



Europarents
Proj. Nr. 2019-1-DE02-KA204-006498



Summary of the cross-national research

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The „Europarents“ Project

The family is the smallest system in European society, the starting point for democracy building and social change, and therefore deserves special support. From our counselling and educational work we know that families are always looking for help with similar issues, that almost everyone is "stuck" in the same places. We have asked ourselves whether this is the case everywhere in the European Community, for example whether Greek and Austrian parents have the same problems. And what are the solutions to these problems with our partners?

So we started to look for similarities and differences in family issues in Europe within the framework of a Strategic Partnership within the Erasmus+ programme. In a consortium of Germany, Austria, Spain, Greece and Bulgaria we found the following results through desktop research and personal exchange.

2. The results of the transnational research

2.1 Reconciling job and family

According to a survey conducted by the German opinion research institute "statista" (2016, 1084 respondents), about 70% of couples are arguing about issues concerning the balance between work and family life (e.g. "Importance of work/private life" 14%, "Money issues" 26%, "Household tasks" 24%, "The question of who is lagging behind at work" 4%). In fact, in most families in Germany, after the birth of their first child, women limit their employment, while young fathers often work even more than before. Although fathers are expected to participate more actively in bringing up their children in the interests of equality, everyday working life usually does not offer them the necessary flexibility.

From Spain, it is reported that many schools celebrate International Family Day on 15 May, instead of Mother's Day and Father's Day, because they believe that the typology of families in Spain has changed and that these holidays respond to an outdated concept. In 46% of families in Spain, both father and mother work full-time. Nevertheless, women often remain the ones who take more responsibility in the home. 56% of working parents feel that this does not do justice to their children.



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Greece has also been celebrating International Family Day since 1993. Independently of Father's and Mother's Day, the aim is to draw attention to the importance of the family, to political attempts to promote the development and rights of the family, but also to the duties of family members, so that the family can function and fulfil its unique role. However, the reconciliation of family life and work is also a major bone of contention and fathers are seeking a new understanding of their roles.

In Bulgaria, on the other hand, there are many parents who are missing out on bringing up their children because they work abroad. The parents are missing as role models and feel that they can watch via video chat how grandparents raise their children. The "National Strategy for the Child 2019-2030" should therefore promote the active role of fathers.

According to an Austrian study (families surveyed by Marketagent.com, 2015, 1,209 families), the reconciliation of family and work is also a "big issue - from the point of view of families, there is apparently still a lot of catching up to do here". Only 14.2% of those surveyed believe that family and career can be (rather) well combined. The "Charter for the Reconciliation of Family and Work", which was published by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Economy, Family and Youth in 2012, among others, has apparently not changed this much.

2.2 Media education in the family

According to a study by the Federal Centre for Health Education, more and more young people in Germany are threatened by Internet addiction. Girls are more frequently affected by this than boys. Safer Internet Day, organized by the Federal Center for Health Education, is intended to encourage parents to better accompany their children on the Internet. The Federal Ministry for Youth also offers parents support through numerous initiatives, such as "Schau Hin! What your child does with media." This campaign informs parents about child-friendly use of media and offers a live chat in which parents can ask questions to media coaches (<https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/kinder-und-jugend/medienkompetenz/medienkompetenz-staerken/75350>, last accessed on 2.02.2020).

According to the Austrian study "Die Allerjüngsten und digitale Medien", 72% of 0 to 6-year-olds are already on the Internet. The most frequent activities are watching videos, listening to music or playing games. 22% of the under 6-year-olds already have their own device. This leads to conflicts within families when it comes to limiting the amount of use. This was confirmed by

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18% of parents surveyed, but almost as many children regret that their parents spend too much time in front of digital devices. The fact that 37 million pictures and videos of Austrian children have been published on the Internet so far shows the need for further training programmes for parents (<https://www.saferinternet.at/news-detail/neue-studie-72-prozent-der-0-bis-6-jaehrigen-im-internet/>, last accessed on 10.02.2020).

Media use times are more regulated in Spain than in other EU countries. According to Süß, this can be attributed to the more family-oriented culture in Spain (Daniel Süß, *Mediensozialisation von Heraufwachsenden: Dimensions - Constants - Change*. Wiesbaden 2004. page 233). Although Spaniards tend to catch up in terms of media competence and have only had sufficient skills since 2012 according to a survey, parents are very well aware of the dangers of the Internet (https://scielo.conicyt.cl/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0719-367X2014000200001, last accessed on 3.03.2020).

According to a study by the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre, children spend about half of their free time online. This leads to early sexualisation and sexual harassment, especially in Bulgaria. Most children do not have the necessary skills to recognise risks of the World Wide Web. Parents were recommended to talk more with their children about the risks and opportunities on the internet and to develop their self-control skills. Bulgarian children are among those with the lowest level of parental control in the virtual network (https://www.safenet.bg/images/sampleddata/files/BulgarianNationalResearch2016_Summary_BG_Slides.pdf, last accessed on 2.02.2020). Media literacy courses have only been available in schools since 2018/2019 (<https://nmd.bg/utчителite-mogat-da-polzvat-gotovi-resursi-po-mediyna-gramotnost/>, last accessed on 1.02.2020).

In 2012, the University of Athens coordinated a study on the internet behaviour of young people, which showed that about 11% of young people have a high addiction potential and have more experience of cyberbullying than in other countries. Here, there is a need for programmes for parents who can recognise the loss of control of young people over their usage behaviour and intervene with targeted measures (https://www.unimedizin-mainz.de/fileadmin/kliniken/verhalten/Dokumente/EU_NET_ADB_Broschuere_final.pdf, last accessed on 12.01.2020).

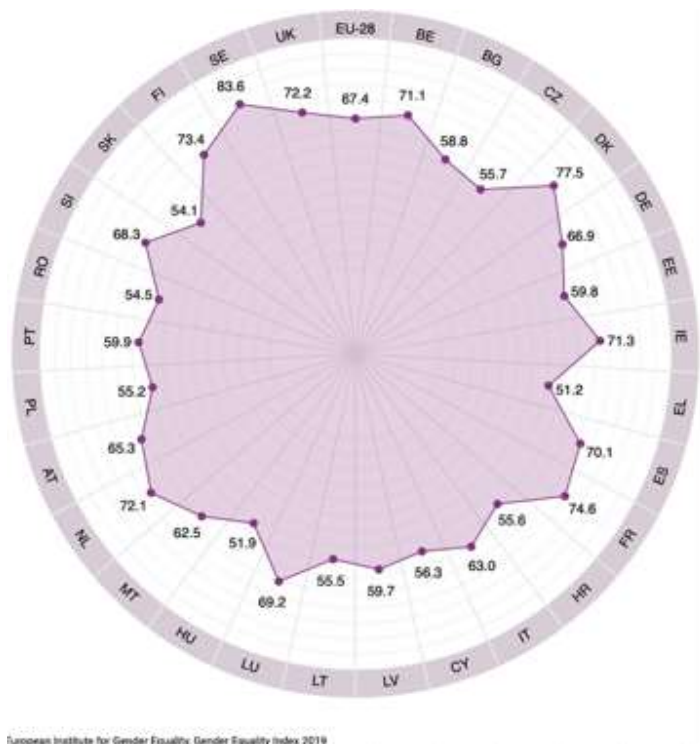




2.3 Equality between men and women in the family

Equality in the home is the first step towards achieving the desired equality in the family. The home is the first microcosm, the first social core we know and in which we educate ourselves. If we teach our children equally that family tasks are the responsibility of everyone, we can all achieve that we can live in a more egalitarian society, both in the family nucleus and in general. We must begin to internalise a more just system of values and beliefs, in which we respect our individuality but recognise our equality.

Progress towards gender equality in the European Union



As the With an equality index of 67.4 out of 100, the EU still has plenty of room for improvement.

Although the EU has made progress towards gender equality, developments are uneven between Member States. Sweden (83.6 points) and Denmark (77.5 points) are consistently the most gender-equal societies. Greece (51.2 points) and Hungary (51.9 points) have the longest road ahead.

number of double-income families and single parents increases, the need for childcare services and the fair distribution of household tasks is growing and changing.

In the EU, 58% of all non-institutional carers* of children are women. A total of 56% of women compared to 51% of men are involved in the care or education of their children several times a





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week. Women spend an average of 5 hours and 59 minutes on household tasks. In contrast, according to Eurostat, men spend 2 hours and 20 minutes in this group of activities.

The integration of women into the world of work has not been accompanied by the necessary social change. Society continues to function as if women were fully dedicated to domestic and family care, regardless of the fact that they have to make important additional efforts to reconcile family and job. Society continues to be divided into roles according to gender. Women are still assigned to family responsibilities and men to work, public and social life.

This is most pronounced in countries with the lowest gender equality index, where it requires the greatest social change.

2.4 Money management

In Austria, children and young people receive less and less pocket money. In 2014, 26 percent of children did not receive any pocket money; currently the figure is 32 percent. At the same time, the proportion of children who regularly receive pocket money dropped from 44 percent to 37 percent. Austria's parents are increasingly relying on "pocket money when needed", as there has been an increase in this category from 18% to 23% in the past five years. (Survey by the Direktbank ING). Open discussions about money are important for adolescents. Two thirds of the parents surveyed agree with this. One third see the school as responsible and expect financial education there. The importance of discussing the topic of money with children is also shown by a joint survey of young adults between 18 and 29 years of age conducted by the Banking Association and Bawag PSK. According to this survey, three quarters of those questioned learned how to handle money from their parents. The survey shows that parents with pecuniary concerns tend to talk less about it.

In Germany 26% of couples argue about money issues. With the birth of the first child, a salary (usually that of the woman) often falls away, so that feelings of dependence can arise. The parental allowance somewhat alleviates this imbalance. However, if it is very low or if one person does not earn anything at all, he/she should receive a salary from the other person - for his/her educational and household work. There are two concepts: the individualistic and the collectivistic. The collectivist ideal: the couple sees itself as a unit to which both contribute. They subordinate their own money to the relationship, have a joint account, and each takes financial responsibility. Individualistic ideal: each person keeps an account, common expenses are divided in half. Items that are bought for the household sometimes even remain the clear



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property of the person who paid for them. It is difficult when a collectivist and an individualist join forces.

In Greece, the average monthly expenditure in the family has fallen in recent years from €1,509.39 (2013) to €1,414.09 (2017). Most of this money is spent on food (€289.04), accommodation (€198.75) and vehicle or public transport (€182.31). One out of two Greek families live in a 3-room apartment (3 rooms, kitchen, bathroom) with approx. 61 to 100 sqm. Unfortunately, the standard of living is not the same for all Greek families. According to the statistics of ELSTAT, there were many families (20.2%) who had accommodation problems, such as mould on the walls, burst water pipes, broken floors or leaking windows. At the same time, the economic crisis has increased the number of people who are dependent on their families.

In Bulgaria the standard of living is indeed not high. The handling of money is affected accordingly. Family or partnership play a central role in life. The money usually comes into a common treasury. Pocket money is given to the children from the 1st class on. The level of financial education is often insufficient. The strongest problem areas: The lack of financial culture is becoming a growing problem, and not only in Bulgaria. On average 52% of European citizens* have financial literacy (according to Financial Literacy around the World). In Bulgaria this percentage is 35%. Children at school acquire academic knowledge in various subjects and miss an important lesson with long-term consequences - how to handle money responsibly. Foundations, NGOs, finance houses, banks, mobile phone operators and insurance institutions deal with these problems in various out-of-school projects, mainly through courses and educational games, workshops or theatre.

In Spain, in families where only one parent works, the environment is slightly different and the issue of how to handle money is agreed upon by the couples. In the past the father was the working person, brought the money into the family and the mother was responsible for the upbringing. Today both are equal and, in more and more families, both parents are fully employed.

2.5 Communication and conflict management

According to the "StreitAtlas 2019", the Germans are bickering, if necessary, even up to the court, to fight for their position. Within the family, the reasons for disputes vary, with 38% of them being family issues. 16% of the couples get into disputes because of different opinions



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about bringing up children. The most frequent topic of dispute between parents and young people is related to their time on the computer ("Statista 2013"). Whereas the topic "eating" is more the subject of conflict between parents and children.

In Germany, the ban on violence in education has been in force since 2000, in Austria since 1989. According to a study by the Federal Ministry for Families and Youth, the most appropriate means of education for Austrians is the deprivation of pleasure. According to a study by Statista from 2016, parents and children argue about the topic "cleanliness and order", whereby this argument emanates more from the mothers, with 19%, than from the fathers with only 4.2%.

In 2019 the Bulgarian Orthodox Church opposed a planned change in the law to ban violence by parents towards their children. The man is still considered the head of the family, but men often shift the important educational issues to their wives. The most severe communication problems in families are to be found in the use of social media. Here 15% of the students* interviewed stated that they had been bullied before, 3% of them do it weekly, 29% did not tell anybody that they had been victims of bullying.

According to the exchange platform "sprachenmarkt.de" (https://www.sprachenmarkt.de/fileadmin/sprachenmarkt/interk_Vorbereitung_images/Interkulturelle_Besonderheiten_fuer_Spanien.pdf) the Spaniards try to pass on or get information indirectly and in encrypted form, they first "beat about the bush". Criticism is expressed rather indirectly and time is taken to form a personal basis for communication. Family, circle of friends and interpersonal relationships are very important in Spain. Spain is a lively and sociable country. Sometimes there are fierce and emotional arguments.

The communication culture in Greece is also very passionate and patriotic, sometimes even perceived as "arrogant" and "intolerant". The conversations are often held in cafés and outside the private environment. The economic crisis has had a strong impact on the problems within families. For example, 25% of parents between 50-64 years old support their children financially (21% of parents between 65-80 years old). 27% of the young people state that the disputes and tensions within the family have increased due to the economic crisis. It is striking that 43% of young people perceive their father as disinterested, the one who knows the least about their friends, 39.4% in what they do in their free time and 39.7% in what they do with their money (Institute for Mental Health EPIPY).



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2.6 Education

In Germany, bringing up children is a controversial issue in about a quarter of the families (Statista survey 2019). The partner and parent-child relationship has changed significantly in recent decades: the traditional patriarchal power structure has been replaced by the "negotiation budget", in which not only the woman but also the children have a say. Nowadays, the "democratic style of education" prevails, in which children are treated with love and understanding and at the same time rules and values are shown to them. At the same time, increasing expectations can be observed in the parent-child relationship. These increased demands overtax many parents and strengthen their feeling that they are doing something wrong in their upbringing or that they cannot meet the standards of upbringing (Kuschel et al. 2004).

In Austria, too, "consciously/pragmatically" and "highly reflected/child-centred" parenting styles predominate, with almost 80% of families who want to bring up children in this way (Statista 2019). It can therefore be assumed that the objective of a highly reflective parenting style, which requires a great deal of exchange between parents, can create a similar pressure as in Germany, which is accompanied by the feeling of doing something wrong in education. Parents also often feel overwhelmed with regard to media education (see above).

In Spain, where in the majority of families both parents work full-time, couples also try to build up a good relationship with their children and pay a lot of attention to them during their time together. Nevertheless, mothers here still bear a large part of the daily child-rearing responsibility and also take care of the children when they are ill.

In Greece, too, fathers are struggling for a new understanding of their roles and are trying to change old stereotypes. At the same time, family cohesion is strongly anchored in society and the close relations between the different generations are very strong.

Multi-generational responsibility for bringing up children is also an issue in Bulgaria, where many children are brought up by their grandparents because the parents work abroad. The feeling of loneliness increases among children, especially since the grandparents' lack of experience with new media often causes educational problems in this area. Here too, the role of fathers in raising children should be strengthened: "The role of male authority is extremely



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important for the boy's identity and the girl's trust," says Mladen Vladimirov, a Bulgarian psychologist.

3. Conclusion

As suspected, many parents in Europe actually have similar issues that cause them concern or problems. The increasing presence of women in the world of work has not yet triggered the necessary social changes, and society in all countries continues to be divided into roles according to gender. These role stereotypes affect different areas of family life: the reconciliation of work and family life as well as education, for example. A special aspect is the fact that in Bulgaria the responsibility for bringing up children often lies additionally with the grandparents, because the parents work abroad.

Uncertainty also prevails in the families of the countries studied with regard to the topics of media literacy education and financial education. Here it seems to be important to inform parents about their role model role and to include financial topics in the everyday education.

Given the limited project framework, it is difficult to compare the communication and dispute culture in several countries. It would be nice to devote more time to these topics in a follow-up project and to deal with them in a personal exchange.

From our counselling practice we know that many parents are already relieved when they realize that they are not alone with their problems. Through Europarents, not only the individual organisations in the consortium benefit from the increase in knowledge through the exchange, but also the families who are reached can get a feeling that other people in Europe are as well off as they are, a feeling for the European community.

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