The Palgrave Handbook of Family Sociology in Europe

Edited by
Anna-Maija Castrén · Vida Česnuitytė
Isabella Crespi · Jacques-Antoine Gauthier
Rita Gouveia · Claude Martin
Almudena Moreno Mínguez
Katarzyna Suwada
The Palgrave Handbook of Family Sociology in Europe

“Skillfully crafted around a diversity of concepts, theories, and methods, this handbook represents a wealth of knowledge on family change in twenty-first century Europe. It is a tribute to years of research, debate, and cross-country networking at the European Sociological Association and beyond. In thought-provoking and comprehensive contributions, European family sociologists invite us to explore the changing terrain of family and intimate lives in terms of relationships, proximity, gender, care, parenting, fertility, inequalities, migration, life course and family policy.”

—Karin Wall, Research Professor, ICS Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Portugal

“The handbook provides an excellent blend of reassessment and reflection on what we know and how we know about families and intimate lives in Europe. Critical overviews and new insights are offered across a carefully chosen range of starting points.”

—Lynn Jamieson, Professor of Sociology, University of Edinburgh, UK, and series editor for Palgrave Macmillan Studies in Family and Intimate Life

“This handbook is an excellent compendium of recent scholarship on the sociology of the family by European scholars. It will be a valuable resource for American scholars who wish to keep up with the best research in Europe.”

—Andrew Cherlin, Professor of Sociology and Public Policy, Johns Hopkins University, USA
Preface

The edited collection *The Palgrave Handbook of Family Sociology in Europe* is a result of a joint effort of members of the European Sociological Association’s Research Network ‘Sociology of Families and Intimate Lives’ (ESA RN13). As researchers and university teachers, we have frequently experienced the lack of high-quality English volumes on family phenomena that comprehensively presented the theoretical and methodological approaches used by contemporary sociologists from different parts of Europe. In order to rectify this, we invited scholars from various European countries (Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK) to contribute to this volume. The main idea was that increased awareness about the research being conducted in different parts of the continent would be invaluable to the development of the European sociological community.

Original manuscripts from over 60 prominent scholars were selected using a double-blind review process. Consequently, the handbook provides an extensive overview of a variety of family forms, trajectories, policies, and values in different societal contexts. Not only does the handbook consider topical themes in family sociology as an academic discipline, it presents the empirical realities of European societies in order to familiarise various audiences—researchers, students, politicians, and family practitioners—with recent findings in the field. Because of its extensive contents, we hope that this handbook will become an integral part of European family sociology and that it will also stimulate international academic debates on family and intimate lives in the future.

National restrictions and lockdowns, which have heavily impacted academic research and teaching since spring 2020, have interrupted the completion of the handbook as the authors, reviewers, and editors had to adjust to the ‘new normal’ brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. We want
to express our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to this
handbook during these extraordinary times, particularly the following people:
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Kuopio, Finland
Vilnius, Lithuania
Macerata, Italy
Lausanne, Switzerland
Lisbon, Portugal
Rennes, France
Segovia, Spain
Toruń, Poland

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Edited by Isabella Crespi

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Isabella Crespi, Vida Česnuiytė, Katarzyna Suwada, Anna-Maija Castrén, Claude Martin, Jacques-Antoine Gauthier, Rita Gouveia, and Almudena Moreno Mínguez

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, family life in Europe has faced multiple challenges prompted by economic, political, cultural, and technological developments. The changes are continuous. As a field of research, family sociology identifies and analyses family phenomena in order to better understand the social realities that people live in and seeks to propose effective solutions to problems encountered in societies. New questions and research topics are constantly emerging and novel approaches and methodologies are

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needed to address these topics. In this respect, family sociology is a dynamic sector of research that encourages the continuous revision of its theories and research instruments, in particular by establishing connections with other fields of research in social sciences (such as work and employment, inequalities and poverty, welfare state analysis, housing and education).

However, the majority of European family scholars are still predominantly experts on their own societies and may only have a vague perception of the state of the art and debates in other societies. The reason for this limitation is not language barriers per se; rather, it is specifically the lack of European publications in English (monographs, handbooks, journals, etc.) on contemporary research that would offer an overview and access to the variety of theoretical and methodological approaches being used, as well as to the cutting-edge research being conducted across the continent. Instead, European scholars are compelled to draw from and refer to American works, meaning that the research trends, theoretical and methodological approaches outside Europe tend to dominate, particularly in studies published in English.

The aim of *The Palgrave Handbook of Family Sociology in Europe* is to provide an overview of topical themes and current developments in family sociology in order to better understand family life in contemporary European societies. The handbook covers several ‘hot topics’ and introduces readers to the empirical realities of family life in Western, Southern, Northern, and Eastern Europe. The contributors were encouraged to provide cutting-edge research findings and to contextualise the national, political, and cultural trends in family and intimate lives in the wider European and sociological frame of reference. The analyses included in the handbook mostly move beyond a single society and offer a comprehensive understanding of the state of the art of the topic discussed. However, and perhaps unconventionally, original empirical case analyses are also included in order to offer an in-depth understanding of some of the micro-level dynamics of contemporary family life.

The handbook comprises six parts, each of them containing four to six chapters: Researching families and intimate lives in Europe: theoretical and methodological trends; Welfare state and family policy regimes in Europe; Families as relationships; Parental arrangements, parenting and child

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well-being; Family lives in migration: intergenerational and transnational relationships; and Family trajectories: (un)linking lives over time and place.

**TRENDS IN RESEARCHING FAMILIES AND INTIMATE LIVES IN EUROPE**

Throughout Europe, we have witnessed changes in the ways that individuals think, live, and build their families and intimate relationships, while some other aspects remain quite stable. Although European societies have followed quite converging pathways of change, family lives and practices are shaped by the socio-historical backgrounds, economical contexts and legal frameworks, as well as the gender norms, social inequalities, and life course dynamics characteristic of each society. In such a multi-layered context, the evolution of theories and methodologies of family sociology is deeply intertwined with the social, cultural, and demographic trends that affect individuals and families. The first part of the handbook ‘Researching families and intimate lives in Europe: theoretical and methodological trends’ offers insights into how theories and methodologies have developed to encompass family changes and diversity. Part I starts with François de Singly’s critical reconstruction of the history of family sociology in Europe (Chapter 2) taking Durkheim’s first university course in the field from 1888–1889 as its point of departure. Drawing on Elias’ notion of a ‘society of individuals’ (2001), the author argues that families have been transitioning from a focus on the ‘we-identity’ to greater emphasis being placed on the ‘I-identity’, whereby individuals continuously struggle to balance cohesion and autonomy. Moreover, this ‘we-I’ balance is strongly shaped by gender and social structures.

Gender, social inequality, and life course are the three cornerstones of the next chapter (Chapter 3), authored by Bernardo Coelho, Diana Maciel, and Anália Torres. From a cross-national perspective, this chapter focuses on how family and gender relations develop over the life course and in accordance with an individual’s unequal structural positions and participation in the labour market. This comparative analysis draws on the various statistical indicators associated with the timing of leaving the parental home, working hours, models of conjugal division of paid and unpaid work, as well as income.

Another key domain in understanding continuity and change in family relations is the law. By providing empirical examples of the European Court of Human Rights, Linda Hart shows (in Chapter 4) how political and legal changes in different national contexts contribute to the recognition of family, gender, and sexual diversity, but also how they legitimate certain kinship categories and principles that do not always overlap with affinity-based relationships and the lived experience. The intersection between family relations and law may be studied in many different contexts and new legislation may engender new forms of family relations.
Detlev Lück, Kerstin Ruckdeschel, Anna Dechant, and Norbert F. Schneider (in Chapter 5) provide a general landscape of the main family demographic trends in Europe before and after 1965, the periods referred to as the First and the Second Demographic Transition. The authors highlight common pathways of change, as well as features that have remained quite stable over the last century, by discussing structural and cultural factors such as the value change from materialism to post-materialism that was responsible for engendering both stability and transformation.

Finally, two innovative methodological chapters in Part I illustrate how family diversity and complexity demand the development of creative and sophisticated methodologies and instruments, allowing for more inclusive definitions of family that are closer to the individuals’ subjective meanings. Eric D. Widmer (Chapter 6) introduces the configurational approach as a methodological perspective that conceptualises families and intimate ties as configurations of mutually dependent people rather than prescribed groups based on blood, marriage, and co-residency criteria. The author shows the heuristic potential of adopting social network techniques and the study of social dilemmas. Meanwhile, Irena E. Juozeliūnienė (in Chapter 7) discusses the pros and cons of using visual methods to research families and intimate lives. The author highlights the power of images; working with images has become a standard practice for many family researchers and involves the extensive use of photographs, video recordings, drawings, family albums, egocentric maps, etc., as well as the adoption of mixed methods.

Welfare State and Family Policy Regimes in Europe

European family life is heavily impacted by the institutional context, in particular, the family policy system. As Emanuel Ferragina and Martin Seeleib-Kaiser argue, family policy can ‘have a multiplicity of functions: horizontal redistribution, the enhancement of individual choices, increasing fertility, supporting economic growth and productivity, as well as reducing gender inequalities’ (Ferragina and Seeleib-Kaiser 2015, 2). Thus, Part II, ‘Welfare State and Family Policy Regimes in Europe’, describes the relationships between the welfare state and family in different European contexts.

Irena Kotowska, Monika Mynarska, and Anne Gauthier (in Chapter 8) discuss the issue of the persistent below-replacement fertility in European countries and potential future developments in family policies that need to consider the new diversity of family structures and gender roles. Changing gender roles are actually a key issue for policymakers today. Thus, Steven Saxonberg and Dorota Szelewa (Chapter 9) propose to examine family policies in different European countries using the conceptual axis of genderisation-degenderisation. They argue that even though there is a general trend in Europe towards increased degenderisation, most countries are still characterised by policies that reproduce traditional gender roles.
The reproduction of traditional gender roles in family is closely connected to the organisation of care for children and the elderly, as well as the way in which people reconcile their care obligations with paid work. This issue is discussed by Agnieszka Furmańska-Maruszak and Katarzyna Suwada (in Chapter 10), who analyse the support of family policy systems in The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, and Sweden by using the concept of familialisation. They argue that despite there being different instruments that aim to support the family in providing care to its members, the family is still perceived as being the main provider of care. Elisabetta Ruspini and Ann-Zofie Duvander (Chapter 11) focus on parental leave as a policy instrument in two clusters of countries—the Nordic and the Southern European countries. They seek to identify which groups of parents benefit from parental leave systems in these two clusters of countries. Chapters 10 and 11 both discuss the role of family policy in supporting economic growth and productivity, as they focus on the issue of combining paid work with other family obligations. They also show the kind of role that family policy can play in enhancing or/and reducing individual choices in family life and paid work.

Finally, Chapter 12 addresses the issue of families living in poverty. Ryszard Szarfenberg shows how different social policy interventions can reduce poverty in European families.

**Families as Relationships**

Research that draws on the individuals’ personal meaning-making, practices and interactions, as well as the inherent materiality and spatial aspects, is a vast field in present-day Europe. Much of this research is qualitative and small scale, making generalisations difficult. However, as highlighted by Carol Smart (2007), the incorporation of the meanings that people themselves ascribe to their relationships allows researchers to include the complex, contradictory, and changing reasons why people behave like they do in family life. The chapters in Part III ‘Families as relationships’ explore families as constellations of ‘lived relations’ and highlight aspects that are central to building and maintaining familial relationships. The authors discuss European families as comprising relationships in which there may be many different kinds of ‘glue’ that bind people and which may incorporate various dynamics that draw on emotions, feelings of intimacy and love, biogenetic relatedness and descent, cultural ideals and social norms, as well as on the social structures and hierarchies that are prevalent in our societies.

First, Rita Gouveia and Anna-Maija Castrén (Chapter 13) identify some of the key debates that have influenced contemporary understandings of families as relationships since the 1980s. The debates have highlighted everyday relatedness, feelings, and practices of closeness that may or may not overlap with the normative expectations of family and kinship. In Chapter 14, Lars Evertsson and Charlott Nyman offer a comprehensive review of couple relationships from the perspective of money and finances. Their focus is on how
couples organise and share money, finances and consumption, and the consequences of the different ways of handling money. For couples, money is ‘Janus-faced’: on the one hand, it elicits gendered expectations and power imbalances, but, on the other hand, the ways in which money is shared, merged, or held separate inform us of the role it plays as an expression of commitment and love. The study of money gives insight into what being in a couple relationship means, and how partners balance between being separate individuals and forming a familial unit. Next, Eva Gulløv and Ida Wentzel Winther (Chapter 15) adopt a children’s perspective in studying sibling relationships. The authors focus on everyday situations, such as sharing objects, commuting between households, carrying out chores, and spending leisure time together. The everyday doings of siblingship evoke feelings of togetherness, relatedness and longing, as well as obligation, doubt and frustration, all of which reflect the tensions between the ideals and the realities of family life. The chapter highlights the processual nature of relationships, drawing on the particularities of contemporary family life.

The final chapter, Chapter 16, discusses the relationships between parents and their adult children. While parenting small children is a widely researched and fervently debated topic, social expectations towards the parents of adult children have thus far been studied much less. This is surprising when taking into account, for example, the negative effects of the economic crises of recent decades on the attempts by young adults to transition to the work market and become financially independent. Author Bella Marckmann draws on an in-depth empirical study into parent-adult children relationships characterised by a continuous search for a balance between closeness and distance, between too much and too little.

**Parental Arrangements, Parenting, and Child Well-Being**

Part IV, ‘Parental arrangements, parenting and child well-being’, covers some of the main research developments related to parents and children in recent decades. These developments concern parenting roles, the division of labour in childcare arrangements between parents themselves and between parents and the complex network of non-parental services, along with the impact of these developments on child well-being. Although it is parents who are still primarily responsible for providing childcare, the development of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector has led to a great amount of research, often comparative research, being conducted. New childcare arrangements raise questions about quality and equal access to non-parental childcare, while also inspiring theoretical and empirical developments concerning specific parental (maternal and paternal) practices, or the ways in which parents assume their role, highlighted by the recent concept of parenting.

The first two chapters concern non-parental childcare. Gerardo Meil, Vicente Díaz Gandasegui, Jesús Rogero-García, and Pedro Romero-Balsas...
(Chapter 17) propose a comparison between three quite typical national configurations that exist in Norway, France, and Spain. These countries represent different kinds of non-parental care strategies. As the analysis reveals, there is a relative convergence towards ‘de-familialisation’, while a significant impact of household income on the types of non-parental care can be observed in France and Spain. Michel Vandenbroeck, Wim Van Lancker, and Jeroen Janssen (Chapter 18) move beyond the usual observation that participating in ECEC services is very beneficial to children’s cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes. They argue that poor families tend to have less access to ECEC services than higher-income families. Moreover, even if children from disadvantaged families do have access to ECEC services, such services are often of poorer quality. The authors document inequalities in childhood and examine how these inequalities affect the nature of parenthood and parenting.

Lluis Flaquer (Chapter 19) focuses on a major issue concerning the shared parenting arrangements after separation and divorce, which have generated many new regulations and experiments throughout Europe. The main thesis presented by the author is based on an idea that joint parental custody (JPC) should be considered in relation to the progress of gender equality. The chapter explores the availability of comparable quantitative data on the prevalence of JPC and gender equality with the aim of presenting the main differences between countries in the context of the Second Demographic Transition.

Much of the development in parental and parenting issues has a common objective, i.e. guaranteeing child well-being. This reference to child well-being is at the core of much of the research that has been undertaken in recent decades. Dagmar Kutsar and Oliver Nahkur (Chapter 20) present a comparative analysis of subjective child well-being in the context of family change in Estonia, Poland, and Romania using data from the second wave of the International Study of Children’s Well-Being, ‘Children’s Worlds’ (ISCWeB). The overall findings confirm that children’s satisfaction with family life increases their subjective well-being regardless of the type of home or form of family in which they live. This innovative study employs the perspective and voice of children in order to enhance knowledge of the factors that contribute to improving the lives of children and their families. In order to guarantee the well-being of the child, many policies address the assessment of parental potential and capacities. Examining aspiring parents (through adoption, foster care, or assisted reproduction using donor gametes), Judith Lind (Chapter 21) analyses the evaluation criteria used for assessing parenting capacity to determine whether aspiring parents are capable of caring for a child. The author analyses how the consideration of socio-economic factors is justified in the assessment guidelines.

The neologisms ‘parenting’ or ‘parentalité’ are a success story in the fields of both research and family policy. Jan Macvarish and Claude Martin (in Chapter 22) outline the ways in which ‘parenting’ is primarily discussed as a problem of public and private disorder, and then consider how ‘parenting’
reconceptualises the role and status of parents. The authors argue that the 
emergence of these neologisms to describe family relations and the raising of 
children, as well as the adoption of these terms by policymakers, suggest the 
development of a new nexus through which families are understood.

**Family Lives in Mass Migration Context**

Part V ‘Family lives in migration: intergenerational and transnational relations-
ships’ documents another crucial challenge for research on family: migration 
and its impacts. Migration is a globally growing phenomenon and interna-
tional research confirms the centrality of the family in the migration plans and 
strategies of individuals (Attias-Donfut and Cook 2017; Crespi et al. 2018), 
for example, in decisions to emigrate and which family members will emigrate. 
The migrant family finds itself in a social system in which roles and relation-
ships may be partially or completely different to what it has been used to and in 
which family relationships can act as bridges between migrants, their country 
of origin and their new context, as well as create a network of closed relation-
ships in self-referential and poorly integrated communities (Kraler et al. 2010). 
In this process, the migrant family plays a key role in terms of time and space 
(Mazzuccato 2013; Zontini and Reynolds 2018; Baldassar and Merla 2013) 
and transnational and mixed families (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002) can be 
framed in the perspective of migrating families. Finally, the extent to which 
migrants and their families are integrated into society, welfare systems, and 
their political participation reveals the level of openness of society to change 
and innovation, challenging the ideal of equality and inclusion that has formed 
part of the creation of modern Western states.

In Chapter 23, Laura Zanfrini considers the presence of migrant families 
and of people from migrant backgrounds. According to the author, migrant 
families are a key issue in contemporary Europe and a crucial question as 
far as the sustainability of the European social model and the future of the 
European way of life are concerned. Beyond their demographic importance, 
migrant families are radically challenging European education systems, labour 
markets, and welfare regimes, since they are largely concentrated in the lower 
ranks of social stratification and are overrepresented in all categories at risk of 
exclusion.

Dafina Kurti Sinatra and Inga Sabanova (Chapter 24) provide an overview 
of recent research in the field of family and migration in Europe, particularly 
 focusing on multicultural and transnational families and their role in migra-
tion processes. Greater emphasis is placed on the role of the transmission of 
family values and traditions to younger generations facing specific economic 
circumstances and challenges, as well as to the role of national migration and 
integration policies and regulation in the dynamics of transnational families.

Families whose members have experienced migration face challenges in 
tergenerational relations, as explained by Mihaela Hărăguş, Viorela Ducu, 
and Ionuţ Földes (Chapter 25). Using various theoretical perspectives and