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**Demographic changes, intergenerational solidarity and well-being
in Europe: a comparative approach**

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Demographic changes, intergenerational solidarity and well-being in Europe: a comparative approach

Introduction

The fact that Europe is a formal political union since 1993, does not mean that historical, cultural and demographic differences have ceased to exist. Still large differences exist in the demographic characteristics of its populations. According to Coleman (2002), demographic convergence in Europe remains incomplete due to persisting socio-economic differences. Other literature emphasizes the importance of cultural and historical differences within Europe (Reher, 1998).

In this first working paper for Workpackage 3 we give an overview of the demographic trends that occurred in Europe over the last decades, and describe some of the main aspects on which European populations differ. Moreover, we pay attention to some of the consequences these demographic trends can have for the composition and functioning of families, in particular their impact on intergenerational solidarity. Our general research question is: how do demographic changes affect intergenerational solidarity and well-being in Europe? We hope to add to the existing literature in four ways. Firstly, we intend to study the influence of demographic change on intergenerational solidarity from a multilevel design by taking into account the influence of demographic trends on the level of individuals, families and countries. Secondly, we will disentangle three core aspects of intergenerational solidarity by separately investigating the influence of demographic change on (1) the strength, (2) the nature and (3) the direction of solidarity. Thirdly, we aim to complement the existing body of cross-nationally comparative literature on intergenerational solidarity by including data from eastern European countries. Finally, we will take into consideration the consequences of these aspects of intergenerational solidarity for the well-being of care providers and care recipients.

1. Demographic trends in Europe

1.1 Demographic trends in mortality and fertility

An important demographic characteristic of societies is the *average life expectancy*. According to Nolte and Gilmore (2005) European societies differ in their morbidity levels which reflect differences in the socio-economic structure. The last thirty years health patterns in central and eastern Europe were quite different from the health patterns in western Europe. This gap is amongst others reflected in the society's average life expectancy. Nolte and Gilmore show that life expectancy has gradually increased in western Europe. In contrast, the average life expectancy only slowly improved in central and eastern Europe, with a period of stagnation in the 1980s. After the fall of communism, many countries in central and eastern Europe experienced a period of high mortality rates. However, this period of deterioration was followed by improvements in health which, in their turn, resulted in lower rates of mortality. Life expectancy is lowest in the former Soviet Union and displays a fluctuating pattern in which periods of improvement are alternated by periods of deterioration. Although regional differences with regard to life expectancy are quite large within Europe, the general trends predict *convergence*. In general we can say that the average life expectancy in Europe is increasing and that differences between European regions are decreasing too.

Statistics show that in the last thirty years there is a serious decline in fertility rates in Europe (Schoenmaeckers & Lodewijckx, 1999). On average the fertility rate in Europe (TFR-value) has dropped by almost forty percent, the highest drop occurring in south-Europe and the lowest drop in the

Scandinavian countries. Although all countries in Europe undergo a similar change, there are large differences between the sub-regions. The countries in the northern region started with moderate levels of fertility in the seventies, but now have the highest fertility rates. Moreover, statistics indicate that the trend to lower fertility rates in northern and western Europe is stabilizing. On the contrary, there are no signs that fertility rates are stabilizing in the countries in southern and eastern Europe. Billari and Kohler (2004) divide European countries into two groups: countries in northern and western Europe with low fertility rates (<2.0) and countries in southern and eastern Europe with lowest-low fertility rates (<1.3). They state that, over time, there is remarkably *little convergence* in differences between these regions with respect to fertility. According to Sobotka (2004), more than half of Europe's population is at or below the replacement level of 1.3. Frejka and Calot (2001) explore in detail cohort fertility (instead of period fertility) behavior in Europe. They find that younger cohorts have fewer children and more often have one-child families or even remain childless.

1.2 Demographic trends in partnering and parenting

Together, the trends to lower mortality rates and lower fertility rates influence the size and composition of a society's population. The trend to lower fertility can be considered as the joint result of different trends on the field of partnering and parenting. Billari (2005) claims that these trends can be summarized with a single key word: postponement. Furthermore, he argues that the postponement of partnering and parenting brought with it the trend to a de-standardization of life courses.

A first trend described by Billari is the postponement of partnership formation, and more specifically the postponement of marriage. In the last decades marriage has become less important in the formation of long-term partnerships. Although most people within Europe still marry at some stage during their life, the age of a first marriage has been delayed. Late marriage began in the Nordic countries and also spread to the western European countries. Related to this trend of delayed union formation is the replacement of marriage by alternative forms. Cohabitation became an acceptable and popular alternative for people in European countries. Cohabitation functions as both a pre-stage of marriage and as a full alternative. Cohabitation is most popular in the Nordic countries and least popular in south-eastern Europe. Of course, there are other alternatives for partnership formation. Billari (2005) argues that the emergence of LAT (living apart together) can become increasingly popular in the nearby future (cf. Dykstra & Komter, 2006 for recent data about the Netherlands).

Another important trend in European countries is the increase in partnership dissolution. Partnerships, both married unions and cohabiting unions, have become increasingly less stable. However, cohabiting unions are less stable than married unions. Liefbroer and Dourleijn (2006) found evidence that this can be attributed to a selection effect: couples that are more likely to split up choose for cohabitation instead of marriage. In addition, they show that this negative impact of cohabitation on union stability is only present in societies where cohabitation concerns either a small minority or a large majority. Although partnerships become less stable in all European countries, large differences exist between regions. For example, divorce rates are lowest in countries in south-eastern Europe (Billari, 2005).

With regard to parenting two trends can be distinguished that together resulted in the decline of women's fertility. A first trend is the increase in childlessness. Rowland (2007) shows that among cohorts born after 1945 more women remain childless. A second trend regarding parenting is the postponement of motherhood (Billari & Kohler, 2004; Sobotka, 2004). In the last decennia the mean age at first birth increased significantly. The postponement of motherhood is clearly visible in most European countries, with a few exceptions in the former Soviet Union. There exist large differences

between sub-regions, in which the mean age at first birth is highest in southern Europe and lowest in central-eastern Europe (Billari 2005).

1.3 The influence of demographic trends at the level of individuals, families and countries

Now that we have described the main demographic trends in Europe, we pose the question in what manner these trends have affected intergenerational solidarity. In this regard it is problematic that demographic trends, although separate processes, are strongly interrelated (Billari, 2005). The trend to lower fertility rates is the result of the postponement of partnering, childbearing and parenting (Rowland, 2007). However, as Watkins, Menken and Bongaarts (1987) notice, the *joint effect* of demographic trends on family life is not obvious. After all, demographic trends can strengthen as well as weaken each other (Kobrin, 1976; Tomassini & Wolf, 2000; Murphy, Martikainen & Pennec, 2006). Also, correlations between demographic trends may differ between countries. For example, low fertility rates in southern Europe are correlated with the postponed age at which children leave the parental house. This is not true for countries in eastern Europe. Correlations between demographic trends may also change over time. Billari and Kohler (2004) demonstrate that after the emergence of lowest-low fertility in Europe (in the 1990s), many macro-relationships between fertility and its traditional determinants reversed or disappeared. As an explanation, the authors hypothesize that the demographic predictors of fertility behavior have changed over time. They argue that the first decline towards low fertility is related to a reduction of higher parity births (stopping behavior), and that the further decline towards lowest-low fertility is associated with the postponement of fertility. According to Billari (2005), the changing correlations over time may be linked to micro-level choices. For a better understanding of the influence of demographic change on intergenerational solidarity, it is therefore important to translate macro-to-macro relations to micro-to-micro relations. After all, demographic trends concern shifts on the individual level. For this reason we take into account the influence of individual characteristics regarding partnering, childbearing and parenting on the support family members exchange across generations.

It is important to notice that demographic trends can also influence intergenerational solidarity on the level of families and on the level of countries. Here we can speak of the contextual influence of demographic change on intergenerational solidarity. The support family members give or receive to each other not only depends on their own characteristics, but also on characteristics of the family structure and characteristics of the country people live in. For this reason we will not only study micro-to-micro relations, but also meso-to-micro relations and macro-to-micro relations. On the family level we expect demographic trends, for instance, to have changed the family structure regarding generational constellations, age gaps between generations and alternative living arrangements. We assume that these changes in the family structure affect intergenerational solidarity. On the societal level we expect demographic trends to affect intergenerational solidarity, apart from individual characteristics. After all, demographic change may not only refer to a shift in the composition of families, but also to a shift in the context in which these families are living. For example, we can hypothesize that people in societies with an ageing population are thinking differently about intergenerational solidarity than people in societies with a much younger population.

In this project we also take into consideration the possibility of cross-level interactions. We will study to what extent the relationship between individual characteristics and intergenerational solidarity is affected by 1. the family structure and 2. societal characteristics. Both in the demographic literature and in studies on intergenerational solidarity so far insufficient attention has been paid to these cross-level interactions. Although it is argued that the effects of individual characteristics on family solidarity differ between clusters of countries (Reher, 1998; Hank, 2007), this is rarely

explicitly attributed to specific contexts and tested. We will improve on this literature by specifying the context.

In sum, we aim to contribute to the existing demographic literature by studying the relationship between demographic trends and intergenerational solidarity from a multilevel design. This is made possible because our dataset combines information on the individual and family level with information on the country level. In the following section we will describe how demographic trends have affected the meso-level of family composition.

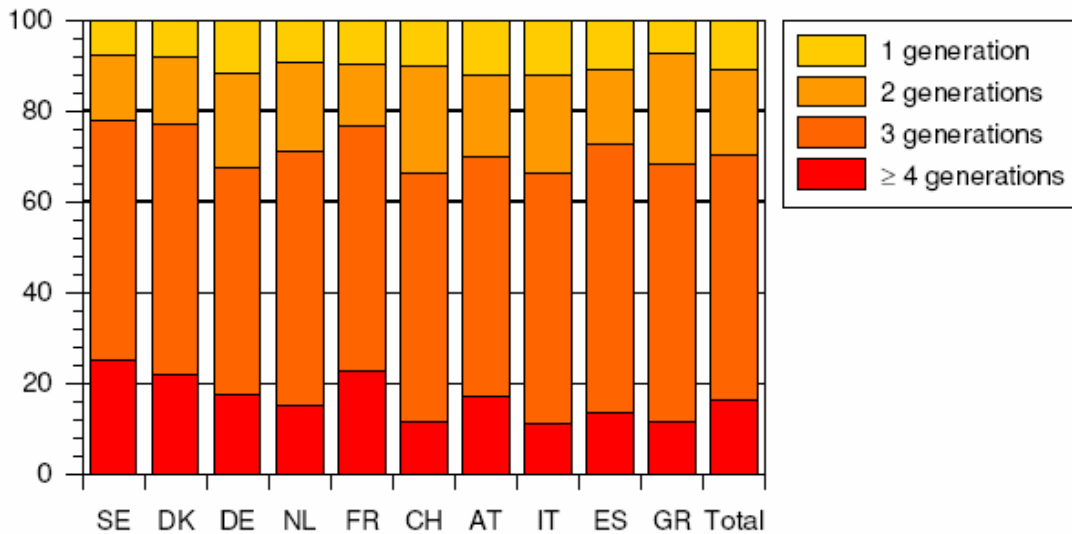
2. Demographic trends and their consequences for the composition and functioning of European families

2.1 Generational constellations

A first change in the composition of families concerns an increase in the *number of generations living at the same time*. A change from a pyramid-formed population structure, with few old persons at the top, and many children at the base, towards a more vertical structure, with many older people still living but with fewer children following them, the so-called ‘beanpole’ structure (Bengtson, 2001). This change is also reflected in the structure of families, with more vertical ties, and fewer horizontal ties. Whereas in the past only a few grandparents used to be alive relative to the number of children and grandchildren, nowadays there are more grand- and great-grandparents and fewer (grand)children within families. There has been a movement from ‘bottom heavy’ to a ‘top heavy’ family structure (Hagestad, 1986). The increase in life expectancy leads to a remarkable increase in the years of shared lives across generations over the course of the 20th century and into the 21st century. This trend has significant implications for members of all generations, who will share more years of life together than ever before in history (Bengtson & Martin, 2001).

The mere ageing of populations is often supposed to produce a new type of condition for middle-aged cohorts, in particular women living in three- or even four-generational families; these cohorts have variously been called the ‘sandwich generation’ or ‘women in the middle’ (Agree, Bissett & Rendall, 2003; Brody, 1981; Miller, 1981). Throughout Europe these families have become a more frequent phenomenon due to the longer average life spans. A much debated question raised by the phenomenon of the “sandwich generation” is whether and how this trend will affect intergenerational solidarity. The assumption has become widespread that in four-generation families women would have to combine care for young children or grandchildren with care for parents and grandparents. This assumption gains particular relevance in southern European countries where the rising age of first marriage (and the age of the mother at the first birth) are causing an exceptional decrease in fertility (Esping-Andersen, 1999). Simoni and Trifiletti (2004) argue that such a trend may foreshadow new and little-known types of vulnerability for the family. Despite the increase in four-generational families, the actual occurrence of this family structure is still exceptional. On the basis of a cross-national comparison, based on the *Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe* (SHARE) originally conducted among 27,500 non-institutionalized individuals aged 50 and over in eleven European countries, Kohli et al. (2005) report that three-generational families are still the most frequent constellation in Europe (cf. Dykstra & Komter, 2006 for Dutch data). Figure 1 gives the overview.

Figure 1 Generational constellations (percentages by country)



Source: Kohli et al., 2005

Given the predominance of three-generational families the late-middle-aged generation, in particular women, will face caring commitments to both their children or young grandchildren, and their parents or parents-in-law (Fokkema et al., 2008). To what extent are upward and downward help competing with each other, with the result that those who provide help to one generation are less likely to provide help to the other(s)? A study by Grundy and Henretta (2006) investigated this question, comparing data from Great Britain and the United States. In both countries the proportion helping a child was greater than the proportion helping a parent or parent-in-law, whereas one third helped both generations. A positive association between downward and upward between-generation transfers was shown. This association was not accounted for by the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Apparently, some families are more likely to be ‘high exchangers’ (cf. Hogan et al., 1993; Komter & Schans, forthcoming) or ‘tight-knit’ (Silverstein & Bengtson, 1997) than others.

Although three-generational families are still the most common pattern, there is an interesting variation in the composition of generations existing in different European countries, as Figure 1 demonstrates. These differences might affect patterns of intergenerational solidarity. More research is needed to determine the extent to which cross-national differences in upward and downward help exist in Europe, and how they affect the well-being of those involved.

2.2 The age gap between generations

The importance of looking at the joint effects of demographic trends is shown by the claim of Bengtson (2001) that multigenerational bonds in family life become more important, because of the increase in life expectancy. We argue that the postponement of childbearing should be taken into account as well. Although people nowadays live longer, they also become parent in a later stage of their lives. This postponement of parenthood may have resulted in a larger age gap between family members of different generations.

An important consequence of the increasing age gap between generations is that children will be younger when their parents need their support. This may have two different consequences for intergenerational solidarity. A first consequence might be that children are physically stronger and

more healthy when their parents ask for practical help. This would imply a positive effect on intergenerational solidarity. A second potential consequence is that adult children have young children themselves at the same time that their parents need help. This would imply an increase of the caring burden resulting in a negative influence on intergenerational solidarity. For the support parents give to their children, it could mean that there are more financial resources to distribute. In this project we will specifically examine the influence of the increasing age gap between generations on intergenerational solidarity.

2.3 Living arrangements and family functioning

The postponement and de-standardization of partnering, childbearing and parenting have had some important consequences for the *living arrangements* in European family life. First of all, the increase in partnership dissolution has made the lives of people less steady. Latten (2004) argues that nowadays people are more often prepared to end an unsatisfactory marriage and live on their own again. An increasing percentage of people do no longer spend their life with one partner, but instead have a series of successive stable relationships. This implies that family constellations vary over a person's life with different partners and, as a result, different in-laws. The demographic imbalance in sex-ratio on advanced ages makes it easier to find a new partner for men than for women. This difference is strengthened by the preference of men for women who are younger than they are themselves (De Jong Gierveld, 2004).

When children are involved, the situation becomes more complicated. Latten (2004) demonstrates that from the Dutch children with divorced parents, a quarter does no longer have contact with their father, and another quarter has a bad relationship with their father. An important consequence of the increase in partnership dissolution is the increase in single-parent families (Bumpass & Lu, 2000). Latten (2004) points out that partnership dissolution negatively affects the financial situation of households, especially when this concerns single-parent households. Because nowadays partnerships are more informal, it is more difficult for ex-partners to claim a financial contribution after their breakup (alimentation). Another important consequence of the increase in partnership dissolution is the increase in stepfamily formation. As a consequence of repartnering there is a significant increase in the merging of families, the so-called patchwork families (Latten 2004). In the case of joint custody, children will grow up in two different families. When new unions are formed between parents and their new partners, children will have a stepmother and / or stepfather who also can play a key-role in their upbringing.

Specific demographic trends, such as increased divorce rates and the decline of marriage are often taken as an expression of expanding individualism which may threaten social integration and family solidarity (Giddens, 1992; Beck, 1997; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Family disruption has mainly been studied in its consequences for children; the extent to which trends in family disruption affect support at older ages has received less attention. Divorce may affect the relationships with adult children and even have long-lasting effects. Daatland (2007) investigated how divorce and unmarried cohabitation affected family functioning in Norway. He found that ever-divorced parents have less frequent contact with children than never-divorced parents; ever-divorced parents also participate less in joint events and celebrations, feel less close to their children, and give as well as receive less help to and from them. Daatland found negative effects for both divorced fathers and mothers, but more so for fathers than for mothers. His study replicates earlier findings that divorced fathers have fewer contacts with their children than married parents (Shapiro, 2003; Tomassini et al., 2004).

Existing studies reveal that divorce and remarriage decrease contacts and relationship quality with adult children as well as perceived support (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998; Tomassini et al.,

2007). There is also evidence that older parents are less likely to receive assistance from stepchildren relative to biological children (Pezzin & Schone, 1999). In a study comparing Great Britain and Italy, Tomassini et al. (2007) investigated how family disruption due to divorce, separation or death affected various dimensions of support. Their results suggest that in Great Britain, with its supposedly stronger individualistic values, support in later life is primarily related to the needs of the elderly, whereas in Italy, with its stronger family culture, support is received irrespective of the older person's individual characteristics.

The demographic literature demonstrates that children from stepfamilies and single-parent families show more internalizing and externalizing problem behavior (Coleman & Ganong, 1990) and experience more stress due to interparental conflict, attachment disruption and periods of diminished parenting (Brody, Neubaum & Forehand, 1988). In the family literature it is hypothesized that stepparents interact less positively with their stepchildren (Coleman & Ganong, 1990). Moreover, stepfamilies appear to be less cohesive and slightly less effective in communicating. This is assumed to be the result of a lack of clear guidelines (Coleman & Ganong, 1990). Lutz (1983) confirms this conclusion by demonstrating that issues relating to divided loyalties and discipline were perceived to be stressful for adolescents living in stepfamilies.

It is clear that changing living arrangements may affect the functioning and well-being of those involved. More research is needed to test the validity of the findings reported here across Europe and to investigate the extent and nature of family disruption in the various European countries.

3. Cultural and structural trends, welfare arrangements and their impact on the family

In addition to the demographic trends that occurred in Europe other changes took place. According to Neels (2006), cultural and structural changes have been running parallel to trends in partnering, childbearing and parenting and even have influenced them. Another important change is related to a society's policy context. In some societies the welfare state expanded whereas in other societies its role remained limited. When studying the relationship between demographic trends and intergenerational solidarity it is important to control for these other trends that may affect solidarity. In this way we can exclude the possibility of a spurious relationship. We will take into account aspects of cultural and structural trends, as well as the policy context, both at the level of individuals and the level of countries.

3.1 Individualization and secularization

The cultural approach of demographic change stresses that people's preferences regarding partnering and parenting have changed over time (Neels, 2006). Lesthaeghe and Van de Kaa (1986) even speak of a 'second demographic transition' within Europe, in which new generations attach more importance to post-materialistic values as freedom of choice and self-fulfillment. This shift in values is supposedly inspired by the process of individualization, which embodies the separation of individuals from communal and corporate structures (Dykstra, 2004). This implies that people's beliefs and behavior are less controlled by family, church and community. The process of secularization describes the consequences of individualization for the religious domain (Dobbelaere, 1999): people's moral values became more detached from churches and religious institutions. D'Antonio, Newman and Wright (1982) state that religion and family life are strongly related because religion provides moral values that encourage family solidarity and discourage antifamily behavior. Berger (1967) argues that this association between religion and family life remains strong, because both aspects belong to the private

sphere of human life. However, family life is also secularized (Dobbelaere, 1999). Thornton (1989) demonstrated that trends in family attitudes parallel trends in religious change. Nonetheless, there are only a few studies that focus on the relationship between family and religion over time (Thomas & Cornwall, 1990).

3.2 Women's labor market position

The structural explanation of demographic change takes into account structural changes such as economic growth and educational expansion. However, most attention is given to the increasing labor market participation of women. In this regard, the structural approach takes into consideration the balance between the costs and benefits of childbearing and parenting. For example, when the costs of parenting exceed its benefits, fertility rates are expected to decline. People's preferences are expected to be stable (Neels, 2006). Brewster and Rindfuss (2000) argue that the association between women's fertility and labor market participation reflects the difficulties women experience in combining work with childcare. Although this association is strong, it remains unclear how this relationship comes about. Research findings suggest that women both limit their fertility to stimulate their career and adjust their labor market career to their fertility (Brewster & Rindfuss, 2000). According to Jensen (1995), women's employment in European countries has gradually expanded. Since the 1960's, women more often integrate motherhood with labor market participation. In the 1980's there was a significant increase in the percentage of women who work full-time. However, there are some differences within Europe. In general, women's labor market participation is highest in northern Europe and lowest in southern Europe (Brewster & Rindfuss, 2000).

3.3 Welfare arrangements: the policy context

Another factor that has an obvious impact on the family is the specific nature of the welfare state, as far as state-based caring arrangements are concerned. The mutual influence of the welfare state and the family has often been discussed with reference to the 'crowding-in' versus the 'crowding-out' argument (Künemund & Rein, 1999; Kohli, 1999). Crowding-out is assumed to be the case when high service levels are accompanied by low levels of family help, implying that family help is reduced by state care; crowding-in implies that high levels of state service go together with high levels of family help, suggesting that state services do not discourage, and may even stimulate family help.

Data from the OASIS project (*Old Age and autonomy; the role of Service systems and Intergenerational family Solidarity*), a cross-national survey in Norway, England, Germany, Spain and Israel among a representative sample of 6,106 people aged 25 and over in urban areas, has served as input for a study by Daatland and Lowenstein (2005), who compared the strength and character of intergenerational solidarity in Norway, England, Germany, Spain and Israel. Their results show that in both the northern and the southern welfare states intergenerational solidarity was considerable. Solidarity was found to differ more in character than in strength, with a stronger emphasis on an ideal of independence between generations in the north than in the south. This ideal may reflect the better access to welfare state services in these countries rather than a difference in culture. That the welfare state has not crowded out the family in elder care, but may have reduced dependence on the family. Services have thus helped the elderly to establish more independent relationships. Other evidence, also from the OASIS-project, confirms this picture; Motel-Klingebiel et al. (2005) shows that the total (aggregate) quantity of help received by older people is greater in welfare states with a strong infrastructure of formal services. The authors did not find evidence of a substantial 'crowding out' of family help. On the contrary, they argue that their findings support the hypothesis that formal services 'encourage' family support and positively correlate with the total amount of help. Another finding was

that help from formal services alone or in combination with family help was greatest in the more generous welfare states regimes, supporting the hypothesis of ‘mixed responsibility’. Kohli (1999) and Attias-Donfut and Wolff (2000) report similar results; public old age security does not crowd out family support but creates resources that make possible new links between adult family generations.

The provision of care for elderly people is often a combination of paid (public and private sectors, market) and unpaid work (domestic, community, voluntary). The relative impact of the voluntary, private and public sectors has been shown to be different in various European countries, such as Great Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden and Italy (Lyon & Glucksman, 2008). A strong infrastructure of formal services provided by the welfare state, as in Scandinavia, reduces parents’ dependency on support provided by their children, and developed welfare systems have been shown to protect better against social exclusion at older ages (Ogg, 2005; Hank, 2007).

Cultural and demographic differences are important determinants of the variation between countries in the balance of state-based and family support. Walker (1993; 1999; 2002), who extensively studied attitudes related to the responsibility for elderly care in Europe, locates the main threat to support provision within the family in the policy arena rather than in the attitudes of the younger generation. Exchanges of help among three generations will become increasingly important; an important future research focus should therefore be on the way the availability of state support affects the trade-off between helping one generation and the other.

4. Intergenerational solidarity in Europe

Whereas the topic of intergenerational solidarity has already briefly been touched upon in some of the preceding sections, in this section we will direct our focus specifically on empirical research on intergenerational solidarity in Europe. We will first discuss the north-south divide in intergenerational solidarity, then specify the different dimensions of intergenerational solidarity and empirical work related to them, and finally address the issue of the direction of intergenerational support – the balance of giving and receiving, or, reciprocity, and its potential consequences for the well-being of care providers and recipients.

4.1 The north-south divide in the nature and strength of family ties

An interesting suggestion made by Reher (1998) is that in western Europe there has been an age-old north-south divide in family ties, with stronger family bonds characterizing southern countries and weaker ties existing in modern welfare states. Much research confirms the existence of differences in the strength and nature of family solidarity in northern and southern European countries. Kohli et al (2005), for instance, have found support for Reher’s differentiation between ‘strong family countries’ and ‘weak family countries’, corresponding with southern and the northern European regions respectively. Not only cultural patterns of family loyalties, but also demographic patterns of co-residence of adult children and their older family members, are assumed to differ between northern and southern European countries. On the basis of data of the first wave of the SHARE-project it appears that Scandinavian countries have the least traditional family structure, whereas the Mediterranean countries, in particular Spain and Italy, have the most traditional one: more co-residence, late ages of leaving the parental home among adult children. Kohli et al. (2005) also report that northern Europeans are less likely than their southern counterparts to live close to their parents or to have frequent contacts with them.

Various authors have pointed out that strong family systems are more vulnerable to the effects of demographic change than weak family systems (Reher, 1998; Hank, 2007). In strong families elderly support provided by children to their parents will be dependent on whether there are enough children to care for their parents, whereas in weak families there will be a greater appeal on welfare state arrangements and less on adult children. Whether this assumption will turn out to be true in the future, is a matter for further comparative research; so far results from cross-national empirical studies, comparing southern and northern regions of Europe, do not point in that direction as will be illustrated below.

4.2. *Dimensions of family solidarity: various outcomes across Europe*

Since Bengtson and Roberts (1991) elaborated six dimensions of family integration into a construct of intergenerational solidarity, these dimensions have – in varying combinations or separately – been the topic of empirical research. The dimensions were: associational integration (the level of contact between members of different generations), affectional integration (the degree of positive feelings), consensual integration (the degree of consensus in beliefs and attitudes), functional integration (the exchanged help), normative integration (the norms of familism), and structural integration (geographical proximity). These dimensions can be recognized in the research reported about below.

Frequent family *contact as well as coresidence* (structural solidarity) seem to be more usual in southern than in northern Europe (Tomassini et al., 2004; Glaser et al., 2004; Kohli et al., 2005). In a cross-national comparative study by Tomassini et al. (2004) the frequency of contacts between parents and their children in Great-Britain, Italy, Finland and the Netherlands was examined. Italian parents appeared to have more frequent face-to-face contact with their children than is the case in Finland or Great Britain but levels of contact in all countries were high. Other comparative European studies confirm the often assumed north-south divide in family solidarity, as far as proximity and contacts are concerned. Using SHARE-data Hank (2007) compared family bonds in 10 countries, ranging from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean region. The results showed that, generally speaking mothers and parents with poorer health, lower education, and younger adult children with a larger number of siblings tend to exhibit the closest family bonds in terms of proximity and contact. The north-south distinction was again confirmed: even when microlevel factors are controlled for, people in the Mediterranean countries had closer family relations than their counterparts living further in the north. A number of central European countries formed an in-between category, as far as proximity and contacts between parents and their adult children are concerned. Despite the differences between northern and southern European countries Hank concludes that there is no indication for a decline of intergenerational relations in Europe, but also points out that the study is limited because only two of the six dimensions of family solidarity have been used, namely structural solidarity (i.e. proximity) and associational solidarity (frequency of contact). Glaser et al. (2004) report several studies suggesting that intergenerational support and contact are at a high level across Europe and that, at least in Great-Britain, there is no trend towards reduced contact over time.

Norms and attitudes regarding filial obligations (normative solidarity) do not necessarily or directly translate into actual care provision but will generate the motivation or an intention to provide care and support (Daatland & Herlofson, 2003). A relevant factor here is how people weigh the relative responsibilities of the welfare state and the family for providing care to the elderly. Actual care provision is also conditioned by personal circumstances (needs), the ‘opportunity structure’, including the children’s resources, whether they have competing obligations, and the extent to which there are alternative sources of help. Another factor of importance consists of the expectations and norms of the older parents themselves. Research has shown that in countries with generous state

provision of care such as Scandinavia and the Netherlands, faced with real choices, older people prefer formal services to family care (Daatland, 1990; Wielink, Huijsman & McDonnel, 1997). Adult children's response to their older parents' care and support needs will be at least partly determined by their own norms, preference and attitudes.

Daatland and Herlofson (2003) did an internationally comparative study analyzing how filial obligations relate both to personal care preferences and normative opinions about the respective roles of families and the welfare state using data from the OASIS-study. The results show that filial obligation norms still prevail in the five countries with substantial minorities in all countries who did *not* accept filial obligations. Support for filial norms follows a north-south gradient, and is highest in Spain and Israel and lower in Norway, England and Germany. Filial norms tend to be transnational and widespread, but the way they translate in policy opinions and personal preferences varies per country. The authors conclude that across Europe strong and stable normative family solidarity co-exists with changing personal preferences and policy recommendations for care.

When it comes to the concrete provision of *care and support* (functional solidarity) to elderly people, results from the 1999 Eurobarometer survey indicate that provision of care to older relatives is higher in southern than in north-western European countries (Glaser et al., 2004). Lowenstein (1999) reports evidence showing a consistently high involvement of families in caregiving, even in countries with a high level of public care services, such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

On the basis of longitudinal studies, both in the US and in Germany, Bengtson and Martin (2001) conclude that the levels of *emotional closeness* (affectual solidarity) reported across generations are quite high, and that they have not shown much decline over time.

A recent report of the Netherlands Interdisciplinary Demographic Institute (Fokkema et al., 2008) aimed to provide an overall picture of the strength, nature and direction of intergenerational solidarity in Europe, focussing on the relations between parents and their adult children. The study is based on data from the first wave of the SHARE-project, and focuses on different dimensions of solidarity, namely structural, associational, normative and functional solidarity. The results show that intergenerational solidarity in Europe is alive and well. The majority of European late-life families are characterized by having a child nearby, being in frequent contact with at least one of the children, having strong family caring obligations, and regular exchange of help in kind (practical help, personal care, help with paperwork, looking after grandchildren) either from parents to children or from children to parents. Although the general picture of intergenerational solidarity in Europe does not give rise to great concerns, there are large differences by gender, religiosity, marital history and socioeconomic status. Mothers have more intensive contact and exchange more help in kin with their children, but fathers are more inclined to assist their children financially. Being religious and having a large family are positively associated with living near one of their children and having frequent contact with at least one of them. Divorce of the parents and a better socioeconomic position of parents and children tend to weaken parent-child ties. Contrary to what is often assumed, employed children show solidarity with their parents as much as those without a paid job. The north-south divide was confirmed again in this study, as far as geographical proximity, contact frequency and caring obligations are concerned: in southern Europe older parents more often co-reside with a child or live close to their children, and have a stronger sense of family duty than older parents in the north. No clear north-south pattern emerged with regard to support exchange; in some of the central and northern European countries relatively high rates of help in kind were found, albeit less frequent than in southern Europe. Formal care facilities, more characteristic for northern countries, seem to relieve the burden faced by informal carers rather than to fully replace them.

A study by Broese van Groenou et al. (2006) confirmed that socioeconomic status is an important determinant of intergenerational solidarity. They compared four different countries (the UK, Italy, the Netherlands, and Belgium) and found that in all countries older people in low SES groups used informal and formal help more frequently compared with people in higher SES groups. Intergenerational solidarity is also affected by social class differences in the sense that middle-class parents live further away from their children than working-class parents. Greater educational and occupational opportunities for children from families with more resources often result in longer distance migration and, finally, in greater intergenerational separation and less frequent (face-to-face) parent-child contact (Kalmijn, 2006; Hank, 2007). For this reason, education has been called a 'mixed blessing' for intergenerational relationships (Daatland, 2007).

The much debated 'decline of the family', that is often assumed to result from the demographic changes described in earlier sections of this paper, does not seem to find support in empirical research. Bengtson and Martin (2001) are optimistic about the future of intergenerational solidarity in Europe; they predict continued high solidarity and support between generations, an extension of families across generations, and extended family functions of help and support across time (Bengtson, 2000). Also Kohli (2005) concludes on the basis of cross-nationally comparative data in Europe that for present elderly Europeans the family is not yet affected negatively by the historical decline of marriage and has remained a strong provider of institutional and everyday integration. Although little research has focused on the role of intergenerational conflicts within older families, the available evidence from both the US and Europe shows that conflicts between adult generations are mostly disagreements about a relatively minor set of issues (Bengtson & Martin, 2001) and do not necessarily threaten solidarity between generations (Van Gaalen & Dykstra, 2007).

A striking lack of information about eastern European countries becomes apparent from the literature on intergenerational solidarity. In some studies the north-south divide is nuanced by including a third category of central European countries (Fokkema et al., 2008; Hank, 2007). Since eastern European countries have undergone more rapid and more dramatic demographic changes and have different welfare systems compared to the rest of Europe (Fokkema & Esveldt, 2006), research comparing north, south, central and eastern Europe has utmost priority.

The empirical literature suggests that the strength of intergenerational solidarity is not declining, but that its nature may vary across Europe, with the various dimensions of intergenerational solidarity differing in importance in the various countries. As we will argue below, an issue that deserves specific attention is the direction of intergenerational exchange, the balance of giving and receiving.

4.3. Intergenerational reciprocity and well-being

An interesting issue raised by Bengtson and Martin (2001) is that of intergenerational reciprocity: the cyclical process of helping and being helped throughout life. Compared to the past, members of the old generation have more resources at their disposal that they can give to their own children; therefore, they are not only recipients but also donors of support. Also Lowenstein (1999) points at the increased emphasis on the interdependence of generations, that is the mutual exchange of resources between elderly parents and their adult children, and advocates to conceptualize intergenerational family support as a reciprocal process; reciprocity in exchange can be immediate or may occur over the course of a lifetime. The balance of giving and receiving across the life course has been addressed by, for instance, Rossi and Rossi (1990) in the US, and Szydlik (2000) in Germany. A study by Daatland (2007) shows that the various dimensions of family solidarity are differently affected by increasing age; for instance, associational solidarity is reduced, but affectional solidarity is increased.

Silverstein et al. (2002), investigating reciprocity in parent-child relations over the life course, report that children who spent more time in shared activities with their mothers and fathers in 1971 provided more support on them on average. This result suggests an 'investment model' of intergenerational transfers; the return gained by the parent was directly proportional to their initial investment, suggesting a form of direct (although not necessarily simultaneous or equivalent) reciprocity between generations. The reciprocation of early financial transfers only emerged over time, suggesting a latency in the response of adult children that is more characteristic of an 'insurance mechanism'. Finally, an 'altruistic model' of intergenerational exchange was also supported by the data: even when the early parent-child relationship had been emotionally distant, the amount of support provided to parents was found to increase with their increasing age. Apparently, children respond over time to the age-related needs of their parents in spite of poor early relationships.

Using data from a nationally representative British longitudinal study, Grundy (2005) analyzed exchanges of support between Third Age parents (aged 55-75) and their adult children. Her results show that there was a strong reciprocal element to intergenerational exchange. For example, married parents who provided support to at least one child were twice as likely as those who did not give that support, to receive support from a child. This study also demonstrated that there are socio-economic differences in the balance of support exchanges; for instance, parents with higher incomes and owning a home were more likely to provide help but less likely to receive help from a child. Verbrugge and Chan (2008) report similar results for India, where the ethos of reciprocity is especially strong. The more financial support Singapore seniors received from kin, the more baby-sitting and chores they provided; apparently reciprocity can be achieved by exchanging different types of transfers between generations.

In a study by Komter and Schans (forthcoming) patterns of reciprocity among Dutch and immigrant families were investigated. The reciprocity pattern where a low level of giving is paired with a low level of receiving was found to be the most common: more than one third of all respondents fall into this category. This finding is in line with the results of Hogan et al. (1993) for the USA and with those of Chan (2006) for the UK; both studies demonstrate that low-level exchange of help between adult children and their parents is the most common pattern. In the Dutch study the reciprocity pattern of receiving much while giving little is the next most important category: more than one quarter of all are found to be receivers. Apparently, parents give their adult children a lot of support that is not necessarily (immediately) reciprocated. A slightly smaller group of adult children are involved in an intensive mutual exchange of support with their parents: the high exchangers. Those who give much while receiving little, the givers, are the smallest category. Another main finding of this study was that the similarities in intergenerational exchange patterns between Dutch and immigrant families were greater than the differences.

Fokkema, Ter Bekke and Dykstra (2008) distinguished different types of 'late-life' families and compared these in a number of European countries included in the SHARE-project. The types were: 'descending familialism', characterized by strong family care obligations and by a high likelihood of help provided by parents to their children, 'ascending familialism', characterized by strong caring norms and by help from children to their parents, 'supportive distance', indicating weak care obligations and primarily 'downward' financial help from parents to children, and finally, the 'autonomous' family type, where there is little contact and support exchange. The family types proved to be robust across northern, central and southern European regions. Both the 'descending' and the 'supportive at distance' types were found to be more frequent in northern and central Europe, whereas the 'ascending' type was more common in southern countries. The 'autonomous' family type is found in all countries but slightly less in some southern countries. The study concludes that cross-country

differences exist over and above differences in sociodemographic characteristics of parents and children, suggesting that other factors than composition effects are involved.

An interesting question for further research would be to examine which cultural or other country differences are accounting for the difference in family types in terms of reciprocity, or the balance of giving and receiving. Another issue worth studying is how these different family types affect the well-being of those involved. Few studies address the association between reciprocity patterns in the family and well-being. An exception is Chan (2006), who found that both low- and high level exchangers, and those who mainly give support to their parents report similar levels of subjective well-being. We do not know, however, if this is also true for other countries than the UK. Moreover, in the past the focus has too often been exclusively on the well-being of care providers, while the experiences of care recipients were largely ignored (Komter, 2004). To what extent do forms of upward or downward help, or help at a distance have an impact on the social integration and the well-being of both care providers and care recipients across Europe?

5. Research questions

The general research question of this project is: how do demographic changes affect intergenerational solidarity and well-being in Europe? The conclusions drawn from our literature review led us to subdivide this overarching question into six research questions that we aim to answer in the following three years. Answering these questions will help us to understand the relationship between demographic characteristics on the one hand, and intergenerational solidarity and well-being on the other hand. Our first question is descriptive and concerns the joint effects of demographic trends on the composition of European families. Because demographic trends can strengthen and weaken each other, it is relevant to investigate how these changes cluster into families. Our first question reads as follows:

1. How are family constellations in Europe affected by the joint effects of demographic trends such as partnering, childbearing and parenting?

Furthermore, we hope to add to the existing literature by studying the relationship between demographic characteristics and intergenerational solidarity using a multilevel approach. We will examine how demographic characteristics affect intergenerational solidarity at the level of individuals, families and countries. Moreover, we will study the influence of demographic characteristics on three core aspects of intergenerational solidarity: the strength, nature and direction of solidarity. This leads to the following three research questions:

2. What is the relative impact of individual characteristics, family structure and societal characteristics on the strength of intergenerational solidarity across Europe?
3. What is the relative impact of individual characteristics, family structure and societal characteristics on the nature of intergenerational solidarity across Europe?
4. What is the relative impact of individual characteristics, family structure and societal characteristics on the direction of intergenerational solidarity across Europe?

In this project we also take into consideration the possibility of cross-level interactions. We will study to what extent the influence of individual characteristics on intergenerational solidarity is affected by the family structure and societal characteristics.

5. To what extent is the relationship between individual characteristics and intergenerational solidarity affected by (a) the family structure and (b) societal characteristics?

After having disentangled the effects of demographic characteristics on intergenerational solidarity we will focus on the consequences of intergenerational solidarity for the well-being of care givers and recipients. This question is underexposed in the existing literature:

6. How do the strength, nature and direction of intergenerational solidarity affect the well-being of both care providers and care recipients?

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