



**Post-divorce parenting and children's welfare in divorce:
EU harmonised statistics?**

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WELLCHI Statistics Committee

- The WELLCHI Statistics Committee is exploring a range of statistical sources about the impact of changing family forms, working conditions of parents, social policy and legislative measures affecting the well-being of children. The central purpose is to make recommendations for a common, harmonised, system of statistical indicators that would improve research opportunities in this area.

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Divorce: issues for children

- A substantial and increasing number of children across the EU are affected by the separation or divorce of their parents
- The effects of separation and divorce on children can be serious in the short and medium term, with possible adverse long-term outcomes for social inclusion and development
- Research to understand the impact of parental separation and divorce on children's current and future well-being and to make comparisons across the EU are seriously hampered by statistical data deficits.
- 'Childhood' is statistically invisible and children appear more as objects than subjects for statistical information collection and research



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Issues for children's welfare resulting from parental separation and divorce

- Demography of divorce, separation and family transition
- Legal and policy frameworks across the EU
- Post-divorce parenting practices: conflicted, parallel or cooperative
- Patterns of child contact and residence after separation
- Adverse outcomes for children and links to parental conflict
- Child support after divorce and post-divorce living standards
- The role of family support services for separation issues



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This paper

- reviews some potential statistical data sources and information available within the EU, and considers how much harmonised data exists
- identifies some of the methodological issues for doing comparative research in this area
- identifies some key data gaps
- concludes:
 - there are few cross-national statistical sources in which the individual child is the unit of analysis,
 - there are some statistical data available on children and divorce within the EU but which are not cross-national or harmonised, and
 - there are some harmonised social statistics data sources, but with limited or non-existent information about children and divorce

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Demography of divorce

Divorce rates per 1000 persons, selected EU countries, 1993 and 2003
Source: Eurostat

An indirect and crude indicator of the number of children affected by parental separation

| | 1993 | 2003 |
|----------------|------|------|
| Austria | 2.1 | 2.3 |
| Belgium | 2.1 | 3.0 |
| Denmark | 2.5 | 2.9 |
| Finland | 2.5 | 2.6 |
| France | 1.9 | 2.1 |
| Germany | 1.9 | 2.6 |
| Greece | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| Ireland | * | 0.7 |
| Italy | 0.4 | 0.8 |
| Luxembourg | 1.9 | 2.3 |
| Netherlands | 2.0 | 1.9 |
| Norway | 2.5 | 2.4 |
| Portugal | 1.2 | 2.2 |
| Spain | 0.7 | 2.1 |
| Sweden | 2.5 | 2.4 |
| United Kingdom | 3.1 | 2.8 |

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Children's living arrangements



Young people (aged 11, 13, 15) living in different family structures in selected European countries (%)

| | One parent | Stepfamily | Both parents |
|-------------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| Greece | 8 | 1 | 91 |
| Italy | 7 | 2 | 90 |
| Spain | 9 | 3 | 87 |
| Ireland | 10 | 4 | 85 |
| Netherlands | 11 | 6 | 83 |
| Belgium (Flemish) | 9 | 8 | 82 |
| Portugal | 10 | 6 | 82 |
| Austria | 13 | 8 | 79 |
| France | 11 | 10 | 79 |
| Germany | 13 | 9 | 77 |
| Finland | 15 | 11 | 74 |
| Belgium (French) | 16 | 11 | 71 |
| Norway | 16 | 13 | 70 |
| Scotland | 17 | 12 | 70 |
| Sweden | 17 | 13 | 70 |
| Denmark | 17 | 14 | 69 |
| England | 17 | 15 | 67 |

Source: Currie et al (2004:28)

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Children's experience of family disruption



Cumulative percent of children who experienced family dissolution by age 15 in selected EU countries, by parents' marital status

| Country | Period | Parents married | Parents cohabited | All |
|-----------|---------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|
| Sweden | 1987-93 | 24 | 38 | 30 |
| Norway | 1983-89 | 18 | 36 | 21 |
| Finland | 1983-89 | 17 | 39 | 20 |
| France | 1988-94 | 17 | 58 | 23 |
| Austria | 1990-96 | 23 | 43 | 26 |
| W Germany | 1986-92 | 26 | * | 29 |
| Italy | 1990-95 | 7 | * | 7 |
| Spain | 1989-95 | 9 | * | 10 |

Source: Andersson 2002: 352-353: www.demographic-research.org

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Patterns of contact-the broad picture

The evidence suggests:

- wide variation in patterns of contact
- higher levels of contact between non-resident parents and children than is commonly believed
- contact mainly arranged by mutual agreement between parents, with infrequent use of the courts
- parents --both resident and non-resident--mainly say their arrangements are satisfactory, in contrast to high levels of conflict in cases involving the courts
- Resident and non-resident parents reported different levels of contact
- a significant minority of children seem to have little or no contact with their non-resident parent

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Statistical sources-patterns of contact

Main unharmonized and ad-hoc


England and Wales, 2003, Office for National Statistics survey (within the Omnibus Survey) of 935 parents about non-residential parental contact with children.

Norway, Surveys on contact arrangements and child maintenance were carried out in 2002 and 2004 involving postal and telephone interviews with about 4000 people each to evaluate child support law reforms in 2003.

Australia. Useful to inform EU survey development work. Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia survey (HILDA) in 2001 involved over 1000 parents who did not live with the other parent of their child(ren).

Sweden. Data on children who have experienced their parents' divorce and separation produced by Statistics Sweden since the 1990s. The individual child is the unit of analysis.

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Statistical gaps

Gaps at both individual country level and cross-nationally

- Demography of divorce from children's perspectives
- Legal and policy frameworks across the EU
- Post-divorce parenting practices across households: conflicted, parallel or cooperative
- (Adverse) outcomes for children and their links with parental conflict
- Patterns of child contact and residence after separation (systematic and cross-national)
- Negotiating contact and private ordering
- Children's views and participation
- The role of family support services for separation related issues
- Patterns of child support after separation and post-divorce living standards

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Parenting after separation: research messages

- While divorce increases the risk of adverse outcomes for children, and stress in the short-term, most children do not suffer harmful long-term effects.
- Studies point repeatedly to the damaging effects on children of parental conflict
- Parents can take steps, with help from professionals and support agencies, to minimise risk
- Co-operative parenting is best for children's well-being and development

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Negotiating private arrangements: children's views

- Little known about how children's views are taken into account in making post-separation parenting arrangements, even though due regard should be given to their views.


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EU harmonised statistical sources with information about children and divorce

- European Community Household Panel (ECHP) and the European Panel Analysis Group (EPAG)
- PACO (Panel Comparability) Project and the Cross-National Equivalent Files (CNEF)
- UN Fertility and Family Surveys
- Cross sectional comparative datasets??
- Child-centred datasets??

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Conclusion



- There are few cross-national statistical sources in which the individual child is the unit of analysis,
- There are some statistical data available on children and divorce within the EU but which are not cross-national or harmonised or systematic,
- There are some harmonised social statistics data sources, but with limited or non-existent information about children and divorce.

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