation of parallel worlds that we don't even fully register, that we actually don't know anything about, and in this respect my greatest worry is a socio-political one: that this type [of family] is not accompanied and supported at all, so essentially we do not know what kinds of things are developing there." (Vienna)*

In Spain, the situation of migrant families was only briefly mentioned: they were listed among those potentially vulnerable, and their situation was discussed only in relation to other factors (e.g. migrant solo parents). Instead, it was noted that young people migrate out of Spain, leaving their elderly parents behind. While this topic is not directly related to our research questions, the Polish discussion touched upon a similar issue, but in a direct relation to the children's situation. In Poland, the informants discussed the situation of children, who are "left behind", when one or both parents leave to work abroad. If one parent works abroad, this is associated with a difficult psychological situation with potential problems in the family which might lead to a divorce. If both parents work abroad and, for instance, grandparents are looking after a child, legal problems add to the picture on top of all other problems (as grandparents are not the legal guardians).

> *"There are two subcategories: First, children whose parents are abroad—temporarily or for a longer period of time—and they stay with their grandparents, the grandmother or with somebody else from their family, but this person is not able to act as a rightful custodian. And this brings a lot of problems (...) Second, there are children, with one parent abroad, being absent for some time. And there we also have a prospect of family breakdown. In my opinion it is a really serious challenge that we will be facing and the number of such families and such children will be increasing." (Warsaw)*

4.1.7 Disability or different forms of dependency

Disability, health problems or other forms of dependency in the family were also mentioned as very important factors increasing vulnerability. Similar to migrant status, these aspects are not directly related to family configuration and we did not ask about them explicitly. Nevertheless, they were discussed in all settings—although in Stockholm only in reaction to the observer's comments—and generally identified as important.

> *"There is one group missing for me in the current list, and these are the families with members in need of care, dependent family members, so when you have long-term care cases within a family, which means again that probably one breadwinner has to drop out." (Vienna)*

The "long-term care cases" relate, in our informants' opinion, to situations when a family member is disabled or chronically ill, but also when there is an elderly person in need of care. The more extreme cases of families with an alcoholic or a drug addict were mentioned, too.

Nonetheless, disability—especially a child's disability—was central in the discussions. As already presented in previous sections, it was frequently named as a factor which further increases vulnerability for those families that are already in a difficult situation because of their size or composition. Disability was perceived as particularly challenging in the case of solo parents or in families with a large number of children. Parents who raise a disabled child on their own might not be able to enter the labour market at all, becoming fully dependent on alimonies or social assistance. Also in large families, one parent—usually the mother—might need to stay at home and with only one earner, the situation of all children in a family would be impaired. In both cases, the situation is related to more duties and higher stress. In fact, problems with reconciling work and family and a heavier burden of parents in different life situations were repeatedly mentioned as central for vulnerability in many family types.

4.1.8 Same-sex couples with children

Before we move on to the next chapter, we should mention the situation of same-sex couples raising children. Since this topic remains controversial in many settings and it also poses many specific challenges, we chose not to focus on this particular family type in FGIs. We decided, however, that we will ask the informants to comment briefly on the situation of homosexual parents, if the topic does not occur spontaneously. Our aim was to see whether our experts consider the topic as relevant, in the context of vulnerability.

Same-sex families were rarely mentioned spontaneously and only discussed in reaction to moderator's question. The experts did not recognise any financial problems in homosexual families and thus they were not considered being a vulnerable family configuration. Nevertheless, they admitted that same-sex couples have to cope with legislative limitations, mostly with respect to parental rights and adoption.

> *"For example, you have a same-sex couple with child. The physical, biological mother can take maternity leave but the other one, no. So, the child has less support from both, ah, well, parents. So those are the kinds of policies where these kinds of families are actually vulnerabilised." (Brussels)*
>
> *"If you have to go, for instance, through an adoption procedure in order to be recognised as the parent of the child of you partner, it's a very heavy and long procedure." (Brussels)*

"I don't know how this concerns homosexuals who raise children together, these are two adults, or one adult with a child or two children… and in reality I cannot see any difference there… Now for this group there is the question, can they adopt children, can they have children in any way, yes? So that is their problem now." (Vienna)

The situation of homosexual families was perceived as most vulnerable in terms of social stigmatisation, however. This stigmatisation might affect parents, but also children raised by same-sex parents are at risk of being bullied at school.

"I think that homosexual families have the same problems in their private lives as heterosexual families but in addition to these problems, they also have to face social stigma. They sometimes have to face aggressive, xenophobic behaviours or remarks. What we need is to change these behaviours." (Madrid)

"If it's on children's wellbeing, I mean of course there is the whole issue of stigmatisation. Saying at school that you are a child of a same-sex couple might already put you in danger of bullying or whatever." (Brussels)

All in all, while the situation of same-sex families is not difficult financially, other aspects of vulnerability were present in the discussion. The topic requires, however, separate investigation. It would deserve a separate discussion and representatives of LGTB organisations should be invited to take part.

4.2 Future developments, drivers and challenges

In the second segment of the group discussion the participants were encouraged to talk about various—cultural, social, institutional, economic—changes that might be particularly favourable or unfavourable for the vulnerable families in the future. At the beginning of this section, respondents were presented with a graph that illustrated ways of possible cultural and economic developments in general terms (Appendix IV, Graph 2). Several experts in our FGIs criticised the graph, arguing that the directions presented are simplified or (culturally) biased. In our design, the graph was meant to anchor the discussion and the controversy around it was not intended. Nonetheless, the dynamics of these discussions revealed interesting viewpoints.

Informants animatedly discussed various directions of macro-level developments, but they were less eager to elaborate on various "end-states", i.e. different models of the future,

produced by different directions of social, cultural or economic changes. Instead they named numerous drivers: forces they considered crucial for the wellbeing of families. Informants focused mainly on the general wellbeing of (vulnerable) families and they rarely considered how any given driver might impact on a certain family type. The list below includes the main drivers suggested in the FGIs, which will be presented in the subsequent chapters in more detail.

- Economic aspects: Economic crisis versus economic growth
- Women's higher labour force participation (changing gender roles)
- Work and family reconciliation
    - Childcare arrangements
    - "Culture of workplace"[10]
    - Men's family involvement (changing gender roles)
- Cultural and social changes: society and relations within
    - Social ties, relationships and communication
    - Intergenerational relations
    - Norms and values: increasing diversity

Since all participants were informed that our aim is to look at various future challenges and they were prompted to think of future developments, we can assume that they perceive these drivers as important not only now but also in years to come. The forces described below should be considered crucial for situation of families at least in the short-term.

4.2.1 Economic crisis versus economic growth

Economic changes and turbulences at the macro level are clearly linked to the economic situation of families and influence the risk of poverty. There were, however, different aspects and mechanisms mentioned that might be at play here. They are all presented with relevant quotes in Table 6 below.

[10] The experts used term "culture of workplace" to describe organizational culture, as well as values, attitudes and practices shared by the employees and employers that shape an overall working atmosphere.

Table 6: Aspects related to economic crisis or a slowdown of economic growth

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Unemployment – worse financial situation of all families	*"The economic crisis, in my eyes, is a problem for any type of family: when there is high unemployment, it will soon hit someone in every type of family, and then this family will have less money." (Vienna)*
Youth unemployment – insecure entry into adulthood and postponement of family formation	*"The worst-case scenario is the one that I just actually mentioned which is that since young people do not have access to employment right now and they actually have to go through several internships because the educational system didn't prepare them for the labour market, this delays their decisions about families, and also, yeah, so that's my worst-case scenario." (Brussels)*
Structural unemployment – necessity to have jobs for people of different skills	*"It's important to have high-quality jobs and not low-quality jobs, it's important to be able to support yourself and one full-time job and not to have the lower and lower wages so that you have to have more than one job to support yourself." (Stockholm)*
Crisis – danger to the welfare system	*"The middle class is suffering tremendous deterioration, the rich are getting richer, the poor are poorer, etc. We don't know how things will evolve in the future. The one aspect we can be sure of is the anxiety of people when they say: pensions will end, the welfare state will no longer exist." (Madrid)*
	"With the economic crisis, if you get a big [one], if people don't trust the government and so on, there would be a big black market instead of a white official market and then you will not be able to finance reforms and redistribution of money, taking taxes, giving these groups [in need] more money so to speak. So that would be a worst-case scenario, if we get like 50 per cent black market here or something like that, then you would have a hard time redistributing money to these families." (Stockholm)
	"We are working on it getting better, that those families who are not so well off can take part in economic growth, to put it rather technically. But without economic growth, without economic activity, there is no tax revenue, and hence no social benefits—quite realistically." (Vienna)
Emotional stress related to financial crisis	*"Nowadays, we are delivering a lot of counselling and psychological support to families because of the terrible socioeconomic situation many families have to face. They don't have the necessary tools to cope with it, which creates a series of emotional problems. Our work is about helping them to face these problems and to solve them." (Madrid)*

First of all, in the discussions the economic crisis was linked to high unemployment. At the same time, the informants assumed or explicitly discussed that two incomes are essential for providing good living conditions to a family. If both parents or even one parent are out of work, this will obviously put a family in danger. Thus, unemployment was seen as the most important factor jeopardizing the situation of all families. Moreover, it was noted that different types of jobs are necessary (i.e. those requiring high qualifications, but also jobs that do not require specialised skills), so people of different social strata, with different levels of education and with various levels of qualification can be certain to be able to sustain their family. Finally, youth unemployment was mentioned as a separate factor that is likely to delay entry into adulthood and family formation. In that sense, it is not a factor that increases a risk of poverty for families with children, but it can prevent young people from forming their families and from having the number of children they want.

The informants mentioned another, highly important aspect of the economic crisis, related to taxation and the welfare state. As one expert in Vienna put it, *"without economic growth, without economic activity, there is no tax revenue, and hence no social benefits"*. The economic crisis was perceived as a serious threat to the entire welfare system. It would make it impossible to support families in need and be detrimental to the whole public sector. As one expert in Brussels summarised it,

> *"It means that the financial pressure will continue from all sides, from the sides of the job, like employment, but also from the side of the society, all these governmental structures. They don't have enough money." (Brussels)*

The economic aspects were discussed intensively in all settings, although to a lesser degree in the Polish group. There were also noticeable differences between countries. For instance, the risk of an enduring economic crisis was tangible in the discussions in Madrid and Brussels, but not so much in Vienna and Stockholm. In the latter countries, the discussion was phrased rather in terms of a slow economic growth or a lack of thereof. The economic crisis was mentioned, but only briefly unlike in the former settings. In Poland, the vision of economic crisis did not appear at all. Similarly, the differences were evident in how the informants talked about the tax system and money redistribution. The experts in Stockholm were speaking in very positive terms about the Swedish welfare system and perceived economic hardship as dangerous for the well-functioning of society. In Madrid in contrast, the more drastic "collapse of the whole [welfare] system" was envisioned.

Last but not least, it was noted that economic instability might lead to emotional problems in families. With the economic crisis, families might face financial difficulties that they are not prepared to deal with. As a result of unemployment, they may have problems to pay their mortgages or monthly bills. This can cause much emotional distress and influence the wellbeing of families in this dimension as well.

While the economic dimension was perceived as fundamental for the wellbeing of families, the informants noted that we should not limit our thinking to financial matters. For instance, in Stockholm, also environmental concerns were raised, as one participant noted that *"high economic growth is good for anyone, not for the planet"*. Moreover, in all settings the experts pleaded for a wider definition of family wellbeing, suggesting that it is not only about a good economic situation, but about a general quality of life. According to some participants of our

study, high economic development could bring more pressure to families if it is not accompanied by more general changes in the "culture of workplace", in lifestyle and so forth. We will discuss this topic in more detail when we present the informants' perspective of work- family reconciliation.

> *"I think that economic growth is a relatively superficial indicator, I think when we speak of the family it is much more about the culture of workplace, culture of the economy, I mean what pressure is being generated by the economy, it could result (...) from poor economic growth, but it could also result from high economic growth, depending on how the economy affects the individual." (Vienna)*

4.2.2 Changing gender roles: women's labour force participation

Changing gender roles are generally perceived as a critical force shaping modern societies, and the participants of our study discussed them as well. Presenting the whole variety of aspects related to gender roles goes beyond the scope of this study. Instead, following the main aim of our research, we focus on how gender roles were perceived in relation to family wellbeing, especially with respect to vulnerable families.

Women's labour force participation was seen as a key factor, although the informants in our study differ in their opinions on how it impacts on the situation of families. The Swedish FGI was probably most unanimous in this respect, as participants in Stockholm believed that a family model with both parents working full time is the best one. Some experts explicitly said that in their opinion the traditional male-breadwinner family model does not pose any benefits at all.

> *"I think of single-parent families. If you went back to traditional family models, so I assume it would be worse for the single-parental households (...) I have problems to see who would benefit from a traditional family model." (Stockholm)*

Women's full-time employment was perceived as beneficial to a family's financial situation as families are better off with two incomes. In addition, employment gives women access to social networks, which might be important for the family wellbeing as well. But it was generally stressed that women's paid work improves their own situation. They become more stable financially, also with regard to their future pensions. Moreover, economic activity and income empowers women to make their own life choices, as they are not financially

dependent on their male partners. Being financially independent from a partner might be particularly important in case of separation or widowhood. If a woman did not work, or limited her working hours substantially, her own and her children's financial situation might deteriorate if they were left on their own. All these aspects are illustrated in Table 7 below.

Table 7: Possible positive consequences of women's labour force participation

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Family income	*"If you are a family that wants to live traditional gender roles and has only one family provider… maybe you can make it on one salary? So it's actually good for the economy and also the family if you have two providers, so it's not only that it costs in public services." (Stockholm)*
Being socially embedded	*"Then we have women who are totally outside of the labour market, they have not made any career at all, they don't have any economic independence left, they lack the networks, the whole social context which would of course also be of advantage to their family, and this is really bad, we have had some very negative cases." (Vienna)*
Financial stability for women – general	*"One problem is to get the women in working full-time, but part-time is really decreasing the economic stability of their finance. So I think that's an important part on the economical line." (Stockholm)*
Financial stability for women – single mother	*"When you opt for having children, one should stay at home, only when that couple separates at some point, and those traditional values have been lived like that, this can really bring about a serious problem (…) and this problem does not only arise when the women reach the pension age, no. It applies right after the separation, they have those problems immediately, with repercussions into all spheres: the cultural spheres, the social spheres, and also the health aspect which is quite significantly involved, by way of work overload, stress factors that push a great many women towards an attitude where they can no longer move." (Vienna)*
Financial stability for women – pensions	*"I think it's a bad thing if you decrease your working hours, because that affects your pension." (Stockholm)*
Empowering women to make their own life choices	*"Being able to support yourself as an individual is the basis for gender equality because if you depended economically on another person then you can't make your own choices in life, so that is a very basic thing to be a free individual and make your own choices in life." (Stockholm)*

Nevertheless, while many participants (also outside Sweden) commented on various positive consequences of women's labour force participation, some negative outcomes were mentioned as well. First, respondents noted that even though gender roles are changing, there is still no full equality within families and women are mostly responsible for providing care at home (mostly childcare, but also for other family members). Consequently, as they are encouraged (or even forced for economic reasons) to work full-time, they suffer a stress-related double burden balancing work and family responsibilities. In fact, in the Polish group a quite vivid discussion took place on how women are put under a huge pressure nowadays: On the one hand they should be wonderful, caring mothers, but they are also expected to work full-time and actively engage in their job. Finally, the situation of children was also discussed in the context of mothers' time in employment. While there was no unanimity in this respect,

the negative consequences for children's wellbeing were mentioned. The possible problems with women's labour force participation are summarised in Table 8.

Table 8: Possible problems of women's labour force participation

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Double burden	*"I think that those who are suffering a lot in families are women, right? I mean, nowadays they are the ones suffering, as they have to balance work, family life, the education of children, care of dependents." (Madrid)*
Pressure to be good in both roles	*"This is some sort of paranoia! On the one hand, we say: women, go to work, come back to the employment as soon as possible; on the other hand: Get up at night, breastfeed, prepare ecological food…" (Warsaw)*
Children's wellbeing	*"Female poverty in case of separation and so on—that I should very quickly, and fully, go back into professional employment. Now, myself I was never really away from it, but on the other hand I also do see the wants and needs of my children." (Vienna)*
	"How important it is for a mother to have a close, early relation with a child of 0-3 year-old (…) A feeling of safety and attachment, creating a strong bond [with a child], developing a good, secure attachment style in a child, this is the best investment for child's life. And I think that young mothers are simply not aware of that." (Warsaw)

4.2.3 Work and family reconciliation

Even though our informants noted some negative aspects of women's economic activity, it is unquestionable that mother's participation in the labour market does improve the financial situation of a family and may act as important protection against poverty. Thus, given the wellbeing of children and families, the possibility of successfully reconciling paid work and family responsibilities is fundamental. In the FGIs, several macro-level drivers were discussed in relation to this topic. First, childcare arrangements were addressed. Second, an interesting dimension related to "culture of workplace" appeared. Finally, the role of fathers was acknowledged, along with several more complex considerations on men's role in modern societies. The three topics are presented in the following subsections.

4.2.3.1 Childcare arrangements: Formal versus informal care

The availability of childcare facilities was mentioned as highly important for work and family reconciliation and—consequently—for the wellbeing of families. It was recognised as particularly relevant for solo parents, but discussed in relation to all families. The informants discussed opening hours as pivotal for the ability to combine employment with parenthood: short, inflexible opening hours might make it impossible for parents to work full-time, impairing the financial situation of a family, especially in the case of single parents. Long and flexible opening hours should be accompanied by a high quality of childcare. Parents will not

be willing to leave their children for long hours in a facility where a child is not well cared for. Again, this will impact on the ability to combine work and parenthood. Moreover, the informants stressed that childcare options should not be limited to preschool children as they play a pivotal role for older children as well. Especially in case of vulnerable families, high-quality after- school care can improve children's situation (e.g. their educational outcomes).

If formal childcare is not available, the role of grandparents and other family members was mentioned as crucial for the mother's (or—in more general terms—the parents') ability to reconcile work and family duties. It was also noted that grandparents and the extended family might be important particularly for vulnerable families, especially single parents. The quotations below illustrate these opinions. We return to the topic of intergenerational relations later in the report (Section 4.2.4.2.).

> *"I think that more attention has to be put on children under the age of three, as it has become a real problem for families to care for them. Grandparents and especially grandmothers are often being called to help parents to reconciliate work and family life." (Madrid)*
>
> *"Sometimes families don't have any choice than to have the grandparents inside their house and to help them sustain, so when the grandparents for example are in healthy condition it can be a blessing for the family also, because they can help family members take care of the children, so that both are able to work and that they have a good economic situation." (Brussels)*
>
> *"When you have children with a single parent but they live in a multigenerational household with, like five aunts, then this is different again." (Vienna)*

Table 9: Childcare characteristics important for work and family reconciliation

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Availability – also of care services for children with special needs	*"When I don't have any family here I've got a large number of facilities which of course don't operate round the clock and do not cover every need, but generally there is a lot of support here, in whatever special situation one may be, whether one is a single parent or has children with special needs." (Vienna)*
	"In a one-parent household you are less able to work, you have to raise your children alone, you can't work full time, there are a lot of complicated facts, especially when childcare is not that well-arranged as it should be, for example in the Netherlands, we have not a very well-arranged childcare system: there are not enough places for example and it's far too expensive." (Brussels)
Opening hours	*"If your work starts at seven in the morning but school starts at eight, how will you manage if you are a single parent?" (Stockholm)*
	"Childcare facilities are important, necessary and actually irreplaceable, but when the nursery school is only open till 5 pm, I as a mother can still have problems, because I have to see that I get some food, I have a household to look after, maybe I have to check the school homework all by myself." (Vienna)
High quality	*"If you have high-quality preschools then you don't have to feel that you must pick your young child up very early, so you can have the child at the preschool until 5 or 6 o'clock and work full-time without feeling that your child is very tired." (Stockholm)*
Day care for children of school age	*"And creating an awareness that the matter of childcare isn't settled after the third birthday [with a kindergarten], for children must be also cared for in elementary school, and in early secondary school as well, but the political innuendo is always a bit that child care is a topic for the toddler stage." (Vienna)*

4.2.3.2 Culture of workplace

A group of factors, related to work and family reconciliation and highly important for the wellbeing of families, concerns the culture of workplace. Using the label "culture of workplace" we take up an expression that was used by our participants. It denotes several aspects. It concerns organisational culture, i.e. the behaviour of individuals within organisations, such as management styles, as well as values, beliefs, norms and habits shared by the employees. "Culture of workplace" also relates to a more general working atmosphere, shaped by various institutional, legal and cultural factors.

The informants noted that good childcare arrangements will not be sufficient if the culture of workplace is not favourable to families. With long or unpredictable working hours, parents will not be able to reconcile their parental and work roles in a satisfactory way. Children might suffer because their parents will be absent a lot, being overworked and stressed when they are back from work. That will, of course, also impact on the parents' health and wellbeing. The informants discussed the role of employers and emphasised that their attitudes towards parents influence the situation of families to a great degree. It largely depends on employers, for example, whether parents are able to occasionally leave work earlier to be there for their children. It also depends on organisations whether they increase job flexibility

and allow parents to take advantage of new technologies. The informants noted that the only thing some employers care about is how much time their employees spend at work, instead of looking at productivity. Productivity could be achieved in a more flexible and family-friendly way, for instance by tele-working.

Table 10: Culture of workplace – aspects important for the wellbeing of families

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Long, unpredictable working hours – less time for family and stress	*"Because of the irrational working schedule we have in Spain, we can't take care of our children properly. We can't educate our children." (Madrid)*
	"Secure work also, stable work where you know you can work tomorrow and you know your schedule and not that somebody calls you in by phone, because then the whole life depends… That is actually a very negative development that we've seen during the last 10 years, that many local workers (especially in female dominated occupations) they don't have a full employment, but they are called in every other day... that's very difficult." (Stockholm)
High work demand	*"The labour market doesn't allow it today anymore… because we need flexible people who can go to work at times when children need their parents, so this is something I would like to discuss." (Brussels)*
Stress and its impact on health	*"Healthy families, and healthy individuals in the working environment, then this has positive reverberations on the family, right? And now if burnout is on the increase, and depressions are on the increase, then of course this has an impact on families in the other direction, so these are the determinants in my view with which to appraise the development." (Vienna)*
Employers' attitudes towards parents	*"That's also a question of culture, working culture, if it's okay to be a parent or not at work, is it okay that my child is sick, is it okay that I have to leave at three o'clock some days in the week." (Stockholm)*
	"And to add another thought to this, it's also a question of the surrounding culture you know, I have friends in the U.S. who tell me that when their children play in a sports event in the afternoon, it is entirely acceptable to the employer that they go and watch them. Here you'd take quite a lot of flak if you wanted to do that." (Vienna)
Availability of flexible work arrangements – technology	*"We keep thinking that productivity is about spending many hours in the office when we have all the technological means to allow flexibility and more efficiency." (Madrid)*

"Culture of workplace" will be discussed further, when we describe various policy measures, as the informants were quite unanimous that it is highly important to "educate" employers and influence organisational culture in order to improve the situation of families.

4.2.3.3 Changing gender roles: Fathers' involvement

Changing gender roles are usually considered with respect to women. Also in our FGIs and in this report, they were discussed in terms of women's participation in the labour market (cf. Section 4.2.2.). But the participants discussed the men's perspective in details, too. They recognised that as women enter employment in increasing numbers, fathers' involvement in family issues becomes of uttermost importance. Fathers' contribution to childcare can make it easier for mothers to work, improving the financial situation of families. Thus it seems

feasible for both parents to sustain their professional careers without any harm on their children.

In addition, the Swedish participants discussed fathers' higher involvement in childcare after the parents' separation. Egalitarian gender roles and father's involvement with a child apply also when parents break up. They stop being a couple, but they are still the parents of their children and given changing gender roles they both are expected to take full responsibility for their children. This might take the form of children's "alternating residence", i.e. living one week with the mother and one week with the father. Such literally shared custody was discussed as having both advantages and disadvantages for the wellbeing of children and parents. On the positive side, children have contact with both their parents and their material situation is better, since both parents have the economic responsibility for them. Some informants pointed out that it makes it easier for a separated couple: even though they are solo parents, they share responsibilities and consequently they can more easily combine childcare with employment. As for disadvantages, it was mentioned that "alternating households" might be difficult when a child starts school and the solution limits parents' mobility. It may also lead to increasing conflicts between parents as they need to make various efforts to get this arrangement work.

Table 11: Fathers' involvement and taking responsibility for children

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Less double burden for women	*"The lack of men's involvement in the family is a real issue" (Madrid)* *"There is a growing support of Poles (both men and women) for the partner family model, where both of them work but also both take care of their children. We see it in the surveys, we see it in everyday work (…) But when we look at other studies, these declarations are not supported by reality." (Warsaw)*
Father's better contact with a child	*"From father's perspective, his active fatherhood, his higher participation and involvement in family life—means a stronger bond with a child. And this is unequivocally positive." (Warsaw)*
Men's and women's equal responsibility for a child after a separation – easier situation for divorced parents	*"You have to look to so that both parents take full responsibility for the child even though you have separated, it doesn't matter that the child lives with the mother or with the father, you don't ceased to be a parent just because of that. You should take full responsibility anyway and if you do that then of course you will have higher gender equity and you will also have perhaps lower unemployment also, for it will be possible for both parents to work." (Stockholm)*
Men's and women's equal responsibility for a child after a separation – better financially	*"Then they have alternating residences you can see they have almost the same level of living as those who are living with both parents." (Stockholm)*
Men's and women's equal responsibility for a child after a separation – possible problems	*"These alternating households are very good in many aspects for the children but it also leads to… the aspect that many fathers now want to have more responsibility for the children after separation, it also leads to more conflicts... Apparently, because before it was like: okay, now we are separating, the mother takes the kids and it was sort of easy. Now is more complicated, I want the kids, I want the kids, and it's a fight and sometimes they live in different parts of Sweden, then it's get more complicated." (Stockholm)*

Before we turn to other drivers, shaping the wellbeing of families, we should report on another, less positive aspect which was mentioned in the Polish group. In Warsaw, some comments were made on a "masculinity crisis". According to some informants, while women become more active and enterprising, men are somehow "left behind". They are not willing to get involved and to take responsibility for a family. This issue was also discussed in a wider perspective of cultural and social changes: changing interpersonal relations and social ties. These topics will be addressed in the next section.

> *"I sense some masculinity crisis (...) women are more ahead, they are better educated—even though they earn less afterwards—they invest in themselves all the time, they love their children, they raise them rather well. But men… something has happened to men..." (Warsaw)*

4.2.4 Cultural and societal changes: Society and relations within

Social exclusion is an important dimension of vulnerability. It is thus not surprising that various aspects, associated with relations between people, were identified as important for the wellbeing of families. The informants discussed vertical relations: between community

members, neighbours and friends as well as within couples and families. But also relations between generations were considered. Both types of relationships will be presented in the next sections. Finally, the more general topic of social norms and values will be touched upon.

4.2.4.1 Social ties, relationships and communication

Even if a family faces economic difficulties, health problems or any other traumatic experiences, their situation can be improved by support from important others. They can provide invaluable support and assistance in difficult times. The informants in our study noted that the wellbeing of any family depends strongly on having close ties with other people. At the same time several experts of our FGIs pointed out that social ties are getting weaker nowadays and they expressed concerns about this state of affairs. They perceived it as a negative side effect of individualisation processes: as people focus mainly on their own goals, they are less interested in other people. In this respect, the internet was partly seen as a source of weakening ties and relationships between people; it was seen as supporting communication, but making relationships more superficial. The same can be observed within families and between partners. People function as independent entities rather than as a family unit. The relationships are getting increasingly loose. Of course, based on the qualitative interviews we cannot say to what share of the population weak social ties apply. But the informants identified them as an emerging problem and emphasised its role for family wellbeing. The experts noted that without close social contacts and kin support, a nuclear family lacks a safety net in case of any problems. And a loose relationship between partners not only poses a direct threat to emotional wellbeing of a family, but it may lead to conflicts and separation. It was commented by our informants that young people do not really know how to build stable relationships. Quotations, relevant for all these topics are presented in Table 12.

It is difficult to identify all forces, responsible for the aforementioned social changes. Yet, the participants in our study addressed several aspects. First, development of technology was seen as unfavourable in this respect. People communicate over social networks instead of creating real bonds. Children spend more time with computers than with their peers and, as one participant put it, *"they are quite alone in their virtual world."*

Table 12: Social ties, communication and relations between people

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Social networks – safety net	*"We are now only referring to the family that is behind the wall of this little house here, but maybe there is another family living in the house next door that will step in immediately if any problem comes up, right? I mean, that is another factor for me: to what extent am I all alone in my little house, without a single satellite." (Vienna)*
Weak relations between people	*"I mean of course we have a certain cultural change here which is part of let's say technology development and the fact that people become more and more individualistic, from my perspective of course, due to let's say, I used to say that people now, young people today we connect to each other, we do not relate to each other anymore, it's more like we prefer to talk to each other on Facebook than actually make friends. And this also will have an impact on families as well, so this cultural change of let's say increasing, I don't know, feeling of abundance or loneliness will be there." (Brussels)*
Weak relations within families	*"Individuals in a family are like separate balls that go their own ways and only bounce against each other from time to time. Because there is no time. In old days, people used to sit together for dinner. Now, everyone eats separately." (Warsaw)*
Loose relationships	*"Relationships are becoming—although people want to have closer bonds—are becoming shorter, and also more loose, and I think this is a trend that one can clearly feel." (Vienna)* *"The sexual educational programmes very often do not really prepare people to be in relation to someone, to be in a relationship and this is something that will be an issue soon, because we will have a generation of people who do not have this kind of knowledge and this will, can also have an impact on families." (Brussels)* *"We are not working on creating bonds (…) I have a feeling that young people are full of fear of entering into a stable relationship." (Warsaw)*

Nevertheless, technology was perceived not only negatively. As discussed earlier in the report, high-tech options for more flexible working were evaluated positively as they enhance work and family reconciliation (see Table 10). Internet communication methods were mentioned as important for sustaining family relations in case family members do not live nearby (e.g. if a child or a parent migrates). However, a negative impact of technological development was explicitly acknowledged. The more general problem with communication between people was discussed as well. In our informants' opinion, people lack communication skills which are especially important in close relations. They do not really talk or listen to each other, do not negotiate nor solve problems in conversations (consequently, a role of mediators was noted as relevant and we present this topic when talking about various actions and measures in Chapter 4.3.).

4.2.4.2 Intergenerational relations

Another theme, revealed in discussions with experts, concerns intergenerational relations. First of all, these relations were discussed in terms of help and support exchange between generations. In particular, grandparents were seen as important providers of childcare (see

Section 4.2.3.1), but their needs for care in older ages were recognised as well. Thus, the presence of grandparents might improve the situation of a family with children, but it may also become an additional stressor.

Table 13: Relations between generations

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Older generation as care-givers	*"I also want to emphasise the role of grandparents who are often the ones helping parents to deal with daily difficulties. Well, grandparents play a key role in many families in Spain." (Madrid)*
Older generation as needing support – additional stress factor	*"There are various stress situations that parents are faced with, in particular the groups that are being subsumed under the heading 'rush-hour of life', the 30- to-40-year-olds who have children, and parents to care for." (Vienna)* *"[In the report, they] calculated how many women and men who had decreased their working hours because they were taking care of an elder relative and it was a huge number." (Stockholm)*
Communication between generations – technology	*"It seems like there is a growing gap between grandparents, parents and children because technology is evolving very rapidly, and not everyone is able to adapt him or herself to these changes." (Madrid)* *"Skype is a wonderful tool to keep in touch with your relatives. If grandchildren help their grandparents to use it, technology becomes a tool that favours family relationships." (Madrid)*
Transfer of values	*"I think talking about families for me means we are talking about values and I find it very important that we have a multigenerational household passing on values from the older generation to the younger generation on and on." (Brussels)*
Transfer of knowledge – especially related to family matters	*"The vast majority of couples are not prepared for having relationships (…) Maybe in previous generations, the [educational] role was played by—I don't know—a grandmother, an aunt, a grandfather. They were telling [the younger generation] about life, how it all goes. And now, there is no such thing." (Warsaw)*

Next, intergenerational relations were discussed in rather technical terms: with respect to new information and communication technologies (ICT). As outlined in the previous section, close relations within (extended) families are evaluated positively, as they improve family wellbeing, hence effective communication between generations is a relevant issue. The role of technology was brought up here with both negative and positive consequences. On the one hand, the knowledge gap regarding technology between generations was pointed out, which makes communication more difficult. On the other hand, new ICT allows for sustaining contact even in case of substantial geographical distance.

Finally, intergenerational relations were discussed with regard to transmission of values and knowledge from the older to the younger generation. Some informants noted that it is important that grandparents pass on their values, traditions and also knowledge to the younger generation. In the Polish discussion group the participants remarked that young parents nowadays are often completely unprepared to take on their parental roles. Especially mothers

are under huge pressure, as they are expected to be wonderful mothers, but they lack the knowledge and skills for it. In past times, the relations between generations were different and young girls could learn about maternal roles by watching their parents and siblings. The situation has changed tremendously, as our informant explained,

> *"The changes that we see in the family structures… I mean previously, in a natural way, a girl was taking care of her siblings or other children around since her young age. And, through osmosis, she learned what a small baby is and how to deal with an infant and it was natural. Nowadays, as a consequence of various cultural changes—I don't want to judge whether these changes have been good or bad, but they have occurred—nowadays, we very often have the situation that when adult women have their babies, this is the very first time for them to have contact with an infant at all (…) They are pregnant and they are terrified. And if their mum doesn't help them… or a mother-in-law…" (Warsaw)*

4.2.4.3 Norms and values: Increasing diversity

Before we conclude the chapter on drivers and forces important for the wellbeing of families, we turn to a more general issue of values and norms. The entire *FamiliesAndSocieties* project pays attention to the increasing diversity of family forms observed in Europe today. Our informants also acknowledged this diversity and discussed its role for family wellbeing. It was recognised that with increasing freedom of choice and people opting for different lifestyles, it is important to create good conditions for all types of families. Interestingly, a growing tolerance towards diversity was not always assumed. Instead, some informants portrayed it as a challenge to create an approving environment, so no family feels rejected or stigmatised.

The informants also recognised a pressure that stems from a clash between "old" and "new" values. Some of them feared that family might be valued less as the diversity of family forms increases. The three quotations in Table 14 illustrate three different perspectives.

Table 14: Traditional family model and increasing diversity of family forms

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Acknowledging diversity and creating good conditions for all family forms	*"I think there is no turning back. It's the fruit of one's freedom, the result of democracy itself. People can choose freely how to organise their lives and hence, the state has little to say on how citizens should live. Working for the State, my concern is about creating an environment conducive to family life so that everyone can develop his/her project according to his/her needs or circumstances of life." (Madrid)*
Acknowledging both: traditional family values as well as plurality	*"I think that in the cultural dimension there are some traditional values which are very much in support of the family, in every way: concerning stability and also clear role models, whatever they are, they help the family, and on the other side what helps the family is of course also the acceptance of pluralism, acceptance of diversity, so in that direction. I think it's too much an ideological conflict here to say that it goes in the one or the other direction. And it probably needs both: on the one hand, you need appreciation of certain values and family stability, and then you also need acceptance of plurality [or diversity]." (Vienna)*
Acknowledging traditional family models	*"And the more diverse family forms we get as we do now, the less the children really experience the traditional family model as having a father and a mother, the further, ah, the less of these traditional values we have, the worse family structures develop, because of children who have been brought up in diverse family forms where parenthood is not valued anymore." (Brussels)*

4.3 Reproduction of vulnerability – policy recommendations

In the last section of the FGIs we asked our informants to discuss various policy measures that—in their opinion—would be crucial to improve the situation of children in vulnerable families and in particular, to prevent the "reproduction of vulnerability" from one generation to another. Even though this section of the paper draws mostly on the final segments of the discussions, it incorporates various aspects mentioned by the participants in other parts of FGIs.

In the following sections, we focus on three central aspects discussed by the experts, identified as crucial for preventing the "reproduction of vulnerability": education, reconciliation policies, and social services for the most disadvantaged families. In the last section, we will discuss the role of monetary transfers as perceived by the participants.

4.3.1 Education

A very clear message from all five focus groups concerns education. The participants strongly emphasised the importance of education to improve the situation of families and to give all children an equal start into adulthood. The participants defined education very broadly and discussed four dimensions:

- Education of children, schooling—especially for children in vulnerable families, allows for better (equal) chances as children enter adulthood and the labour market;
- Education of parents—transferring various skills and values to parents, so they can better cope with their parental roles;
- Education of employers—especially with respect to the "culture of workplace", so they support their employees who have parental responsibilities;
- Education of the society—general education for all adults, promoting certain values but also teaching various (social) skills.

4.3.1.1 Education of children, schooling

The informants stressed that securing good educational opportunities for all children is of utmost importance to improve their wellbeing and protect them from inheriting vulnerability. First, it was acknowledged that having a good education gives much better prospects of finding a (well-paid) job. Through education children acquire knowledge and skills that are crucial in the labour market. With better education, they also feel stronger, they are capable of shaping their lives in line with their own preferences. They do not necessarily copy the ways of living of their parents, hence can avoid to follow the pattern of vulnerability. They become more tolerant and open-minded, which also positively influences their situation.

The participants of our study also noted that schools can provide a safe and supportive environment for children, which may be particularly important for children from vulnerable families. For example, full-day schools or after-school care reduces the time when children are exposed to difficult situations at home or in their neighbourhood, and also teachers can better monitor and support their development and progress at school. All these aspects are listed in Table 15.

Table 15: Education for better start in adulthood

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Education = job	"When your child is educated, you can be concerned because it doesn't find a job for instance. But it's often just a question of time. When your child doesn't even have a diploma, the concern is much more serious." (Madrid) "Education is the beginning of the start of getting out of poverty, you are able to give everybody a basis for a better life." (Brussels)
Education = better life, escaping difficult situations at home	"There is one big factor that increases the equality for later on in life and that's if you have a good enough schooling. If your grades are good enough (…) you can leave a lot of the social heritage behind. But if you don't, if you don't succeed in the schooling, then you have a much higher risk to inherit that take sick leave, going to prison and whatever, alcoholic use and drugs and everything." (Stockholm)
Education = open-mind, tolerance	"I think education is key to teach tolerance and respect for diversity." (Madrid) "And education is also something that comes very much into play with this polarity, stigmatisation and traditional values and diversity, in that the higher the education, the higher also the diversity, or the acceptance of diversity." (Vienna)
Being at education = protection from different situations at home	"You can also compensate during the day then when they are there and keep track on them and monitor them and such, and sort of compensate for different situations in the family, even if they are going through a divorce or separation. If they have a good environment during the day in childcare or at school, I think that's the way to compensate this to children and make it save for them." (Stockholm)
Being in education = out of vulnerable environment	"It is really important for children who are in poor environments, and I mean poor economically, that they have somewhere where they don't look upon themselves as poor. So, I think that's what preschools or all of schooling could do for those children (…) And that's actually why you have the right to put your children in day care after school in Sweden, even if you are unemployed or at home with children that are younger." (Stockholm)

The experts in our study discussed also numerous characteristics of educational systems, which are important for securing good education for all children and for reducing inequalities between them (Table 16). Most importantly, education should start early. Already at preschool level, formal childcare can provide good conditions for developing children's skills and making sure that they enter the school system with similar levels of cognitive competences. This will improve the situation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In the same vein, adjusting the working hours at school so as to give children the opportunity to do their homework under teacher supervision would also be supportive.

According to our experts, the teachers' role should go beyond the simple transfer of knowledge. Teachers should monitor children's development and provide additional help when necessary. They should react to children's needs: compensate their weaknesses but also look out for their interests and strengths in order to support and promote them. A more individualised approach in education was advocated.

Table 16: Important aspects and characteristics of education

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Starting early	"Preschools are important too, they are of very high quality in Sweden and the aim of the preschools are not only to have more women in the work force and to increase Sweden's economics, it's also to give children the same possibility before they start school, the preschools observe the child's development and also help children to learn a little math and other important cognitive skills before starting school." (Stockholm)
To adjust schooling hours	"We started from qualitative studies as well on the ideal rhythm of a day at school, the ideal rhythm of a year for a child in education and we formulated a proposal to completely re-draw the schedule and to completely re-draw the schedule of a day at school, and that has some links with the reduction of the risks of poverty. For example in our proposition we say we should put the homework at school, so we should suppress the homework at home cause we know that parents are [who] do not have the equal ability, so they can't help the children." (Brussels)
Monitoring, providing additional help	"To give children equal chances you … it's not enough to have good education for all, you also have to have special support for the children who need it of course, so some children have more difficulties learning how to read, you have to have that extra support." (Stockholm)
Promoting strength not only compensating weaknesses	"It's important that one realises the importance of education but I also think one must create a framework where children get interested themselves, so one must encourage children in their strengths and not, as it is the tendency today, that one only compensates for weaknesses." (Vienna) "There is a need to change the educational system in order to make sure to create a platform for people to discover their talents and skills rather than to create a standardised, ah, say: individual." (Brussels)
Learning materials	"We should really try to ensure access to education. I mean, access to books and pedagogic material. That would be a big boost for our society and we are currently preparing our population to receive this training." (Madrid)
Educating about healthy lifestyles	"It is important for children to have also philosophy, musical education and gymnastics, to have more focus on lifestyle, while we call it these days the lifestyle, yeah, the ancient Greeks said it's philosophy and music, musical development, it also increases your mental knowledge and your gymnastics in a way that you have an active living as we call it in these days." (Brussels) "[We should teach them] how to deal with stress – not only maths and biology." (Warsaw)
Free time	"A spare time issue also, because there are children who don't even look forward to the summer, because they know it's gonna be 8 weeks of doing nothing (…) Some municipalities they have like free bus who takes all the children to the beach and offer kind of good opportunities to be with friends and so on while other municipalities don't do anything for the children so actually they just hang out because the parents work, maybe the other friends has went somewhere else and that's a long." (Stockholm)

It was also emphasized that education should go beyond standard school topics: sports and cultural education should be considered just as important as the standard teaching curriculum. Education should cover topics related to healthy and active living and to promote certain lifestyles. In that respect also the need for organising children's free time, including holidays was mentioned. This would be particularly important for parents who cannot afford to pay for various leisure activities. The informants also paid attention to aspects such as giving children access to high-quality learning materials, to enhance opportunities of children from households which are poor and/or value education to a lesser extent.

4.3.1.2 Educating parents

The second theme relates to educating the parents. This topic came up in all FG, except in Sweden. As discussed in Chapter 4.2., some informants noted that nowadays young parents are not always ready for their parental roles, which might make them vulnerable. On the one hand, the informants saw a lack of role models: they noticed young people are not always able to learn from older generations. On the other hand, they maintained that parenting is particularly demanding in our fast-changing reality. Several informants noticed that modern world poses many new challenges to the parents. As one expert from Madrid put it,

> *"I am talking about problems in terms of lack of parenting skills, educational model, and question of how to raise a child in a society where the reconciliation of work and family life is a real problem. Parents have little time to spend with their children, they lack quality time with them." (Madrid)*

Consequently, the importance of various educational programmes for parents was highlighted in discussions. The experts referred to several aspects here (see Table 17). First, the need for various courses and classes on general parenting skills was mentioned. Their aim would be to educate young parents and parents-to-be about the basics: about raising a child, taking care of it, etc. Some experts mentioned that though there are such courses, they are often only for those in need—i.e. for parents already facing problems with their children—while they should address everybody: as a prevention and not as a cure. Another preventive action would be related to educating parents about available sources of support in case of any problems in a family or with their children. Again, such information should be passed on to parents before the problems occur. Parents should know where to turn to in case of financial problems or experiencing violence in the family, they should also have access to legal information on separation and custody rights etc.

Table 17: Teaching parents

Category	Quotation from the discussion
How to be a good parent	"For every new parent it should be very important to have a course, obligatory course of how to bring up children because (…) in the beginning you don't know anything. And if your child is crying, doesn't behave, doesn't eat, how do you react on that? Should you punish them? Should you use other methods? All parents need to find out how to deal with this in a good way (…) in a small course—maybe a week—to learn them how to bring up the children in a way which the mothers already learned in their experience. So I think that an obligatory child course could be very helpful for every parent." (Brussels)
	"People are entering relationship and then children appear at some time and they have no idea what parenthood is all about. They have no idea. And they come to us and we talk to them, but we should talk to them already during their premarital teaching."* (Warsaw)
Reaching out to parents with information on available sources of support	"So that nurses and midwives—so those who have contact with all parents, so there is no stigmatisation and they offer this to everybody (…)—to say in some friendly way, not to suggest to the family that they are not managing, but to give them information: There are places where you can go to in case you have any issues." (Warsaw)
	"Actually people have no knowledge at all before they enter into this, I mean they don't know what's ahead of them in case of a separation, and so that should be taken in as well, this legal information, so it's good when something happens at that level." (Vienna)
Convincing parents' about importance of education of their children and providing guidance in that respect	"When we talk, it seems like rich people are the only ones who can educate and poor people seem condemned never to be able to educate. It's not true and not fair. Education is not the heritage of rich people but the challenge is also about convincing every one of the importance of education." (Madrid)
	"What is central is investing in parents' education, because one factor that is very important to me is whether parents have an appreciation for the fact that education is important for their children, regardless of whether they have a good education themselves or not. Do they want their children to have the best possible opportunities, and high education, whatever they see the optimum education opportunities. (…) I think some parents still need more information what educational options—and what professional opportunities afterwards—their child actually has, because they may not be in an environment which can fathom these professional opportunities." (Vienna)

*Note: In Poland everybody who wants to get married in church (and the majority does) needs to attend the premarital teaching organised by the church, which is supposed to teach people about their new responsibilities and roles in marriage (in the light of Roman-Catholic teaching).

Finally, the informants emphasised that parents should also be educated with respect to their children's education. They should know how important education is and how to guide their children and encourage them to learn. It would be useful for young parents to learn more about what type of education offers the best employment opportunities.

4.3.1.3 Educating employers

The third theme related to education concerns educative actions directed towards employers. When our participants discussed various factors which are important for the wellbeing of families, the "culture of workplace" was often emphasised. Consequently, educating employers and shaping the culture of workplace appears as an important aspect in improving the situation of families and children.

Table 18: Teaching employers

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Investing in employees' wellbeing	*"We need companies to recognise the beauty of motherhood and to adopt measures to allow women to have babies. It's about corporate social responsibility in big companies, small and medium enterprises. We need social investment, as it will create positive economic return for the society. There is something called "emotional salary" that refers to employees' satisfaction and wellbeing. It's not about money but about happiness and equilibrium in the workplace, creating loyalty towards the company. When workers feel happy, they work more efficiently and are more loyal to their companies." (Madrid)*
Investing in employees' private life, promoting work-family balance	*"The key problem is that employers are not educated and they do not know the value of investing in an employee also in terms of supporting the development of his or her private life (…) I believe that educating employers, in various labour force structures, is the way to go." (Warsaw)*
Time management – work and family reconciliation.	*"And a culture of workplace, of work time (…) except of hospitals etc., of course, and restaurants, they have to work in the evenings, that's clear. But that meetings that are set for 5 pm all the time in this country, or even until 7 pm, this is a very un-cultural feature that should be stopped." (Vienna)*

According to our informants, employers should learn that it is worthwhile to invest in their employees' wellbeing, decrease stress at work and take measures to promote a more effective work-family balance. An employee who is more relaxed and happier and who can easily combine work and parenthood will be loyal to the company and productive.

As presented in Chapter 4.2., the ability to reconcile work and parental responsibilities was perceived as crucial for the wellbeing of families. It is therefore not surprising that the topic reappeared in the last section of FGIs, when the informants discussed various political measures and solutions. As we present later in this chapter, they talked about many other important arrangements in that respect, too. They emphasised, however, that changing employers' mentality and adjusting organisational culture in companies would additionally enhance the effect of any policy measures or institutional arrangements, aiming to improve work-family reconciliation.

4.3.1.4 Educating society: Promoting values, teaching social skills

The final aspect, which had to do with educating people in general, is the broadest. It concerns educating all members of the society: promoting certain values and teaching various (soft, social) skills. As we reported in previous chapters, the informants noted that some societal transformations—the loosening of social ties, the changes of intergenerational relations as well as general communication issues—might all have harmful effects on families. Hence, counteractive actions in these respects would also be called for. We list them, along with example quotations, in Table 19.

Given societal changes, the informants acknowledged that people should learn how to work on having good interpersonal relations, how to take responsibility for another person, how to build a good relationship with a partner, and how to work on relationships in their family and in the society at large. Mostly but not exclusively, this concerns young adults and their intimate relationships. Closely connected to this topic, the debaters mentioned the need for developing communication skills among young adults and—especially—young couples.

Further suggestions of the discussants concerned promoting certain values and attitudes in society, encouraging positive behaviours and drawing people's attention to different aspects of social reality. The importance of more empathy in social relations was mentioned, as was the need for promoting positive attitudes towards "family" in the society. Creating a "family-friendly" society was perceived as the very basic requirement for improving the situation of families and children. In more general terms, the informants talked about "humanising" and "de-commercialising" society. These topics were most intensively discussed in Madrid and Warsaw, although mentioned in other settings, too.

Table 19: Educating society

Category	Quotation from the discussion
How to create good relations with people	"We have to act to strengthen bonds between people. To improve the ability of young people to create strong bonds, where they take responsibility for the other person." (Warsaw)
	"We speak a lot about education and the fact that we have lots of, let's say lots of emphasis on sexual education programmes but these very often do not really prepare people to connect to someone, to be in a relationship and this is something that will soon be an issue, because we will have a generation of people who do not have this kind of knowledge and this will, this can also have an impact on families." (Brussels)
How to communicate	"School could be a place where skills—such as communication skills—are being taught. Psychology has made an enormous progress… there are numerous systems of how to train and practise communication skills, which could really help the families." (Warsaw)
Being more emphatic and sensitive	"Sometimes it can only be a matter of thinking in another direction, because there will always be children who suffer in a family, there will always be problems of different kinds, so for instance, I know there are a lot of people who complain that after summer the teachers, they want all the children to tell about what they did during the summer. Maybe that's not so important, because maybe you had a really crappy summer, maybe you don't want to talk about that, just that simple step [not asking for it, being more sensitive] would change a lot for that child." (Stockholm)
De-commercialising society	"More generally, I think that humanising society is a utopia. I think we should rather de-commercialise our society. For instance, from the Family Watch, campaigns could be launched to show how we are all equal. Equality is the more important value of our life. It means that it's not about admiring someone for his/her money as we don't even know if he robbed it or not, but for who he/she is." (Madrid)
Promoting family	"It's important to whet the appetite for experiencing children yourself, or not to let yourself be discouraged, for the child wish is there, but then there are those discouraging factors: fear of not getting a career, so I renounce on having a child, or I postpone it for far too long … all those factors, and I think this is the challenge for all of us: lobby groups, politicians and social partners, the media in particular, most of all the media with their pictures." (Vienna)

4.3.2 Flexible reconciliation policies – "time for children"

In addition to education, further important measures to prevent the reproduction of vulnerability, were discussed as well. Most importantly, the informants emphasised that in order to ensure a good future for children, parents need to be able to spend enough (high-quality) time with their offspring. Yet, as pointed out earlier, parental participation in the labour market is necessary for the financial provision for a family. This underlines the importance of reconciliation policies which were intensively discussed.

In Section 4.2.3.1., we introduced the topic of formal and informal childcare arrangements, as the experts viewed institutional factors related to work and family reconciliation as crucial for the wellbeing of families and an important challenge. We do not repeat here all those aspects, but they remain relevant. Availability, opening hours, quality of formal childcare were all reiterated here. But as the topics of possible measures and protective actions were considered,

our experts talked about childcare in more general terms. They stressed that having time for children requires balancing paid work and parenthood. It is not only about being able to work when becoming parents. It is also about caring for children and being there for them even though having to work.

> *"And policies for quality time. I mean, what does a child need? Attention and time. And time policies. If we are favouring a society that is incompatible with care for children, it implies that our model is generating neglected children. I think we should rather encourage reconciliation policies but not necessarily economic ones." (Madrid)*
>
> *"Parents come to us, and these are not only mothers who say they want to take more time, please give us more time, and this is quite a clear demand, that the state should compensate that financially, and this must simply be taken at face value." (Vienna)*
>
> *"It should be recognised to have times in the professional life when one is just founding a family, that both parents can reduce their hours, and should reduce their hours." (Vienna)*

To alleviate time-pressure for parents and provide time to care, some informants suggested flexible policy measures that would allow parents to follow their preferences in regards to care for children. Overall, the interview partners stressed the need for policies to accommodate to parents' needs to care as well as the need for policies to acknowledge the diversity of family constellations. But they also stressed that when creating care policies one needs to consider the long-term consequences and perspectives of policies. For example, one needs to take into account the economic and welfare consequences of care leaves for the family and for the caring person, the consequences concerning gender equality, and the costs for the welfare system. One also needs to take a foresight perspective and acknowledge the fact that societies are constantly changing and that therefore policies need to be adaptive to social changes.

Table 20: Flexible policy for work and family reconciliation

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Flexibility – reacting to parents' preferences	"Working for the State, my concern is about creating an environment conducive to family life so that everyone can develop his/her project according to his/her needs or circumstances of life." (Madrid)
	"Policy should be flexible and meeting people's needs. If a mother wants to come back to work—make it easier for her. If she wants to stay home—make *that* easier for her as well." (Warsaw)
Downsides of flexibility of reconciliation policies	"If we say: one should be able to receive child benefits forever, and regardless of how long a person has been outside of the working life… So for example, the women, and we tell the families, yes, yes, go ahead and decide for this or that, and that is your own decision. But it must also be clear that the consequences of this decision eventually will have to be borne by the solidarity community, that is when those women will grow older and not qualify for a real pension and therefore are forced to rely on some kind of subsidiary benefits." (Vienna)
Flexibility – access to different forms of childcare	"To massively encourage flexible forms of childcare, and not only institutional facilities but also their complements like day nannies, foster grannies or what else there is… And also the in-firm childcare, as the third pillar, plus the private and the institutional ones." (Vienna)
Flexibility – different needs of different family forms	"I support the idea of family policy that is open to very different needs – taking into consideration different family forms. If somebody has one child, they want to send a child to some group of children as soon as possible [for socialization]. If somebody has more children, they want to [keep them at home] longer, because they have a community of their own (…) we need to understand that there are different needs." (Warsaw)
Flexibility – adjusting to increasing diversity and cultural changes	"Diversity, gender equality, and you know some, some political will or some political conviction that we need to progress towards these models and to find innovative solutions on the economic ground to make our economic model work or be compatible with these culture evolutions." (Brussels)
	"It's important as well to create policies that don't depend or don't prefer one family constellation in front of another, that you sort of make your policies modern so it's adaptable for either situation. Because it will always change and we will have new ways of living and new ways of doing things and it's important that you don't try to force people in one direction by economic or any other incentives." (Stockholm)

Interestingly, some differences between countries were revealed at the above topic. While economic and welfare consequences of care leaves were discussed in all FGIs, some informants in Madrid, Vienna and Warsaw believed that parents (mostly women) should be able to stay at home with their children if they desire so. In Stockholm, the informants unanimously emphasized that both parents' involvement in the labour market is desired and should be encouraged.

Nonetheless, the overall need for flexible policy measures with respect to the reconciliation of work and family life were generally recognised in the discussions. This flexibility concerned a choice regarding time before returning to the labour market but also the availability of various childcare options (e.g. institutional (public) childcare, nannies or childcare facilities in companies). It was also noted that a higher flexibility of policy measures is called for, given

an increasing diversity of family forms, cultural changes and new ways of living (e.g., children's "alternating residence" in case of shared physical custody) (see Table 20).

4.3.3 A smart support for the weakest

The last section of FGIs focused on how to prevent the reproduction of vulnerability. The informants spent considerable amount of time discussing ways of supporting children from disadvantaged families: those in poverty, socially excluded, experiencing high levels of conflicts or violence. In other words, they spoke about supporting those in the worst situation: the poorest, and most troubled families and children. The informants mentioned a need for financial transfers to those families, but this aspect was not dominant in relation to preventing the reproduction of vulnerability, as we discuss it briefly in the next chapter. Predominantly, the informants discussed how social support and social services should be organised. They indicated several aspects that should be improved, as displayed in Table 21.

First, the experts discussed several services that are important to support vulnerable families. For instance, a need for psychological support was strongly advocated: mediation services for families with conflicts or at the verge of divorce, counselling or therapy for children and their parents, etc. This necessity is in line with previously discussed issues: conflicts, poor communication skills, and a need for educating people how to deal with problems and stress. Second, the informants mentioned some special needs of particularly vulnerable families that should be addressed, such as a need to provide assistance to children or parents with disabilities so that they can participate equally in all activities of everyday life and lead a free and independent life.

Table 21: Supporting the weakest

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Mediation	"Mediation is also important and we are living in a country where people don't really use it. And repercussions of not using it are pretty significant: 40% of separations are said to be contentious. I am convinced mediation could decrease this percentage." (Madrid)
Therapy, counselling	"We have to allow parents and children to really talk, to have the opportunity to go into therapy even before the separation in order to help the child, I mean the adults, they usually manage but the children, and they take the blame very often. And it's not always noticeable, because they try to be brave for the parents and I think that's a big problem." (Stockholm) "The social support institutions should not only give money but also provide psychological support." (Warsaw)
Special needs – disability	"Disability and disabled children, we have this assistance reform that we have in Sweden that they get an assistant that helps them during the day in some cases anyway, and that I think is very important in order to live a free life so I think that is a good way to equal chances, to come out and have your own life so to speak." (Stockholm)
Supporting parents – not deciding for them	"On the one hand, it is of course necessary to lead children out of poverty if there is poverty, they must be taken up to a level of existence that is decent and humane, and then they must be secured there. And on the other hand to a great extent it must be left to the families themselves how they become happy and what opportunities they want to make use of, and in that respect I do see a tendency that we want too much to dictate them how to become happy." (Vienna) "We cannot interfere with the life of a family, we cannot intrude. It needs to be calm, normally. We need to learn how to listen." (Warsaw) "Just to insist on the fact that I said that the state should support the family—and never replace it. It's seems simple but it's important." (Madrid)
Support without stigmatisation	"I think many families are afraid of reaching out to social support because they are afraid they will be labelled as a dysfunctional family." (Warsaw)
Supporting parents – not punishing them	"She would even go and ask for help, but she is scared that children will be taken away from her (…) Among large families, especially those very poor, there is an increasing fear of social services… fear of having their children taken away." (Warsaw)
Reaching out early	"There is one development, an activity which is being deployed by the provincial health insurances, it's called *Frühe Hilfen*,* and there I see a very positive approach where those families at risk are provided support, they help them in recognising problems early and they show them the right way, so they offer adequate assistance. So that is outreach support, starting with parental education about health subjects, schooling support, language promotion, so that families have some backup and assistance." (Vienna) "We need some system, I don't want to call it 'monitoring', but some sort of watching over the families… supporting and helping them, so everybody gets information." (Warsaw)
Preventive actions – alcohol, violence	"We are living in a country where politicians are making great laws against gender violence or against alcohol abuse, but we do nothing about prevention. And I think prevention is key for cultural change." (Madrid) "I think it's a necessity to prevent problems such as domestic violence, gender violence, intra-family conflicts with teenagers and their parents." (Madrid)

*Note: Early Assistance, for detail see http://fruehehilfen.at.

The dominant theme, however, touched upon how social support should be organised. Especially the informants in Warsaw, but also in Vienna and Madrid, spoke about a necessary reorganisation of social support.

Most of all, it was emphasised that families in need should be given support—but they should not be punished for their failures and they should not be stigmatised. The Polish group pointed out that poor families are often afraid to ask for help, as they fear being investigated by social workers, and having their children taken away from them. Such extreme cases were not mentioned in other countries, but it was generally discussed how social support should be sensitive to people's needs. It was stressed that the state should not decide for families, that it should offer options and support but not dictate people how they should live. As one expert from Madrid put it, the state should support a family but never replace it. Moreover, a need for early support and preventive actions was also recognised. Families should be supported before any serious problems occur. The comments on alcohol abuse and violence prevention go very much in line with that reasoning.

4.3.4 It is not "all about money"

It might seem surprising how little has been mentioned about direct or indirect financial transfers to vulnerable families. Though these aspects were not absent from the discussions, they were hardly central when the informants discussed actions that might break the cycle of reproduction of vulnerability in families. It is possible (and some statements in the FGIs could suggest that) that the experts see financial transfers as important for mitigating the most urgent needs of disadvantaged families, but other measures are called for regarding long-term, preventive actions. Nevertheless, some specific economic measures were discussed also in relation to reproduction of vulnerability and they are summarised in Table 22.

Table 22: Economic measures to support vulnerable families

Category	Quotation from the discussion
Tax reductions for families in needs	"About the issue of taxation, I believe a tax reform is necessary and we already have examples such as tax deductions for families with disabled children for instance." (Madrid)
Financial transfers to those in needs	"We should have a redistribution system also that we have in Sweden that the child allowances and housing allowances and so on, but focus on single parents with bad economy." (Stockholm)
	"We have to make a financial transfer that a child wherever it grows up, in whatever family configuration it grows up, a child is not allowed to be at risk of poverty." (Brussels)
Food	"In Sweden we also have lower VAT on food. That is one way also. If you have a family it's more expensive, you have to buy food for more people, so that's one incentive to equal chances in some way that you can afford good food as well." (Stockholm)
	"In many countries like UK one-third of the child population is obese and it's almost on an epidemic scale, so in my view one of the key policies should be also access to healthy food. There we are under pressure of the agro industry that goes also to the cafeterias in schools and everywhere." (Brussels)
Health care	"Health care also is very important, that you have dental care and health care for children, and so that they can have glasses for instance if they need to, no that's not everyone who has that, so that's very important if you want to have equal chances for children." (Stockholm)
Employment policies – easier access to labour market for youth	"I think employment policy is very important for children as well, not the smallest children maybe but the teenagers, I think of the work market as a possibility or that everyone should have the possibility to get a job. If you're already 13 or 15 or something, and it feels like, "Oh, I will never get a job and I am so excluded", that sort of affects all society, and then it's impossible for children to have the feeling that everyone can get a job, and even if you don't plan on going to University it should be possible to go through another way, maybe through work-and-learn programmes or other types of programmes, so that everybody has a chance of getting a job." (Stockholm)

The informants mentioned tax policies (including VAT-related regulations to allow for lower food prices), direct financial transfers as well as a necessity to invest in free health-care services. In Stockholm an interesting issue was brought up: offering jobs to teenagers and reforming the system of professional training, so young people from vulnerable families are supported in establishing themselves in the labour market. Overall, the informants agreed that monetary transfers and investments alone do not suffice to prevent or alleviate families' vulnerability or the reproduction of vulnerability; economic or financial support needs to be embedded in broad offers of education and in creating a family-friendly society. These additional aspects are seen as indispensable to prevent the reproduction of vulnerability. The quotes below illustrate this line of reasoning and provide an excellent summary for all issues discussed in Chapter 4.3.

> *"I see three fields of action where we politicians are called upon: number one is parents' education, that's been mentioned already (...). The second field is social work, or children's rights, but social services only work when the doors to the*

troubled families are wide open. And I don't mean the doors to their flat but their personal doors, then social work can be successful. And the third field is actually the easiest, I mean monetary allowances to the families. And let me emphasise that I think #1 and #2 are much more important." (Vienna)

"There is an important study in the Netherlands about social transfers and benefits: if there is no emphasis on education in a family and they have financial support from the state, in the study they found out that we already have the third and the fourth generation of people having financial benefits from the state. Because they are brought up in a tradition of financial transfers from the state to the family, to sustain them and to be able to live, in poor conditions, but to live. And to get out of this situation, the study finds that the most important thing is education." (Brussels)

"It's not always about money or economic issues but about a social model and the way we organise our society. It's a social issue that touches everyone: the businesses, the administrations, the families and schools. It's about the way we are organising schedules, time. It's indeed essential for a child to receive the attention he/she needs. Quite often, we talk about tax incentives, access to health care, social and educational services, etc. What we desperately need is to create capacity. We need to encourage the creation of a social environment favourable to families. This environment is missing: we are more concerned about economic success than about any other aspect of our lives. I mean, what about family success, personal achievements, volunteering, engaging in other types of activities? This is fundamental! So we should create a movement to accompany those families towards a future with better opportunities for children. It's about ensuring a future for every single child, regardless of their family situation." (Madrid)

5 Summary and Discussion

The Work Package 10 of *FamiliesAndSocieties* is dedicated to several foresight activities, looking at the family futures. *Inter alia*, it employs qualitative methodology to explore possible challenges for social policy that might appear in the future, given different prospects of the economic and cultural development in Europe. In the focus group interviews (FGIs) described in this report we focused on the situation of vulnerable families, in particular those with children. We explored factors that might be crucial for the wellbeing of such families in

order to define priority areas of policy intervention. We made use of the expertise of policymakers and stakeholders to enrich our knowledge in this respect.

The discussions with these experts addressed three themes. First, given the increasing diversity of family forms in which children are raised, we asked whether any family configuration could be considered particularly at risk of vulnerability. Next, we turned to various factors and drivers important for the wellbeing of vulnerable families. Doing that, we wanted to reveal key macro-level developments that will shape the future of these families. Finally, we explored what policy measures might be—according to our experts—crucial for preventing the "reproduction of vulnerability" within families. Here, we summarise the three themes.

The informants defined vulnerability as a multifaceted concept. In the literature, vulnerability is usually defined in relation to economic hardship and social exclusion. In particular children are considered vulnerable if their material, social and emotional needs are not fulfilled (e.g. Radcliff et al., 2012). Our experts agreed that economic hardship is a central aspect of vulnerability. They recognised that a family becomes vulnerable if parents are unable to work and to provide for their family. The importance of social context was emphasised as well, as the informants discussed issues related to social exclusion, stigmatisation or a lack of social support. But vulnerability was also perceived in more general terms as a lack of balance and stability in the lives of families. The informants noted that vulnerable families are those who experience extreme time pressure and stress, who are overburdened, but also those experiencing high levels of conflicts, are going through a divorce or are at risk of it. Other aspects, such as health issues (including disability) or alcohol abuse were mentioned as well. In more general terms, an uneven work-life balance and lack of harmony between family members may be considered as central dimensions of vulnerability, along with financial hardship and social isolation, according to our experts. Importantly, **the relation between paid work and family life appeared crucial for the concept of vulnerability as it conveys economic, social as well as emotional dimensions**. The inability to reconcile the two spheres of life is likely to lead to serious economic problems. Parents can get trapped in precarious jobs, or they have to limit their working hours and thus substantially reduce their income. In extreme cases, they might have to leave the labour market altogether. Consequently, they would no longer be able to meet the financial needs of their family. Being outside the labour market can also reduce the social contacts shared by parents, limiting their social

embeddedness. Facing substantial difficulties regarding the reconciliation of employment and family life, parents might also choose to reduce quality time with their offspring to ensure economic safety, but this solution could have a negative impact on the relationship with their children and on the children's emotional wellbeing. Clearly, both options entail numerous dangers and might be harmful for the wellbeing of a family, especially if there is no support from a social network. Problems with the reconciliation of work and family life are also related to time pressure and high stress levels, all of which implies highly unfavourable consequences for families.

The above line of reasoning also showed up when we asked the experts of what family configurations might be particularly at risk of vulnerability. They pointed to solo parents and families with a large number of children as requiring most attention. They noted that these families are not vulnerable because of their composition per se, but precisely because the reconciliation of paid work and family responsibilities is particularly difficult for them. Some informants noticed that it might become even more challenging for migrant families or when a family faces some health problems (for instance, disability of a child). All in all, **the ability to efficiently combine family life with employment was perceived as decisive for family well-being**.

The experts further discussed topics related to employment, when asked about macro-level developments that are important for shaping the future of vulnerable families. In line with their general views on vulnerability, our informants emphasized that **economic development** and factors influencing the **work-family balance** are the most central drivers. As for economic development, they discussed overall trends related to crisis versus economic growth (including unemployment and wages), as well as more detailed characteristics of the labour market, for instance the growing female labour force participation. With regard to the work-family balance, they described it as a highly complex and multifaceted interplay of various forces. They discussed the role of institutional arrangements for childcare, but they paid equal attention to a shift in gender roles (the increasing involvement of fathers in childcare) as well as to changes in the "culture of workplace". They noted that high demands on employees' time (e.g. requests to work overtime), lack of flexibility from employers with respect to the needs of families or an unfavourable working atmosphere in companies are all highly destructive for the work-family balance and, consequently, the wellbeing of families. The informants acknowledged other macro-level factors, too, showing their importance for the

future of families. They spoke of loosening social ties and intergenerational relations, changing norms and beliefs, but also of technology development and growing mobility.

Many of the drivers discussed in the FGIs are frequently considered in demographic studies. For instance, when researchers explain current demographic trends or attempt to predict their **future directions**, they commonly consider **economic development or changing gender roles and the expansion of women's employment**. The discussions with experts, however, enrich our knowledge on these factors by revealing various details and ambivalences related to them and by setting them into the context of the wellbeing of families. Showing a more nuanced picture of factors that are crucial for the future of families constitutes an important benefit of the qualitative investigations reported here. In the discussions, **many possible future developments were perceived as bringing both positive and negative consequences**. This ambivalence had already been visible to some extent in previous foresight activities (Kapella et al., 2011; OECD, 2012) and was highlighted by our study.

To start with the most central drivers, while economic growth is generally desired, our experts acknowledged that it might be a rather superficial (or even misleading) indicator, and that more attention should be paid to the quality of life in general, that is beyond purely material aspects. Disputes on economic growth should not overlook various risks related to work-related stress or environmental concerns. To make sure that economic growth benefit vulnerable families, it should be accompanied by job security, decent wages, and—as already indicated above—corresponding changes in working cultures to improve work-family balance (e.g. attitudes towards female employment, understanding parental obligations, etc.).

A similar ambivalence was visible in how the experts spoke of the women's increasing labour force participation. On the one hand, the higher female engagement in paid work has a positive impact on family incomes and improves women's situation in terms of financial independence, also with regard to their future pensions. On the other hand, several experts pointed out that we should pay special attention to the pressures it imposes on women. Without corresponding changes in men's social roles, a higher acceptance of female employment, more family-friendly workplaces and further improvements for childcare provision, women might become overburdened, as they are faced with increased pressure to excellently perform in both roles: that of a mother and that of an employee. Finally, fathers' growing engagement in raising their offspring is evaluated very positively by our informants.

The increased commitment of fathers in child rearing, however, also requires new policy answers to family issues. For instance, in case of parental divorce new solutions for physical custody arrangements, especially in a context of higher mobility (e.g., related to the labour market) need to be envisaged. Given the above ambivalences and new challenges identified by our informants, we believe it is needed to closely monitor social and family changes in order to adapt policies to new and emerging family trends.

Our results illustrate the relevance but also the complexity of many other drivers as well. Importantly, while the importance of some factors was not addressed explicitly in the discussions, their role was apparent in how the experts mentioned them recurrently, in conjunction with other topics. For example, technological change or mobility were brought up at several occasions in the discussions and in connection with various aspects of family life, e.g. consequences for work, care, post-separation family arrangements, intra-family communication, family ties across long distances, etc.

It is highly important to pay attention to all possible consequences of economic, institutional and cultural trends. In designing future policies, any ambivalence about these forces needs to be carefully considered. The discussions with the experts allowed us to understand these ambivalences better. Moreover, they turned our attention to several cultural and social forces that are less commonly recognised in demographic research. For instance, the experts noted that **work-family balance** very much depends on the organisational culture of the company the parents work for. In fact, they were critical about employers' inflexibility and high demands on their employees' time. A more positive attitude of employers towards parents and a friendlier working atmosphere could substantially improve the situation of families, but in general, the modern culture of workplace was not evaluated favourably by our informants. Another dimension that was found important for the wellbeing of families, but not commonly considered in demographic studies, concerns the **communication skills** of (young) people. As the experts spoke of cultural and social changes, they pointed to negative changes in people's ability to hold in-depth conversations, discuss and solve problems and—consequently—to build satisfactory relationships. The qualitative studies complement existing quantitative analyses here. The aforementioned aspects can hardly be included into demographic models, but their relevance for the situation of families should not be omitted.

In FGIs, we explored general drivers that might be important for the wellbeing of vulnerable families. Knowledge on these drivers is important for efficiently designing future policies. As the picture has been presented so far, the importance of employment and work-family balance seems paramount. This is again echoed in our experts' suggestions regarding policy measures. As we asked about desirable policy interventions that would prevent the reproduction of vulnerability within families, the topic of reconciliation policies once again came up. Furthermore, the informants discussed the central role of education and social services for the most disadvantaged families.

As the ability to combine childcare with paid employment was identified to be central to vulnerability and decisive for family wellbeing, *reconciliation policies* were viewed as a pivotal aspect of any political strategy by the experts. In order to ensure a good future for children, parents have to be able to secure financial means—but they need to have time to be there for their children as well. Hence, along the availability of institutional childcare also legal and organisational options that would give parents the possibility to reorganise or cut down their work load to dedicate more time to parenting were seen as crucial. Overall, the experts identified a need for flexible policy measures to promote work-family reconciliation.

A key challenge for the future is to help vulnerable families not only temporarily (by mitigating their most urgent needs) but to improve their situation in a sustainable manner. In all focus groups, participants strongly emphasised the importance of *education* in this respect. Education was very widely defined, however. The experts emphasized the significance of formal childcare and early childhood education for children from vulnerable families, so they are empowered and provided with the skills necessary for breaking the "cycle of reproduction of vulnerability". Education is also crucial for improving their position in the labour market when they enter adulthood. Moreover, the need for educating parents, employers and the society in general was also discussed. Parenting nowadays was seen as particularly demanding, due to the rapid social and economic changes; educational programmes for parents were regarded as essential to improve skills for communication and conflict resolution. Parents should also be educated about the importance of schooling for their children's future. As for employers, they should become aware of that it is worthwhile investing in their employees' wellbeing and supporting them also in their parental roles. The aspects related to the "culture of workplace" appeared here once again. No policy measure

will be enough by itself if employers and the society as a whole do not recognise and acknowledge the needs of (vulnerable) families with children.

Finally, in their policy recommendations the discussants focused on the children from the most disadvantaged families who are confronted with poverty, social exclusion and high levels of conflict (or even violence). These are the children with the most urgent needs and their needs have to be directly addressed. The experts mentioned some concrete measures, such as daily assistance for children with disabilities and mediation for families with conflicts. But first and foremost, the participants discussed the general orientation of state support strategies and debated how *social support services* could be improved. According to the experts, a key challenge for the future will be to develop perceptive preventative actions and early support. It is crucial to design measures in such a way that families in need are not punished or stigmatised for their failures. Instead of dictating what to do, social services should offer support that is sensitive to people's situation and their specific needs.

In general, it has to be highlighted that there is a need for a comprehensive strategy and complementary policies: single measures have to go hand in hand with each other. Education and the creation of a more family-friendly society were seen as indispensable. While financial transfers are required to address the most urgent needs of vulnerable families, they alone do not solve the problem of reproduction of vulnerability. Instead they might even lead to the socialisation of state dependency. Thus social transfers alone cannot guarantee to break the vicious circle that children of disadvantaged families often face. Instead, it is most important to support families to sustain themselves. The importance of employment was recurrently emphasised throughout the report and in this summary. But the discussions with the experts offered a new perspective on the topic.

In the FGIs, employment was discussed predominantly with respect to the work-family balance (or conflict). This clearly indicates not only that employment is important, but also that it should be viewed from the family perspective, in particular from the perspective of families with children and including a viewpoint of those in a disadvantaged position. Policy measures should not merely encourage employment without considering all the other needs of families. Focusing purely on increasing employment and only later thinking of reconciliation measures, or searching for solutions to ease the burden of solo parents or large families, or any other family in need, is problematic. Instead, the family perspective and the work-family

balance should be a starting point to look at the employment system, i.e. when jobs are created or new labour laws introduced. Moreover, we were reminded by our participants that the work-family balance should be considered from many dimensions and in relation to numerous forces. Reconciliation policies and childcare provision should be complemented with changes in workplace culture. To achieve work-family balance, we need to educate employers how to be responsive to the needs of families, creating a family-friendly environment and supporting parents in their parental roles. Having a family perspective also means being attentive to any new challenges that occur to parents nowadays, with respect to mobility, changing gender roles, changes in intergenerational relations and many other economic and cultural developments.

The discussions with policymakers and stakeholders provided valuable insights into the situation of (vulnerable) families and into forces important for their wellbeing in the future. They offered new perspectives and drew our attention to aspects that are not commonly considered in demographic studies. Future population research should incorporate these insights and, in turn, provide improved evidence-based policy recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders. It should be pointed out that some of the focal areas suggested in our report are already being investigated by our colleagues within the framework of the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project. For instance, Bernardi and colleagues conducted research on family configurations and children's educational attainment that offers additional insights regarding the reproduction of inequality (Bernardi et al., 2013; Bernardi & Radl, 2014). Other reports and working papers addressed the consequences of new gender roles (e.g. Klesment & Van Bavel, 2015; Oláh et al., 2014). Especially noteworthy, the division of parental leave and shared physical custody (alternating residences) after divorce have already been researched for Sweden by Evertsson et al. (2015) and Turunen (2015), respectively. With regard to specific policy measures, several studies of the project deal with effects of childcare on female labour participation and child development (e.g. Brilli et al., 2015; Del Boca et al., 2015; Del Boca et al., 2014; Thévenon & Neyer, 2014). Research activities in the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project also cover the important topic of children with disabilities (e.g. Di Giulio et al., 2014). An essential benefit of qualitative research is that it allows for capturing and exploring uncertainties and ambivalences. It is more difficult to investigate these aspects in quantitative studies, but this line of inquiry is very important. In the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project, Mortelmans et al. (2015) addressed the issue of positive and negative consequences of new technologies. In our report, however, several other ambivalent

outcomes of cultural and economic developments were highlighted. They need to be studied in more details in future research as well.

All in all, our study clearly illustrates the necessity for a closer dialog between researchers and practitioners. As aforementioned examples of studies have indicated, the *FamiliesAndSocieties* project is already progressing in the right direction. Nevertheless, there is still a high potential for future collaborations between science and politics, especially in respect to family futures. Policymakers seek to design measures to improve the wellbeing of families and evidence-based policy recommendations are necessary for that. The foresight studies—which bring the perspectives of practitioners and scientists together—are an important step in this respect. They illustrate how complex the futures might be. They draw our attention to various possible side-effects or undesired consequences of various actions. They are helpful in suggesting alternative plans and solutions, to be prepared for even the most unlikely events. A closer collaboration between scientists and practitioners when thinking of the future(s) of the family would allow for more efficiently predicting the imminent course of events and to design actions that can really improve family wellbeing in any future reality.

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Appendix I: Results of previous foresight activities

Table A.I.1: Relevant future developments according to the Workshop (FamiliesAndSocieties)

Economic (un)certainty	Gender relationships	Childcare arrangements	Intergenerational linkages
- More secure situation with two incomes in family - Access to free, high-quality care services and universal social security coverage vs. privatisation of services - Digital inclusion - Higher mobility needed, while families are not that mobile (mobility divides families) - Unemployment - Housing availability/prices – availability of low-interest loans – flexibility – facilitation of rental market - Family-sensitive and responsible firms - Minimum income and financial support to children - Reduced taxes on children-related items - Contract-based labour market	- Gender equality vs. traditional gender roles (gender stereotypes) - Division of parental leave and of household work, fathers' empowerment (new father role), increasing FLFP - Women emancipation and increasing education - Same-sex couples - Union stability & quality - Gender equality at the labour market (equal access to work, equal pay)	- The active roles of: ethnic communities, neighbourhood - Common framework for public and private care - Flexible care arrangements, parents' should not be forced into one type of care, also care 24/7 available, different arrangement (child-minder, multigenerational housing & service exchange etc.) - Absence of grandparents (mobility, increasing retirement age) - Family-sensitive and responsible firms - Care available to all (cannot be too expensive or subsidised for chosen ones) - Longer parental leaves - Development of high-quality childcare, national quality standards on child protection	- Diversity in intergeneration relations – supporting multigenerational houses - Independent choices of couples - More information & family education - New media literacy especially for older (digital inclusion – also to improve contacts) - Migration and family re-unification - Mobility – might be forced by housing & job availability - Urban planning

Source: Philipov, D., I. Jaschinski, J. Vobecká, P. Di Giulio, & T. Fent (2014). Report on the futures task force workshop. (FamiliesAndSocieties Working Paper No. 18). Retrieved from FamiliesAndSocieties website: http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/WP18PhilipovEtAl2014.pdf

Table A.I.2: Different future scenarios according to FamilyPlatform (2011)

Scenarios:	**1.**	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**
summary	**equal opportunities – open migration – diverse education and values – mix of private/ public care**	**increasing inequalities – no migration – private education and care – extreme values**	**increasing inequalities – open limited migration – private education and care – diverse values**	**equal opportunities at low level – restricted migration – rigid public education, public care – diverse values accepted**
basic frame of society	- multiculturalism, open attitudes, integration - confident society with few social and economic fears - high employment - strong welfare and social solidarity	- hardly any mobility between social groups and limited choices - states have withdrawn their support almost completely and families need to choose between market based support (at price) or community based one	- "contract society" – contracts instead of state provided services - "tribal society" – strong communities	- Europe is strong (no borders inside) but isolated from the rest of the world - no family-policy but support for children or elderly (as individuals) - reproductive technology, surrogacy, growing babies
(in)equality	- policies to improve gender equality - motherhood and fatherhood valued - flexible working arrangements - equal chances for children - life-long learning - no digital exclusion - linguistic and religious diversity	- increasing inequalities between social, ethnic and religious group - gender equity depends on the social position - shifts towards more extreme values	- inequalities in all dimensions (gender, economic, social, ethnic) - knowledge/education gaps between groups, different gender roles in different groups, negotiations of roles	- state provides basic public care services and education. they are at the basic level and the higher quality depends on the individuals - inequalities begin at the baseline - direct support to those in needs
migration	- open migration - work on a legal basis and social benefits for migrants - feminisation of migration - high skilled workers might not need to migrate due to technology development	- severely restricted migration - mobility only for tourism - illegal migration exists – ethnic minorities form closed communities - conflicts between social and ethnic groups - cultural segmentation	- migration is privatised – one may buy citizenship by paying taxes - EU citizens can migrate rather easily, big difference between the countries (different services and different taxes) - segmentation of labour market and black market	- almost impossible from and to outside of Europe - within EU people move and work freely

Source: Kapella, de Liedekerke, & Bergeyck (2011). *Foresight Report: Facets and Preconditions of Wellbeing of Families* (Final Report of FamilyPlatform Work Package 3). Retrieved from EU website: http://europa.eu/epic/docs/wp3_final_report_future_of_families.pdf

Table A.I.2 continued

Scenarios:	1.	2.	3.	4.
education	- diverse forms of education of high quality (central certification) - increased e-learning and lifelong education - open education and children can choose their involvement - high involvement of parents	- completely privatised due to low number of children - virtual learning (every social /ethnic group can offer their own schooling) - expensive face-to-face schooling for elites	- only limited public education - no public crèche - education standard guaranteed until the age of 14, private universities - e-learning privatised, growing knowledge gaps	- rigid, provided by state until the age of 16, afterwards – private - equal start opportunities
values	- tolerance, acceptance for different lifestyles and family models - emphasis on equity and well-being	- increasing social isolation - radical groups with extremes values - on the other community based support is needed	- diverse values, freedom as the highest value (not equality). - values and norms are shaped by groups, companies, religions	- "we are different and we love it" (but only if you're European) - suspicious to migrants and foreigners
care systems	- mix of private and public - local authorities distribute money directly to families to spend on preferred care - diverse and modern care options	- completely privatised - price and quality strongly correlated - if not affordable, the role of local communities and generational links is in play - those with no support – likely to remain with one child only - organisation of childcare depends on community	- privatised, provided by charities or private sector - childcare provision is a mix of company and association-funded (private interests) and informal care systems	- entire care is targeted at individual – state offers basics and individual decides what they use and whether they supplement it with private
individual level	- with a variety of choices one needs to be flexible and open for negotiations - more individualistic approach - a need for improving family and intergenerational ties	- pressure to conform to values of community - pragmatic links rather than based on love	- increasing inequity and uncertainty - freedom of choice and ambivalence - people demand more public responsibility	- relationships, kinship and networks are important - long-term, committed relationships are valued - more freedom and less tension in couples – state takes care of basic needs

Source: Kapella, de Liedekerke, & Bergeyck (2011). *Foresight Report: Facets and Preconditions of Wellbeing of Families* (Final Report of FamilyPlatform Work Package 3). Retrieved from EU website: http://europa.eu/epic/docs/wp3_final_report_future_of_families.pdf

Table A.I.3: Different future scenarios of OECD (2012)

Scenarios:	Golden Age?	Back to the basics
economy	- Advanced science- and technology-led sectors growing - Increasing need for high skilled-workers (including migrants) - Higher standards of education - Unemployment is low - Reduction in the size of public sector - Reduced spending on welfare and provision of care - While absolute poverty has declined, the relative poverty is on the raise & inequality growing - Rising health costs	- Unemployment and inflation are high - Education and skill developments have deteriorated and there is a regression in technology development (non-profit, low-cost technology increasing) - Increasing poverty and social inequalities - Non-flexible labour market
society	- Growing responsibility of individuals to be self-reliant - Well-being and taking care of body and soul is high on the agenda	- Society fragmented and low trust - Migration inflows reduced, but the proportion of the population with ethnic or migrant background – growing - More conservative attitudes - Family of a greater importance
public sector	- Public finances rather balanced - Investments targeted at enhancing human potential - Formal care services on high demand (informal care structures for the less well-off)	- Public finances in bad shape - Large budget cuts and the state has retreated from various services – especially from formal care
labour market	- Higher women's labour force participation (although still somewhat behind men…) - More flexible working arrangement – but most working full-time - E-working and e-living - Higher retirement age	- Women's labour force participation is lower than expected and they are usually working in informal sectors. - Elderly are more involved in informal, voluntary and charity sectors - High competition for jobs of low-skills, low salaries
family	- Increasing demand for institutionalised childcare – important role of the private sector (expensive) - Greater personal choices and greater economic independence - Those of lower income and unemployed – not able to afford expensive private healthcare and childcare	- Poor families have less children - Childcare – informal - People cohabit for a longer time, but single-parent families and divorces are static (due to more traditional attitudes) → how does it fit with increasing cohabitation? - With greater proportion of women unemployed, and involvement of elderly persons in care – informal network of care is boosted

Source: OECD (2012). *The Future of the Families to 2030*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Appendix II: Welfare regimes in the studied countries

Welfare states shape the cultural and structural environment of everybody's life. Policies restrict or enhance the options and chances of children who are growing up in different familial settings in a variety of ways (and will still do so in the future). Therefore, family policies need to be addressed in a forward-looking view on European family forms and family well-being as well. But "family policies involve a range of broad objectives: reconciling work and family responsibilities, mobilising female labour supply and promoting gender equality as well as ensuring the financial sustainability of social protection systems, combating child and family poverty, promoting child development and generally enhancing child well-being" (Thévenon & Neyer, 2014, pp. 2-3). Because different objectives are more pronounced in some countries than in others, different type of welfare state and family policy regimes do exist. Focus groups were held in Madrid, Stockholm, Vienna, Warsaw and Brussels. This selection gives a good coverage of countries with different economic and cultural background as well as with different welfare regimes.[11] The following lines roughly describe family policy and family configuration within these countries. Some of the numbers presented in the Tables in this Appendix were also used for Graph 1 in FGIs (for graphs of focus groups see Appendix IV).

Sweden (Stockholm)

Sweden is the prototype of the "dual-earner policy configuration type" (Oláh, Richter & Kotowska, 2014, p. 3). According to Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) countries that are classified under the *Social Democratic welfare regime* offer extensive policy provision. These countries aim at comprehensive support for working parents with young children facilitating work-life balance for both women and men. Childcare facilities are fully developed and used by most parents. Notably, almost all parents with preschool-aged children of three years or older use formal childcare (see Table A.II.1). Furthermore, Nordic family policy includes the objective of a gender equal division of childcare and a substantial proportions of fathers take paternity leave (Carlson, 2013; Duvander & Haas, 2014).[12]

[11] However, cultural ideals, welfare state policies and private care arrangements within households are complexly interrelated and affect each other (Pfau-Effinger, 2000, 2005, 2009).

[12] Sweden was the first country introducing a gender-neutral paid parental-leave allowance in 1974. Special incentives for men to take parental leave were then introduced in 1995 and 2002 (additional months of paid leave for the couple if both parents share the responsibility for child rearing). Nevertheless, Swedish mothers on average still take much longer parental leave than Swedish fathers (Carlson, 2013; Duvander & Haas, 2014).

High-level dual-earner support has led to high female employment rates and lower levels of child poverty (Ferrarini, 2006). Table A.II.2 shows that Sweden is characterised by relatively low poverty rates. Yet, almost 40 per cent of single parents with dependent children are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. On the other hand, single parents are the only group of parents showing higher risks than the non-parent population.

Concerning other cultural and legal aspects, new partnership forms spread first in northern Europe. The Swedish divorce law has always been among the most liberal divorce laws in Europe.[13] Taken together with women's independence due to their own employment, new partnership forms could easily emerge. Births outside marriage are also much more common in Sweden than in other European countries—a development starting in the 1960s and 1970s (see Table A.II.3). Today, more than half of Swedish children are born to non-married mothers. Accordingly, family configurations in Sweden are much more diverse than in other countries. Slightly more than half of households with children include married parents (see Table A.II.4) but almost 18 per cent of households with children are single-parent households and more than 30 per cent of households with children include non-married parents. Couples with two children (married and non-married) represent one-third of all households with children in Sweden (see Table A.II.5).[14] Though families with one child only build the majority of single-parent households (59 per cent), one-child households in total are less common in Sweden than in most other European countries.

Table A.II.1: Use of Formal Childcare (public and private forms)

Formal Childcare in Europe in 2012	Age of children: less than 3 years			from 3 years to minimum compulsory school age		
% over the population of each age group	no formal childcare	1 to 29 hours	30 hours or over	no formal childcare	1 to 29 hours	30 hours or over
EU 28	73	14	14	17	37	46
Belgium	53	21	**27**	< 1	25	**75**
Spain	64	21	15	8	52	40
Austria	**87**	7	7	20	**57**	23
Poland	**94**	1	5	**65**	10	26
Sweden	47	17	**35**	3	27	**69**

Source: Eurostat (2014a; data from EU-SILC 2012).

[13] For example, the minimum requirement of three years of living in separation before a unilateral divorce was eliminated already in 1974 (Härkönen et al., 2014, p. 4, Table 2).
[14] Half of Swedish couples with children have two children (see Table 5).

Table A.II.2: Child Poverty

Share of households at risk of poverty or social exclusion (2012 or 2013)	Single person with dependent children	Two adults with one dependent child	Two adults with two dependent children	Two adults with three or more dependent children	Two or more adults with dependent children	Three or more adults with dependent children	Household without dependent children
EU 28	49.7	19.1	18.7	32.2	23.7	31.1	22.9
Belgium	**51.7**	17.0	11.2	21.5	16.9	24.0	22.3
Spain	**47.6**	25.3	26.4	**40.5**	**30.4**	**38.5**	23.1
Austria	42.1	13.8	13.9	26.6	17.0	18.2	18.5
Poland	**47.0**	18.6	21.0	**44.8**	26.3	28.9	23.6
Sweden	39.0	10.5	**7.4**	**15.3**	**10.2**	**10.3**	**18.7**

Source: Eurostat (2014c; data from EU-SILC 2012 or 2013).

Madrid, Spain

The Spanish welfare state belongs to the *Mediterranean welfare regime* with nearly none or extremely limited policy provision to families and pronounced gender role differentiation. These welfare regimes are also called "familialistic" meaning that the individual heavily depends on the family. Familialistic systems lack both the provision of services by the state and by the market. This is also emphasised with regard to childcare, where Spain is seen as employing a *privatised (noninterventionalist) care model* leading to low female employment rates (e.g. Haas, 2003). Nevertheless, in 2012 formal childcare—though not on the same level as Sweden or Belgium—seems to be more developed in Spain than in Austria or Poland. On the one hand, two-thirds of children below the age of three years are not in formal childcare. But on the other hand, 40 per cent of children between three years and compulsory school age use full-time care (30 hours per week or more).

Table A.II.2 shows that child poverty is rather high in Spain. Less extensive welfare state provisions and the economic crisis may have left their marks. As in most countries, the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is very high among single-parent households (48 per cent). In Spain however, this share is also rather high among households with two adults and three or more dependent children. More than 40 per cent of such households are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. In addition, the situation for multi-generational households seems to be similarly difficult. Almost 39 per cent of households with three or more adults and dependent children live in hard economic circumstances.

In Spain, people exhibit relatively high marriage rates and divorce levels are low. Cohabitation is still uncommon (cf. Thévenon & Neyer, 2014; Oláh et al., 2014). Religion as well as economic factors may play a role (e.g. high youth unemployment preventing young

couples from being able to afford cohabiting). Though the share of live births outside marriage has risen from only 2 per cent in 1960 to almost 36 per cent in 2010 (Table A.II.3), children living together with married parents still amount to 84 per cent of all households with children in Spain (Table A.II.4). The composition of households with children (Table A.II.5a) is dominated by couples living with one or two children (28 and 33 per cent, respectively). In sum, almost half of households with children are households with one child only (49 per cent; see Table A.II.5c).

Table A.II.3: Live Births outside Marriage 1960-2010

% of births outside marriage	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010
EU 27	-	-	-	17.4	27.4	38.3
Belgium	**2.1**	**2.8**	4.1	11.6	28.0	46.2
Spain	**2.3**	**1.4**	3.9	9.6	17.7	35.5
Austria	13.0	12.8	17.8	23.6	31.3	40.1
Poland	-	5.0	4.8	6.2	12.1	**20.6**
Sweden	11.3	18.6	39.7	47.0	**56.3**	**54.2**

Source: Härkönen et al. (2014, p. 2, Table 1).

Table A.II.4: Diverse Family Configurations

Household type in which children live (2007)	Children living without parents	Children living with one parent	Children living with cohabiting parents	Children living with married parents	Children living in multi-generational households
EU 25	1.2	14.1	11.0	73.8	5.4
Belgium	2.5	**16.2**	13.7	67.7	2.2
Spain	1.2	7.2	7.9	**83.7**	5.8
Austria	2.2	**14.3**	7.4	**76.1**	7.5
Poland	0.8	11.0	9.2	**79.0**	**22.0**
Sweden	1.3	**17.6**	**30.5**	50.6	0.3

Source: Eurostat (2010, p. 24, Table 4.2; data from EU-SILC).

Austria (Vienna)

Austria belongs to the class of *conservative welfare regimes* (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999) that used to be sort of a "general family support policy configuration type" (Oláh et al., 2014). Traditionally, most of these countries were characterised by the dominance of the male-breadwinner model with the housewife doing the family work (including childcare tasks) and her husband earning the money for living (Ostner & Lewis, 1995). Nowadays, the range of state support to women combining paid work with family responsibilities varies greatly across countries belonging to the conservative type.

The Austrian welfare state has a long tradition of high social investment in children. Since 1955 the welfare state provides cash benefits for each child—independently of the wealth of parents.[15] For a long time, family policy was designed in terms of general family support. But Austria may be shifting from the track of the *General Family Policy Model* in direction of a more *Contradictory Family Policy Model* (Korpi, 2000). In reforms taken during the last decades, the Austrian welfare state combined familialistic with de-familialistic policies (Blum et al., 2014).[16] While extensive parental leave or direct transfers heighten female dependency on the family, childcare facilities for preschool children help reconciling work and family life and, thus, foster female employment. Incentives derived from such a policy for women are rather ambiguous.

Indeed, Austria seems to be a country where the male breadwinner model is still very popular because welfare state policies offer only limited incentives for employment of mothers. A lot of mothers in Austria choose to use parental leave for several years and opt for part-time work thereafter until children are out of school (Berghammer, 2014; Pfau-Effinger, 2000; Steiber & Haas, 2010). The result is a high dispersion of the modified breadwinner model in which fathers work full-time while mothers have part-time jobs.

In line with mothers` extensive use of parental leave in Austria, almost 90 per cent of children below three years do not use formal childcare at all (see Table A.II.1). After a few years, most women start working part-time. This again seems to be reflected by the numbers in Table A.II.1. While almost 60 per cent of children from 3 years to minimum compulsory school age are in formal care for less than 30 hours per week, about 20 per cent are not using any childcare at all or full-time (at least 30 hours per week).

The tradition of a strong welfare state is reflected in most of the numbers in Table A.II.2. Compared to the other countries depicted, the share of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion is among the lowest in households with and without dependent children. Nevertheless, there are large differences between the types of households within the country. While less than 14 per cent of households with two adults and one or two children are identified as vulnerable, almost 27 per cent of households with two adults and three or more dependent children and more than 42 per cent of single-parent households are at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

[15] The dominant paradigm was (is) that each and every child is worth exactly the same.

[16] Austrian politicians argue in favour of this strategy with reference to the "freedom of choice" meaning that each woman should be able to decide according to her preferences.

In Austria, every fourth child was born outside marriage in 2010 (Table A.II.3). Nevertheless, children are living with married parents in three out of four households with children and only 7 per cent of households with children include cohabiting parents. Another 14 per cent are single-parent households (Table A.II.4). As in Spain, almost half of all households with children are households with one child only (49 per cent; see Table A.II.5c).

Poland (Warsaw)

In the literature, post-socialist countries are often discussed as countries in transition employing no clear pattern of a certain type of welfare state regime. While previous Soviet-type policies were abandoned it was unclear which direction the systems will take. Early reforms were marked by a lack of attention to social sector restructuring (Orenstein & Haas, 2005; Orenstein, 2008). Following neoliberal economic programmes only, "[t]he end of subsidies, full employment, and enterprise-based social provision created enormous pressure for welfare-policy reform" (Orenstein, 2008, p. 84). During the first years, a number of emergency measures were introduced. Strategies to build new social security systems were not implemented until the late 1990s. Finally, not only market solutions but also corporatist structures were introduced. Thus, especially countries in eastern central Europe maintained a high level of social protection.

Indeed, former socialist countries are rather heterogeneous in terms of state support to families and to women who want to combine labour market participation and family life today (see Fodor et al., 2002). But Aspalter and colleagues (2009) argue that most welfare state systems in Eastern Europe returned to the social security policy they had before state socialism in Soviet times. By and large, systems in countries like Poland became similar to most of the continental European *conservative welfare regimes* (e.g. Austria). Thus, family policies are familialistic. Compared to Soviet times, mothers are given a greater incentive to return to the home (Saxonberg & Szelewa, 2007).

In line with the latter statement, Table A.II.1 shows that 94 per cent of Polish children below the age of three are not in any formal childcare. While Austria shows a comparably low level of formal childcare usage for the youngest children (87 per cent), Poland's position for children between three years and the minimum compulsory school age is outstanding: two-thirds of this groups of children are not using any kind of formal childcare at all (Austria: 20 per cent). In Poland, only one-fifth of children are born outside marriage (Table A.II.3) and

almost four-fifths of households with children are households in which the children are living with their married parents (Table A.II.4).

The share of households at risk of poverty or social exclusion is very high among both single-parent households as well as households with three or more children. While 24 per cent of households without dependent children are at risk, the share of single-parent household amounts to 47 per cent, and the share of households with two parents and three or more children equals 45 per cent (see Table A.II.2).

Table A.II.5a: Composition of Households with Children

Share of household types with children	Single adult with … children			Couple with … children			Other households with … children		
	1	2	3+	1	2	3+	1	2	3+
EU 28	8.1	4.5	1.5	27.3	30.0	9.6	12.4	4.8	1.8
Belgium	8.8	5.4	2.8	24.3	30.9	13.5	8.9	3.6	1.9
Spain	5.2	2.8	0.5	**29.0**	**33.2**	7.2	15.1	5.3	1.6
Austria	6.6	3.6	1.0	27.2	28.7	9.6	14.9	6.2	2.1
Poland	5.4	2.7	1.1	26.0	25.4	7.8	17.5	10.3	3.8
Sweden	13.3	7.2	1.9	22.5	33.8	11.2	7.0	2.3	0.8

Source: Eurostat (2014b; data from EU-LFS 2013).

Table A.II.5b: Number of Children in different Configurations of Households with Children

Household type	Single adult with … children			Couple with … children			Other households with … children		
Number of children (%)	1	2	3+	1	2	3+	1	2	3+
EU 28	**57.6**	32.0	10.4	**40.8**	44.8	14.3	**65.1**	25.5	9.4
Belgium	**52.0**	31.8	16.3	**35.4**	45.0	19.6	**61.8**	24.8	13.3
Spain	**60.9**	33.6	5.5	**41.8**	47.7	10.4	**68.6**	24.1	7.3
Austria	**58.7**	32.3	8.9	**41.5**	43.8	14.7	**64.3**	26.6	9.1
Poland	**58.4**	29.8	11.8	**44.0**	42.9	13.2	**55.4**	32.6	12.0
Sweden	**59.1**	32.2	8.7	**33.3**	50.1	16.6	**69.4**	22.7	7.9

Source: Eurostat (2014b; data from EU-LFS 2013).

Table A.II.5c: Number of Children in Households with Children

Number of children (%)	1	2	3+
EU 28	47.8	39.3	12.8
Belgium	42.0	39.9	**18.2**
Spain	**49.3**	41.3	9.3
Austria	**48.7**	38.5	12.7
Poland	**48.9**	38.4	12.7
Sweden	42.8	43.3	13.9

Source: Eurostat (2014b; data from EU-LFS 2013).

Belgium or EU (Brussels)

Experts discussing in Brussels focused on the European Union as a whole rather than on Belgium in particular. However, Belgium is an interesting country because family policy offers a lot of assistance and support to parents. Like France, Belgium is categorised within the *Contradictory Family Policy Model* combining high levels of general family support with high levels of dual-earner support (Korpi, 2000). In Belgium, the percentages of children using formal childcare are high (Table A.II.1). Most impressive, three-quarters of children from three years to the minimum compulsory school age are in fulltime care (at least 30 hours per week). Around 16 per cent of children live with one parent only (Table A.II.4). More than half of single-parent households are at risk of poverty or social exclusion (Table A.II.2). Rates are not that high in large households. For example, the same rate amounts to 22 per cent of households with two adults and three or more dependent children. The share of households with three or more children on all households with children is comparatively high (18%, see Table A.II.5).

Within the European Union the availability and usage of childcare facilities varies widely. Even within our small sample of five countries, shares of children below the age of three years who do not use any formal childcare range from 47 per cent in Sweden to 94 per cent in Poland, and from 25 per cent in Belgium and 27 per cent in Sweden to 65 per cent in Poland with children from three years to minimum compulsory school age (see Table A.II.1). The diversity in poverty rates of households with children is also huge (Table A.II.2). The share of households facing high risks of poverty or social exclusion within households with two adults and three or more dependent children ranges from 15 per cent in Sweden to 41 per cent in Spain and 45 per cent in Poland. In addition, while only 20 per cent of children are born outside marriage in Poland, more than one-half of children in Sweden are. The number of children in households with children also differs to some degree: households with a single child account for about 42/43 per cent in Belgium or Sweden and around 49 per cent in Austria, Poland and Spain.

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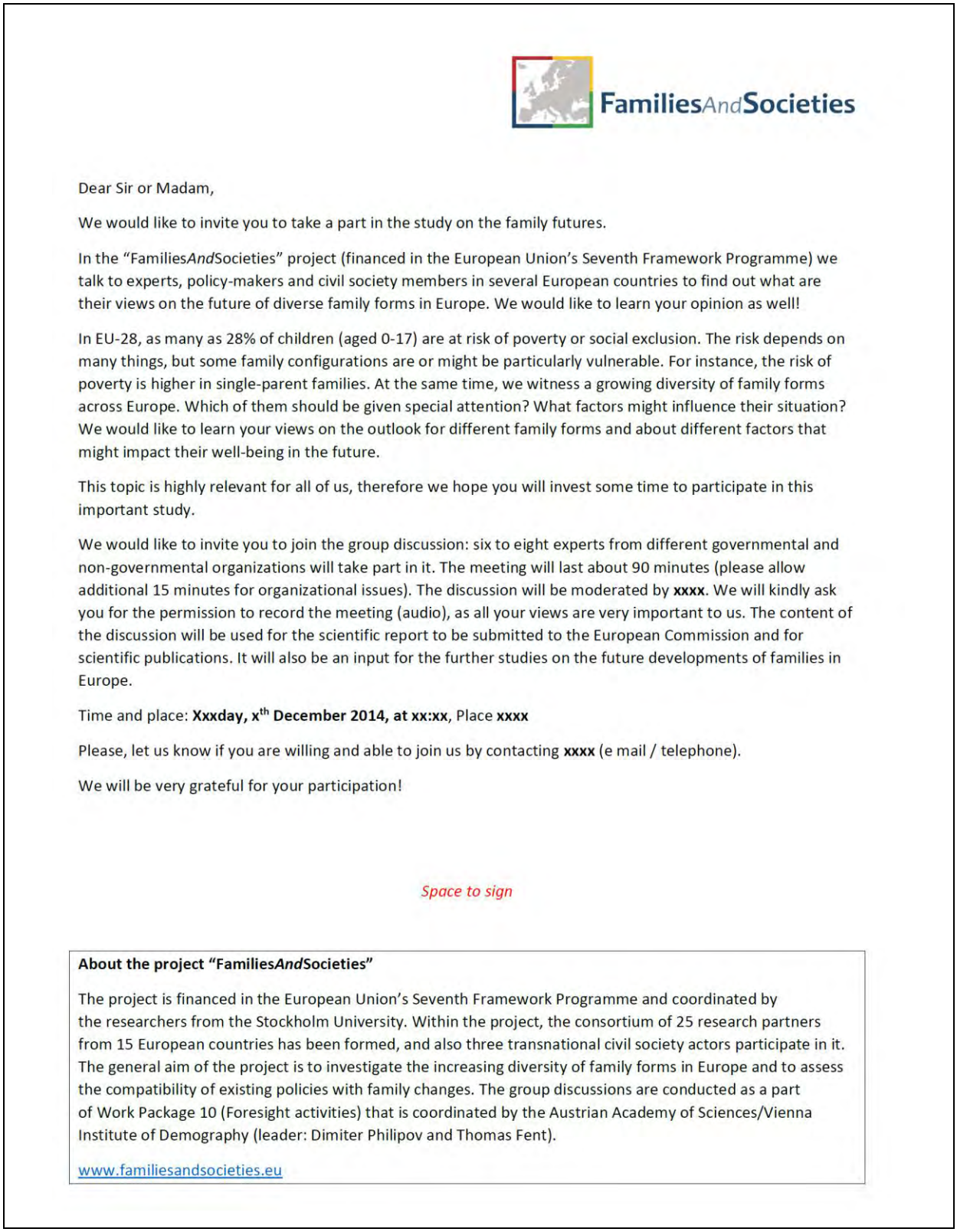
Appendix III: Invitation Letter and attached Project Information

Figure A.III.1: Invitation Letter (Template)



FamiliesAndSocieties

Dear Sir or Madam,

We would like to invite you to take a part in the study on the family futures.

In the "Families*And*Societies" project (financed in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme) we talk to experts, policy-makers and civil society members in several European countries to find out what are their views on the future of diverse family forms in Europe. We would like to learn your opinion as well!

In EU-28, as many as 28% of children (aged 0-17) are at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The risk depends on many things, but some family configurations are or might be particularly vulnerable. For instance, the risk of poverty is higher in single-parent families. At the same time, we witness a growing diversity of family forms across Europe. Which of them should be given special attention? What factors might influence their situation? We would like to learn your views on the outlook for different family forms and about different factors that might impact their well-being in the future.

This topic is highly relevant for all of us, therefore we hope you will invest some time to participate in this important study.

We would like to invite you to join the group discussion: six to eight experts from different governmental and non-governmental organizations will take part in it. The meeting will last about 90 minutes (please allow additional 15 minutes for organizational issues). The discussion will be moderated by **xxxx**. We will kindly ask you for the permission to record the meeting (audio), as all your views are very important to us. The content of the discussion will be used for the scientific report to be submitted to the European Commission and for scientific publications. It will also be an input for the further studies on the future developments of families in Europe.

Time and place: **Xxxday, xth December 2014, at xx:xx**, Place **xxxx**

Please, let us know if you are willing and able to join us by contacting **xxxx** (e mail / telephone).

We will be very grateful for your participation!

Space to sign

About the project "Families*And*Societies"

The project is financed in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme and coordinated by the researchers from the Stockholm University. Within the project, the consortium of 25 research partners from 15 European countries has been formed, and also three transnational civil society actors participate in it. The general aim of the project is to investigate the increasing diversity of family forms in Europe and to assess the compatibility of existing policies with family changes. The group discussions are conducted as a part of Work Package 10 (Foresight activities) that is coordinated by the Austrian Academy of Sciences/Vienna Institute of Demography (leader: Dimiter Philipov and Thomas Fent).

www.familiesandsocieties.eu

Figure A.III.2: Project Information sent to Discussants

FamiliesAndSocieties – about the project

What will families look like in the future? Are existing social- and family policies compatible with changes in family patterns? These and related questions are addressed in the large-scale integrating project FamiliesAndSocieties – Changing families and sustainable societies: Policy contexts and diversity over the life course and across generations, coordinated by Stockholm University.

The collaborative research project is financed in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (€6.5 millions in EU contribution; grant no. 320116). Launched in February 1, 2013 it will continue until January 31, 2017.

The main objectives of the project are:

- To investigate the diversity of family forms, relationships, and life courses in Europe.
- To explore the growing complexity of family configurations and transitions.
- To examine their implications for men, women and children with respect to inequalities in life chances, intergenerational relations and care arrangements.
- To investigate how policies address family diversity.
- To develop short- and longer-term projections.
- To identify future policy needs.

In overall, to contribute to evidence-based policy-making.

The research activities of the project are divided into 12 Work Packages. The group discussion is a part of the Work Package 10: "Foresight activities."

Work Package 10: The future of the families

Co-leaders: Dimiter Philipov & Thomas Fent
Austrian Academy of Sciences-Vienna Institute of Demography

The main objective of the work package is to inform policy makers about the impact that family-related policies have on the long run on well-being and on satisfying family needs. It will produce a newer, deeper and more multifaceted knowledge of the future of the families that could contribute best to the knowledge needs of policy makers involved in designing family-oriented interventions and promote the well-being of individuals as well as families.

Two lines of research are being pursued. First, advanced statistical methods are applied to outline possible future trends in family configurations. Second, the qualitative methods are employed to better understand needs of different family types and to draw policy implications. In the qualitative part, the main aim is to explore **what challenges for social policy might appear in the future – given different economic and cultural developments?** This question will be addressed in the group discussions with experts and stakeholders.

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Figure A.III.2 continued

The content of group discussions was defined based on the previous family-related foresight projects (International Future Programme of OECD and FamilyPlatform) as well as on the results from the workshop that was organized as a part of the Work Package 10 activities. The workshop was organized with 36 stakeholders from different European institutions (governmental and non-governmental) in January 2014, in Tallinn. Its aim was to identify the core factors that might shape European family forms and family wellbeing in the future. During the workshop a wide array of topics were discussed. But the participants paid a lot of attention to how different family types might become vulnerable under different economic or cultural conditions in the future and how children in these families need to be protected.
These topics will be explored more in-depth in the forthcoming group discussions.

The group discussions will be organized in several European countries: Austria (Vienna), Belgium (Brussels), Poland (Warsaw), Spain (Madrid), Sweden (Stockholm) and Switzerland (Lausanne).

For more information about the project please visit: http://www.familiesandsocieties.eu/

In case of any further question do not hesitate to contact one of the team members in the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna Institute of Demography:
Dimiter Philipov • Dimiter.Philipov@oeaw.ac.at
Monika Mynarska • Monika.Mynarska@oeaw.ac.at
Bernhard Riederer • Bernhard.Riederer@oeaw.ac.at
Ina Jaschinski • Ina.Jaschinski@oeaw.ac.at • Phone: +43 1 515 81 7725

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Appendix IV: Guideline for Focus Group Interviews

Introduction

Introduction, obtaining participants' consent to record the discussion and to list their names in the report.

You have all received information about the study, but before we begin I'd like to present some basic information about our project. We invited you here today to take part in the focus group discussion that is organized within the research project "FamiliesAndSocieties". The project is financed in the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme and coordinated by the researchers from Stockholm University. Within the project, the consortium of **25 research partners from 15 European countries** has been formed, and also **three transnational civil society actors** participate in it. The general aim of the project is to investigate the **increasing diversity of family forms in Europe** and to assess the compatibility of existing policies with family changes.

In our part of the project, we wish to talk about **future of the families**. We would like to hear your opinions about needs of different family types in the future. It is important to note that we are not constructing any forecasts. We do not want to predict the future. Rather, we are interested in a foresight. That means we try to develop a much broader view. We want to get an understanding of quite different possible futures, including also developments that are not very realistic. Therefore, I will encourage you to consider different scenarios for the future and discuss with you their impact on the well-being of families. I will be explaining everything as our discussion unfolds, but first I would like to take a few minutes to introduce the participants.

1. Family types and vulnerability /max. 15 minutes/

As I have already mentioned we wish to discuss with you the future of different family types. We know that European families are becoming more and more diverse and **children are raised** in different family settings.

[Presenting Graph 1]

This graph depicts most general family configurations and gives you some numbers illustrating the existing diversity.

We are all familiar with these trends. The most common family form – if we speak about families with minor children – is a married couple with one or two children. Although of course, there are also families with larger number of children growing up together. Other demographic trends should be noticed: Some children are raised by unmarried parents, others – grow up with only one of their parents or parents share custody over them. The number of children in reconstructed (patchwork) families is increasing, too.

Probes:

- Do you think that any type of families is particularly **at risk** of economic hardship or of being socially excluded? Which of them require more attention? Why?
- Are there any stereotypes associated with different families? Do you think there are any stereotypes of /cohabiting families, families with many children, solo-parent families…/?
- Which families might be stigmatized? Why?

2. Future developments /max. 40 minutes/

We have talked about different families that might be vulnerable nowadays. But the main aim of our project is to discuss the future of these families. We want to look at different factors that might be **difficult or favourable** for the families in the future.
[Presenting Graph 2]
Of course, nobody can be 100% sure about what Europe will look like 10 or 30 years from now. We might be facing different cultural and economic developments in the future. Some possible directions are very briefly presented on the graph. It shows just a few key words indicating certain changes. They surely do not cover all options.

Probes:

- Taking this as a starting point – which general future economic, cultural or other developments would be favourable for the families we have just talked about? What may prevent vulnerability?
- What would Utopia look like from your perspective? What is your best case scenario? Feel free to imagine even the most unlikely scenarios!
- What kind of future developments might be 'dangerous' for different family types? What could make certain family types even more vulnerable?
- Are there worst case scenarios? What would be the consequences for the families? Again, please try to imagine even the most unlikely scenarios!

Important: *If the topic "same-sex couples" is not brought up by the participants in their discussion, at the end of this section the moderator should ask whether any of the conclusions made before would be different if same-sex couples raising children are considered, e.g., "We have already talked about different types of families but we have not mentioned one issue, namely same-sex couples with children. Do you think they will be facing similar challenges in the future? Are any future developments particularly 'dangerous' for them? Or particularly favourable?"*

3. Reproduction of vulnerability – policy interventions /max. 30 minutes/

We discussed different risks that the families might face in the future. Under different scenarios – families will face different challenges. But there will be always an **issue of preventing reproduction of inequality/vulnerability**. This brings our **attention directly to children**.

- Do you think it is possible to give equal chances to children raised in all types of families in Europe in 10, 20 or 30 years from now? To what extent? Why / why not?
- If necessary: By "equal chances" we mean an "equal" start into adulthood.

When we speak of family-related policies there are always three types – three pillars – mentioned: direct or indirect financial transfers, childcare policies and regulations related to parental leaves. But family policies involve a broad range of objectives. If we focus on children's well-being and future development – are these the policies to look at?
There are numerous other policies that might be important – we have listed some of them here, just to give you examples. *[Presenting Graph 3]*

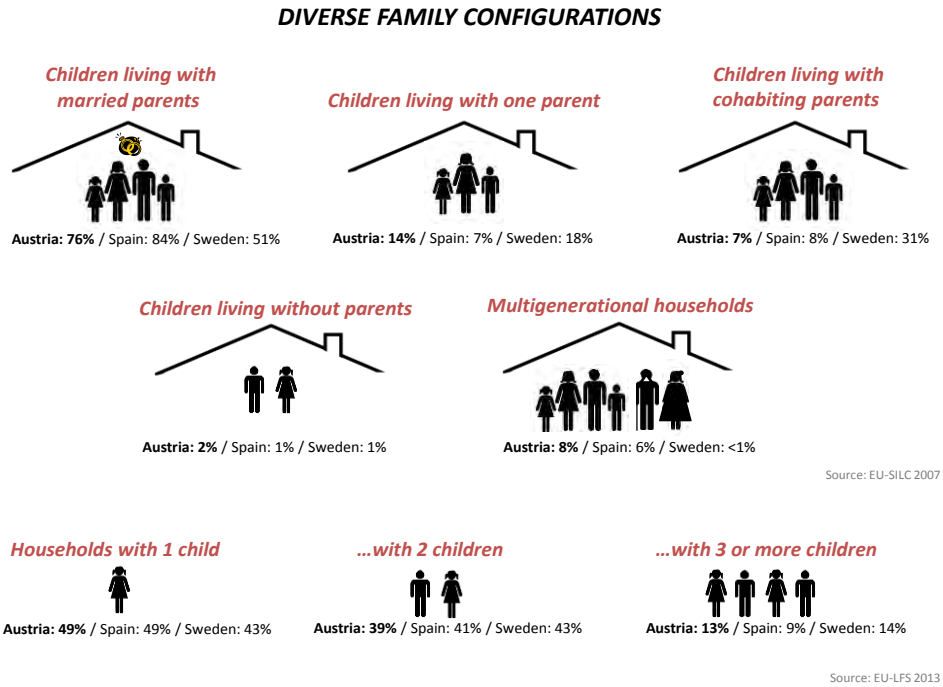
Probes:

- What policies will be most important in future to prevent inequalities and to secure equal chances for children? Why? How will they work? (if possible, give concrete examples)
- Which policies should be given priority in future? Why?
- For the needs of our foresight, again we should consider any development possible – indeed including almost impossible scenarios. If you think about the policies discussed, will all of these measures be efficient under any circumstances? Will these measures be efficient for all family types?

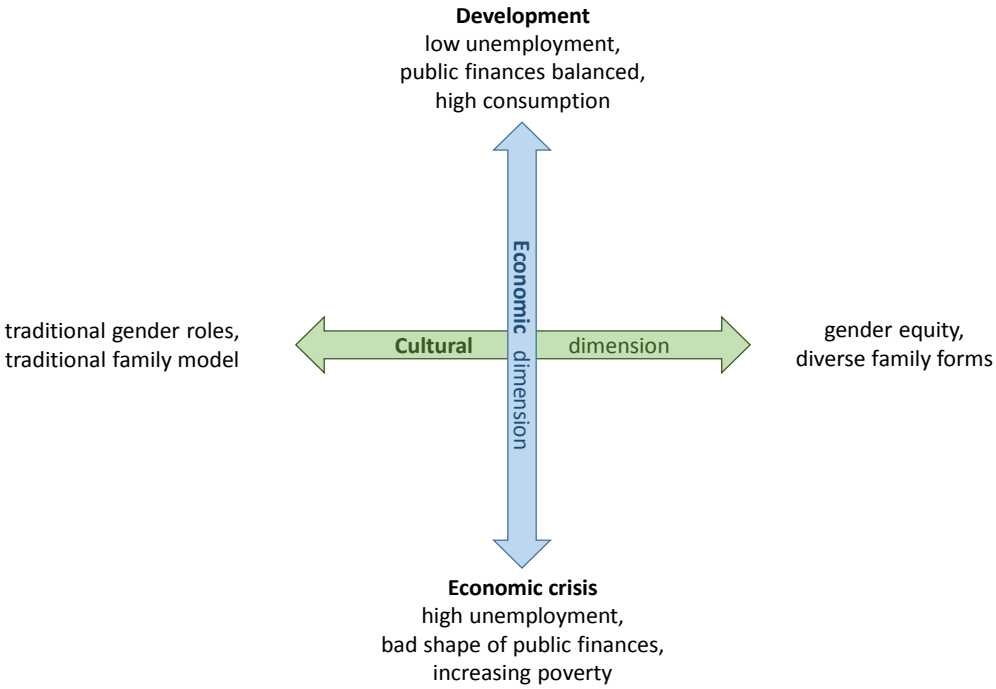
Summarizing /5-10 minutes/

Given the topic of our today's conversation – future of families and their well-being – is there any **important issue that we have not covered in our discussion?** Something that we should keep in mind when, e.g., writing up recommendation for policy-makers? Whatever you want to add, whatever is important from your point of view, please feel free to mention it.

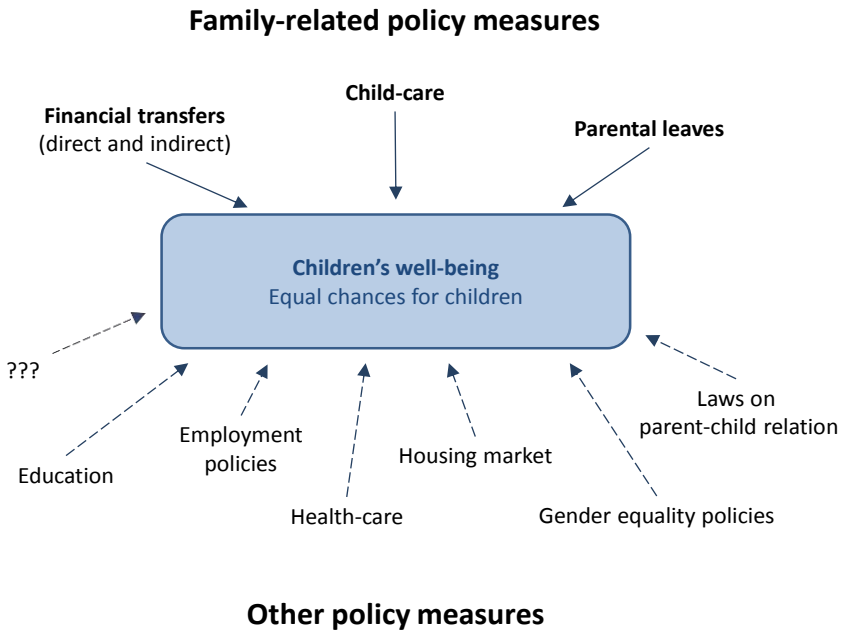
Graph 1: Family Configurations (Example for FGI in Austria)



Graph 2: Future Developments



Graph 3: Policy Measures



Appendix V: Participants in Focus Group Interviews

Bączkowska, Olga	Analyst of the Department of Economic Analyses and Forecasts, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (Poland)
Barajas, Félix	Deputy Director-General Families from the Ministry of Health, Equality and Social Policy (Spain)
Baumgartner, Rosina	Secretary General of the Catholic Family Association in Austria (Katholischer Familienverband Österreichs)
Boniecka, Małgorzata	Representative of the Society for Friends of Children (Poland)
Corral, Lucila	Ex-deputy of the Socialist parliamentary group and currently attached to the Secretary of Social Policy PSOE (Spain)
Dorożała, Karolina	*FamiliesAndSocieties* stakeholder of the G10 foundation (Poland)
Duran, Patricia	Representative of Asociación de Solidaridad con Madres Solteras (Spain)
Edman, Karin	Development officer, Sweden's Remarkable Single Parents
Fagerström, Pia	Head of Section from Division for Family and Social Services of Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden
Gericke, Arne	Member of the European Parliament (European Conservatives and Reformists Group), Familienpartei (Germany)
Hagström, Ulrika	Senior research officer at TCO, the Swedish Confederation for Professional Employees
Herrera, Luis	Director of Institutional Relations at Federación Española de Familias Numerosas (Spain)
Krupska, Joanna	Chairperson of the Associations for Large Families – Three Plus (Poland)
León, Milagros	First Deputy Managing Director of the Madrilenian Institute for Minors and the Family (Spain)
Löfgren, Niklas	Spokesperson in family-economic matters of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (Försäkringskassan)
Löfvenholm, Jessica	Deputy Director from Division for Family and Social Services of Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, Sweden
Lövgren, Sophia	General Secretary of Sweden's Remarkable Single Parents

Lueger, Angela	Family spokesperson of the Social Democratic Party in Austrian parliament
Lugert, Alexandra	Federal Director of the Austrian Family Association (Österreichischer Familienbund)
Lundström, Karin	Senior Demographic Advisor at Statistics Sweden
Maciaszek, Paweł	Representative of the Foundation "Divorce? Wait!" (Poland)
Maira, Michael	Representative of the organisation La Ligue des Familles, Belgium
Martín, Milagros	Member of the Board, former President at Asociación de Abuelas y Abuelos de España (Spain)
Musiol, Daniela	Family spokesperson of the Green Party in Austrian parliament
Núñez Morgades, Pedro	Chairman of the Social Affairs Committee of the Madrilenian Assembly (Spain)
Örn, Charlotta	Analyst, the Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate
Perkowska, Małgorzata	*FamiliesAndSocieties* stakeholder of the Office of the Government plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment (Poland)
Pettighofer, Doris	Head of the Austrian Platform for Single Parents (ÖPA)
Polychronakis, Antonio	Representative of the Family Justice Centers Europe initiative and European Programme Officer at the city of Rotterdam, Netherlands
Schaffelhofer-García Marquez, Elisabeth	Public relations manager of the National Coalition on the Rights of the Child in Austria (Netzwerk Kinderrechte Österreich)
Schützeneder, Franz	Head of the department on families in the federal state of Upper Austria
Schwarz, Markus	Chairman of GFO – Society for Family Orientation in Austria
Seidel, Philippe	Junior policy officer of the Age Platform Europe in Brussels
Stanicek, Branislav	Administrator at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels
Strasser, Georg	Family spokesperson of the People's Party in Austrian parliament
Szredzińska, Renata	Coordinator of the Foundation „Nobody's Children" (Poland)
Wisniewski, Daniel	Director of World Youth Alliance Europe (regional office in Brussels), Founder and President of YouthProAktiv