

PART I

KEY PREMISES



Debates on ageing societies predominantly focus on the circumstances of the elderly. A change of focus is needed, and one that starts from three key premises.

First, population ageing is not only about older persons: it affects people of all ages. In debates on ageing societies, there seems to be an implicit assumption that demographic ageing primarily affects older persons, their economic situation, health, mobility, social integration, family support and care. Of course, increasing longevity and decreasing birth rates have resulted in larger numbers of older persons both in absolute and relative terms. Nevertheless, with dramatic shifts in the balance between old and young, the worlds of younger age groups are profoundly changed. The young are growing up in societies where they are a numerical minority and where they have several generations of family members “above” them. These considerations suggest that attention should be given to people of all ages.

The new demographic circumstances in which family members of multiple generations share several decades together compel us to recognize that individuals are embedded in a complex web of vertical and horizontal ties. Thus, a second key premise is that there are critical interdependencies between family generations and between men and women in families, which are built and reinforced by social policies. These interdependencies should not be taken for granted as is often done. Rather, it is important to address explicitly the ways in which legal and policy arrangements constitute differential opportunities and constraints for men and women and across generations in families.

A third key premise is that to understand interdependencies in families, a spectrum of levels and units must be distinguished and recognized: country, historical generation, family, dyad (partners, parent-child) and the individual. Countries have disparate political, religious and economic histories and different welfare-

State arrangements. To understand the impact of demographic changes on people's lives, it is not sufficient to consider cross-national differences only. Regional diversity, including urban-rural differences and social change over time must also be considered — the rapid changes in Central and Eastern Europe being a case in point.

Under the auspices of the Population Activities Unit (PAU) of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in Geneva, a system of nationally comparative surveys and contextual databases has been developed, which aims at improving the knowledge base for policymaking. The Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) is a unique data-collection effort covering the entire adult age range that is being carried out in a wide range of countries, including non-Western nations (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2007). The GGP is ideally suited to empirically address questions on intergenerational relationships in ageing societies — taking people of all ages into consideration, explicitly considering interdependencies between

generations and between men and women in families and allowing cross-national and longitudinal comparisons.

This report details selected findings from MULTILINKS (<http://www.multilinks-project.eu/>), a research programme funded through the Seventh Framework of the European Commission in which GGP-data are analysed. This research programme examines:

- (a) Multiple linkages in families (e.g., transfers up and down family lineages, interdependencies between older and younger family members);
- (b) Multiple linkages across time (measures at different points in time, at different points in the individual and family life course); and
- (c) Multiple linkages between, on the one hand, national and regional contexts (e.g., policy regimes, economic circumstances, normative climate, religiosity) and, on the other hand, individual behaviour, well-being and values.