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Part I

Demographic Trends, Population Related Policies and General Attitudes
Chapter 1
Demographic Change and Family Policy Regimes

Osmo Kontula and Ismo Söderling

Abstract The DIALOG countries are experiencing long-term downward trends in fertility, leading to demographic ageing. Natural population growth rates are entering periods of declining growth or outright decrease. There are a great number of societal problems that arise from this demographic transition. Up to date, it has been disputable whether public policies have had any impact on population trends.

This article groups DIALOG countries into four family policy regimes based firstly on the generousness of the public support they provided to families, and secondly on their variant emphasis on the socio-economic and gender equity issues in their societies. In addition, the associations between the family policy types and the socio-economic clusters and demographic change and public opinion are presented.

Family policy regimes were found to have considerable overlaps with the clusters that were formulated on the basis of demographic, economic, social policy, employment and educational indicators of the same countries. Societies form their family policies in great part according to the monetary resources that are available in their countries. As an exception to this, some countries limit their public support to means-tested benefits for poor families, and they also pay less attention to gender equity issues at home and in the labour force.

These choices have been associated with demographic changes in these countries. Countries relying on the “Labour market” regime in their family policy had the highest fertility rates. In contrast, “Imposed home care” countries had cut down their income transfers and benefits to their citizenships. This transition was associated with very low fertility. DIALOG countries that had applied family policy approaches that were in harmony with the population’s family values had higher fertility rates than the other countries. This finding has policy implications for population policies.

Keywords: Demographic change · Family policy regimes · Fertility · Public opinion

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1.1 Introduction

European countries, including the DIALOG countries, have faced a major demographic change and transition in the last thirty years. They are experiencing long-term downward trends in fertility, leading to demographic ageing. Fertility rates are now below replacement level in nearly all countries. As a result, natural population growth rates are starting to decline, or population sizes are falling outright. At the same time, the proportion of elderly dependants continues to grow while the working-age population declines in absolute and relative terms (see Kontula and Miettinen 2005). Moreover, net immigration, which potentially could offset declines in working-age population, remains generally low in most European countries (Grant et al. 2004).

There are a great number of societal problems that arise from this demographic transition. The International Monetary Fund (2004) argues that the impact of upcoming demographic changes on economical growth could be substantial. The historic association between demographic and macro-economic variables suggests that the projected increase in elderly dependency ratios and the projected decline in the share of the working-age population could result in slower per capita GDP growth, and lower saving and investment (IMF 2004, 147). For example, the estimates suggest that demographic change could reduce annual real per capita GDP growth in advanced countries by an average of $\frac{1}{2}\%$ point by 2050, i.e., growth would be $\frac{1}{2}\%$ point lower than if the demographic structure had remained the same as in 2000 (IMF 2004, 147).

Demographic change in Europe has stimulated demographers. The concept of the “Second Demographic Transition” was undoubtedly the theory of the 1990s. It describes and explains the substantial, unprecedented growth of cohabitation, lone parenthood, extramarital childbearing and low fertility observed in many countries since the 1960s (Coleman 2005, 11). The concept was developed actively during the 1990s (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2004): Post-materialist demography has now evolved further into “post-modern” demography (van de Kaa 2001).

To date, it has been disputable whether public policies have had any impact on population trends. Fertility is a key component for future demographic trends, and it would be most helpful if research could find some evidence of how public policies could make a difference to the declining trends in fertility, or indeed reverse these trends. As yet, only in France and Sweden have new approaches and efforts carried out in family policies been shown to have provided a boost to total fertility rates (Hoem 2000; NIDI 2005; Courbage 2003). At the same time, the rapid economic and social transition in the former communist countries has undoubtedly caused the collapse in fertility rates. The policies applied in these countries in the past ten years are a kind of antithesis to successful population policy.

This chapter aims to look for possible associations between the applied family policies and fertility trends in the DIALOG countries. For this purpose, we use the family policy typology of Kontula and Miettinen (2005) and the clusters of DIALOG countries based on their demographic and socio-economic characteristics, i.e. so called contextual macro indicators (see also IMF 2004).
The chapter also presents a brief overview of population growth in the DIALOG countries from 1990 to 2002, based on demographic statistics. This presentation continues with preferences regarding population growth formulated by the populations under study. Attitudes towards population and family issues (public opinion) are compared to family policy regimes. To that end, people’s attitudes have been used towards population growth, marriage and children, as well as opinions on family policy measures and about possible impacts of institutional childcare for children’s development.

The chapter is an outcome of studies carried out under DIALOG Work Package 4, coordinated by the Population Research Institute (PRI), Family Federation of Finland. Work Package 4 aimed to collect and analyse contextual data on the social and demographic situation in the participating countries, as well as on recent developments in the respective policy fields, especially focusing on policies related to family and ageing, and to relate this to the PPAS data.

1.2 Concepts and Measurement

The information dealt with in this chapter is very largely derived from the country reports that experts from 15 DIALOG countries contributed in 2004 under the guidelines provided by the Population Research Institute (PRI) in Finland (Söderling and Laitalainen 2005). The national reports described socio-demographic and socio-political situation in the DIALOG countries during the period 1990–2002. The final versions of the reports were sent to PRI in summer 2004. They were called “15 parsimonious National Studies Based on Contextual Data and Analysis of General Attitudes”. This information is supplemented by public opinion on demographic change studied by the results of the PPAS data.

The detailed information on social and family policies in each DIALOG country report was used by Kontula and Miettinen (2005) to classify countries in four groups (typology of family policy regimes). Countries were divided into four regimes: “Day care service” countries, “Income transfer” countries, “Labour market” countries, and “Imposed home care” countries. These family policy types are applied to analyse demographic and socio-economic contexts and public opinions towards population change and family policies in these countries.

Country variations in socio-economic contexts are studied by using 18 contextual macroindicators which refer to population, the economy and social policies, employment and education. Our aim is to examine whether the clusters based on these 18 contextual macroindicators are in any way related to the family policy regimes existing in these countries (for the actual indicators and figures, see the Appendix). Next, interrelationships between population growth and its basic components (natural increase and migration) and family policy regimes are analysed. And finally, people’s attitudes towards marriage and children, as well as opinions on family policy measures and about possible impacts of institutional childcare for children’s development, are analysed by family policy regimes to reveal some characteristic “opinion profiles”.