

Families and work in transition in 12 countries, 1980–2001

*Nontraditional living arrangements and the employment
of women, including mothers of young children,
continued to increase in developed nations*

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Profound changes in family structure and employment patterns took place in 12 developed countries during the last two decades of the 20th century, continuing earlier trends. The traditional nuclear family unit, a married couple with children, declined steadily as a proportion of all households. Married-couple households without children maintained a generally stable share. By contrast, the proportion of single-parent and one-person households rose in all of the countries studied. The United States had the highest proportion of single-parent households throughout the period, but some countries had larger increases. The one-person household became the dominant living arrangement in Denmark and Sweden.

Accompanying and interacting with these trends in household composition were continued demographic shifts and changes in the work-family relationship. Fertility rates, already low by historic and world standards in 1980, fell further in most of the countries studied, but rose and then leveled off in the United States. U.S. marriage and divorce rates remained the highest in the developed world, but other countries were narrowing the difference. The proportion of children born outside of marriage rose in all of the countries examined, with the two Scandinavian countries maintaining the highest percentages throughout the period. The United States was among a group of countries joining Sweden with a lower average age of women at first birth than at first marriage.

Women of childbearing and child-rearing ages entered the labor force in greater numbers, and the proportion of working mothers with very young

children rose rapidly in the last decade, except in Sweden, where the proportion declined, but remained the highest among the countries studied. U.S. single mothers had much higher rates of employment than most of their European counterparts.

In a comparison (limited to eight countries) of the working patterns of couple families with very young children, the United States was the only country in which the predominant pattern was for both parents to work full time. In the mid-1980s, the traditional pattern of the husband working full time and the wife not working outside the home was clearly dominant in the United States, as well as in the other seven countries. Although declining since then, this traditional pattern remained the most frequent arrangement in France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, and Spain from the middle of the eighties to 1999; in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the most common pattern was the husband working full time while the wife worked part time. Part-time employment, an option sometimes chosen by working mothers, was most prevalent among women in Northern Europe and Japan and least prevalent in the United States, Ireland, and Southern Europe.

The new study of family structures, household living arrangements, and the work-family relationship presented in this article updates and expands upon a 1990 article published in the *Review*.¹ That article studied the period from 1960 to the late 1980s; this one overlaps it, covering the period from about 1980 to the beginning of the 21st century. In what follows, a more extended treatment is given to the work-family relationship,

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with a particular focus on the role of women. Data are presented for 12 countries: the United States, Canada, Japan, and 9 Western European nations. (See table 1.) The current study includes two countries—Ireland and Spain—that did not appear in the earlier study. In addition, Germany after unification has replaced West Germany in the analysis, and data for the 1980s are omitted for Germany. Finally, because of data limitations, not all countries are included in every table.

The article begins with historical background information, setting the stage for a more current description of major demographic and sociological changes directly influencing family composition: fertility rates, age composition of the population, marriage and divorce rates, and births out of wedlock. Trends in household composition are discussed, followed by a consideration of family employment patterns, mainly through an analysis of employment-to-population ratios, first for women and then, more specifically, for mothers.

The data in this study were compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from various national and international sources. In particular, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development was the source for most of the statistics on work and the family. Because concepts and definitions differ across countries, an appendix dealing with these issues is included at the end of the article.

Table 1. Total fertility rate,¹ 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2001

Country	1980	1990	1995	2001 ²	Percent change, 1980–2001
United States	1.84	2.08	2.02	2.05	11.4
Canada	1.74	1.79	1.67	1.60	-8.0
Japan	1.75	1.52	1.42	1.36	-22.3
Denmark	1.55	1.67	1.80	1.74	12.3
France	1.95	1.78	1.70	1.90	-2.6
Germany ³	—	1.33	1.25	1.29	—
Ireland	3.23	2.11	1.84	1.98	-38.7
Italy	1.64	1.33	1.18	1.24	-24.4
Netherlands	1.60	1.62	1.53	1.69	5.6
Spain	2.20	1.36	1.18	1.25	-43.2
Sweden	1.68	2.13	1.73	1.57	-6.5
United Kingdom ...	1.90	1.83	1.71	1.63	-14.2

¹ The total fertility rate for a given year is the mean number of children that would be born alive to a woman during her lifetime if she were to pass through her childbearing years conforming to the fertility rates, by age, of that year.

² Data for all European countries, except Denmark and Sweden, are either provisional or estimated by Eurostat. For all other countries, data are final.

³ Data are for 1991 instead of 1990.

NOTE: Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For European countries, *European Social Statistics: Demography 2002* (Luxembourg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2002), table E-4; and *Demographic Statistics 1997* (Luxembourg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 1997), table E-6. For all others, *Age Specific Fertility Rates and Selected Derived Measures* (U.S. Census Bureau, International Database), table 028; on the Internet at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbprint.html>.

Background

During the decade of the 1950s, the traditional nuclear family was predominant. Young persons married early and had rather large families relatively quickly, divorce was rare, and cohabitation and unmarried childbearing even rarer. Single parenthood was relatively unknown, and most often it was the result of the death of one of the parents. This portrait was generally accurate for all countries studied save Denmark and Sweden, where most of the pattern still held, except that births out of wedlock had already begun to climb in the 1950s (although they were still at fairly low levels by 1960). Young women of the 1950s often worked before they married, and some continued working after marriage until their first child was born, but almost all mothers of infants withdrew from the labor force for an extended period of time, and many did not return. The male-breadwinner, female-homemaker family symbolized that midcentury decade in all developed countries.²

The 1990 article revealed that the period of the 1960s to the late 1980s produced far-reaching changes in demographic patterns, family structures, and the employment of women, compared with the 1950s portrait. It is useful to summarize the key findings of that article as a starting point for the current one. The earlier article chronicled the following key trends and comparative relationships among 10 countries:

- Fertility rates fell in all of the countries studied, moving from fairly high rates in the early 1960s to all-time lows by the late 1980s, when all countries had rates below the natural level of population replacement (2.1 children per woman).
- A trend toward lower marriage rates began in Scandinavia and reached the United States and most of the other countries studied by 1970; in addition, a rising trend appeared in the age at first marriage, but Americans still married earlier than their European counterparts.
- The divorce laws were liberalized sooner in the United States than in Europe, and the U.S. divorce rate was much higher than Europe's in all years of the period. Still, divorce rates accelerated in the 1970s in almost all of the countries examined, with particularly large increases in the United States and the United Kingdom.
- Rates of births to unmarried women surged in all of the countries studied except Japan. By 1980, the rates were already more than 1 out of every 3 live births in the two Scandinavian countries, but were still substantially lower in the other countries.
- Countries were generally following the same direction in terms of changes in household composition, but the pace of change varied widely. The number of households

composed of married couples with children declined, that of single-parent households rose (except in Japan), and more persons were living alone.

- A growing proportion of those entering single parenthood did so through marital dissolution or childbirth outside of marriage rather than through the premature death of a spouse.
- In North America and the two Scandinavian countries, increases in women's participation in the world of work already were noteworthy in the late 1960s, and the trend only accelerated in the 1970s, although negligible or more moderate increases characterized the rest of Europe.

Many of the trends in family life to be described in this article are continuations of those just noted. Still, there have been some breaks with the past in a number of countries.

Besides the demographic aspects to be discussed, many economic, social, cultural, and legal factors are behind the international trends in the family, and it is beyond the scope of this article to describe them and analyze their impact. Some factors that bear mentioning include the role of the service sector and technological improvements in the rise of women's employment; government policies toward more equal treatment for women in all areas of life, including employment; changing societal attitudes toward cohabitation and child-birth outside of marriage; government provisions for maternity and child-care leave for parents and support for child-care facilities, either directly or indirectly through tax credits; taxation systems that either favor or discourage work by married women; and both legislated and voluntary family-friendly arrangements by firms that have helped reconcile family and work responsibilities. Many authors have undertaken international or one-country analyses of these topics, and a number of their studies are cited in the notes.

Demographic trends

In most of the countries studied, compared with their counterparts 20 years ago, people today have fewer children, marry later or not at all, and are more likely to divorce. The United States, with higher fertility and declining divorce rates, is an exception. In all of the countries examined, the proportion of children born out of wedlock has increased, and the population, on average, has become older.

Fertility rates. The total fertility rate has fallen since 1980 in almost all of the countries studied, with several exhibiting dramatic decreases. (See table 1.) Nevertheless, the total fertility rate remained below the natural level of

population replacement of 2.1 children per woman in every one of the countries examined. The only countries not experiencing a decline in total fertility rate over the 1980–2001 period were the United States, Denmark, and the Netherlands, with the United States the only nation near the natural replacement rate in 2001.³

At the start of the period, the highest rates by far were in Ireland and Spain. In 1980, Ireland's rate was only slightly lower than the U.S. rate of 1921, and Spain's rate was just below the 1941 U.S. rate.⁴ By 2001, Ireland's rate was lower than that of the United States that same year, while Spain's fertility rate had already fallen far below the U.S. rate in 1990.

The general fall in fertility rates accelerated in the early 1990s, but a small reversal began in the late 1990s, when 7 out of the 12 countries studied exhibited an increase. The late increases were not enough, however, to offset the sharp overall declines during the preceding 15 years. Spain's fertility had fallen so much that, by 2001, it rivaled Italy for the lowest total fertility rate.

Population change. A continuing decline in the levels of fertility, combined with longer life expectancy, was responsible for the aging of the population in most industrialized nations during the past 20 years. The following tabulation, representative of the trend in the developed world, illustrates the changes in life expectancies in a selection of the countries studied:⁵

	Men		Women	
	1980	2001	1980	2001
United States	70.0	74.4	77.4	80.0
Japan	73.3	77.6	78.8	84.2
France	70.2	75.5	78.4	83.0
Italy	70.6	76.7	77.4	82.9
United Kingdom	70.2	75.7	76.2	80.4

Table 2 shows the change in the distribution of the population by age group between 1980 and 2001. All of the countries studied experienced a declining share of the youngest group of the population, from birth to 15 years, and an increase in the proportion of the population of those 65 years and older. The fall in the proportion of the youngest group was least in the United States, reflecting its relatively high fertility rates. Spain, Japan, and Ireland had large declines in the youngest age group. The U.S. increase in the proportion of those 65 and older was near the bottom, with only Denmark, Ireland, and the United Kingdom posting more moderate increases. Japan, Spain, and Italy had large increases. If the ratio of the oldest group to the youngest is a measure of the aging of the population, the United States aged least over the period, followed by Denmark, the United Kingdom, and

Table 2. Distribution of population by age, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2001

[In percent]

Country and age range	1980	1990	1995	2001	Percentage point change, 1980–2001
United States:					
Under 15 years	22.5	21.6	21.8	21.2	–1.3
15 to 64 years	66.2	65.9	65.4	66.4	.2
65 years and older	11.3	12.5	12.8	12.4	1.1
Canada:					
Under 15 years	22.7	20.7	20.4	18.8	–3.9
15 to 64 years	67.9	68.0	67.7	68.6	.7
65 years and older	9.4	11.3	12.0	12.6	3.2
Japan:					
Under 15 years	23.5	18.2	15.9	14.4	–9.1
15 to 64 years	67.4	69.7	69.4	67.7	.3
65 years and older	9.1	12.1	14.5	18.0	8.9
Denmark:					
Under 15 years	20.9	17.1	17.4	18.7	–2.2
15 to 64 years	64.7	67.4	67.4	66.5	1.8
65 years and older	14.4	15.6	15.2	14.8	.4
France:					
Under 15 years	22.4	20.1	19.5	18.8	–3.6
15 to 64 years	63.7	65.8	65.3	65.1	1.4
65 years and older	13.9	14.1	15.2	16.2	2.3
Germany: ¹					
Under 15 years	–	16.2	16.0	15.1	–
15 to 64 years	–	69.2	67.9	67.3	–
65 years and older	–	14.6	16.1	17.6	–
Ireland:					
Under 15 years	30.4	27.3	24.4	21.4	–9.0
15 to 64 years	58.8	61.3	64.2	67.4	8.6
65 years and older	10.7	11.4	11.4	11.2	.5
Italy:					
Under 15 years ²	20.5	16.5	15.3	14.4	–6.1
15 to 64 years ²	66.7	68.9	68.6	67.6	.9
65 years and older	12.9	14.6	16.2	18.0	5.1
Netherlands:					
Under 15 years	22.3	18.2	18.4	18.6	–3.7
15 to 64 years	66.2	68.9	68.4	67.8	1.6
65 years and older	11.5	12.8	13.2	13.6	2.1
Spain:					
Under 15 years	25.9	19.9	16.6	14.6	–11.3
15 to 64 years	62.9	66.5	68.1	68.4	5.5
65 years and older	11.2	13.6	15.3	17.0	5.8
Sweden:					
Under 15 years	19.6	17.9	18.9	17.7	–1.9
15 to 64 years	64.1	64.3	63.7	64.7	.6
65 years and older	16.3	17.8	17.5	17.7	1.4
United Kingdom:					
Under 15 years	21.0	19.0	19.4	18.9	–2.1
15 to 64 years	64.0	65.3	64.9	65.5	1.5
65 years and older	15.0	15.7	15.7	15.6	.6

¹ Data for 1991 instead of 1990.² Until 1990, age ranges for Italy were 0–13, 14–64, and 65 years and older. After 1990, the age ranges became 0–14, 15–64, and 65 and older.

NOTE: Data for the United States, Canada, Denmark, France, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom are midyear estimates. Japan's data are as of October 1 of the reporting year. Data for Germany, Ireland, Italy, and the

Netherlands are annual averages. Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For 1980 data, *Labour Force Statistics 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001); for all other years, *Labour Force Statistics 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002).

Ireland. Japan aged most, followed closely by Spain and Italy, with a considerable gap to the next country, Canada.

In 1980, all of the countries had a significantly higher proportion of their people in the youngest than in the oldest category. In Ireland, the ratio was almost 3 to 1, and Japan was not far behind. By 2001, however, the proportion of the oldest age group exceeded that of the youngest in four countries: Japan, Germany, Italy, and Spain.

In the 1980s, as over the entire period examined, all of the countries surveyed showed a decline within the youngest population group, and all experienced an increase in the proportion of the population aged 65 and older. From 1990 to 1995, the proportion in the youngest group increased, albeit slightly, in five countries: the United States, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Denmark had even greater increases in this proportion over the next 6 years, owing mainly to its increasing rate of fertility between 1980 and 1995. In the United States, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, the downward trend in the youthful population resumed.

In most of the countries, the proportion in the age group from 15 to 64 years (those most likely to be in the workforce, hereafter called the main “working-age” group or population) remained little changed, as gains in the oldest group were balanced out by losses in the youngest group. Ireland and Spain were exceptions: high levels of fertility in these two nations during the early 1980s led to a surge in the main working-age group, with those born during that time entering their late teen years toward the end of the 1990s.

Although the overall dependency ratio, defined as the proportion of young plus old to the main working-age group, remained nearly constant in most countries between 1980 and 2001, the old-age dependency ratio (the proportion of the older population to the working-age group) increased in all of the countries between 1980 and 2001, except Ireland, which registered a decline, and the United Kingdom and Denmark, where the ratio was virtually unchanged. Japan’s old-age dependency ratio almost doubled during the period, from 14 percent in 1980 to 27 percent in 2001. Italy and Spain also saw their oldest population category increase as a percentage of the working-age population, as declines in fertility during the period prevented the replenishment of the main working-age population and the numbers in the oldest age category surged. In Italy, the old-age dependency ratio jumped from 19 percent to 27 percent and in Spain from 18 percent to 25 percent. The United States, by contrast, experienced only a moderate increase in its old-age dependency ratio between 1980 and 2001, from 17 percent to 19 percent, owing largely to its relatively high fertility rates during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.⁶

Marriage and divorce. The timing and frequency of marriage and divorce have been important factors in the transformation of families and households during the latter part of the 20th

century. On the one hand, the downward trend of marriage rates noted in the 1990 article continued through the mid-1990s, and then a slight reversal set in. On the other hand, the pattern of divorce rates during the 1980s and 1990s was different from that of the 1960s and 1970s in a number of countries.⁷ Divorce rates rose steadily until the early 1980s, but in subsequent years there was a leveling out, and in some cases the trend reversed.

Marriage patterns underwent significant changes between 1980 and 2000. (See table 3.) The transformation may have been, in part, attributable to greater labor force participation by women in the last half of the 20th century, a phenomenon that will be discussed in more detail later. Newly found earning power and economic independence have made it possible for women to delay marriage or never marry. That is to say, women’s employment and careers may provide options other than marriage and family. Greater economic independence for women also has made the dissolution of a marriage less threatening to women than in years past.

The mean age of women at first marriage increased in every country between 1980 and 1999. (See first panel of chart 1.) As women married later, they also married with less frequency in every country studied but Denmark. An upward trend in the marriage rate in Denmark coincided with both an increasing fertility rate between 1980 and 1995 and moves by many cohabiting couples to formalize their relationship into marriage after having children.⁸

Canada, the United Kingdom, and Ireland were among the countries with the highest marriage rates in 1980, but these countries experienced the sharpest declines as their marriage rates converged toward those of other countries. The United States remained, by far, the country with the highest marriage rate in 2000, underlying the fact that most Americans get married at some point in their lives. The incidence of nonmarital cohabitation is much less frequent in the United States than in most of the European countries studied and in Canada. (See chart 2.) Lower marriage rates in some countries may reflect, to a degree, a large number of consensual unions.⁹

By the mid-1980s, divorce laws had been changed in almost all industrialized countries to make divorce easier by expanding no-fault grounds and by simplifying divorce through mutual consent.¹⁰ This development, along with the increasing economic autonomy of women, had significant effects on rates of marriage and divorce, especially in Japan, southern Europe, and Ireland. There, divorce rates rose sharply between 1980 and 2000, but remained well below those of most countries with already liberalized divorce procedures. (See table 3.) Starting at very low levels, the divorce rate in Italy more than tripled, and in Japan it went up by more than 70 percent. Spain experienced an increase of approximately 60 percent in its divorce rate during the last decade of the 20th century alone. In Ireland, divorce was not allowed by law prior to 1997, but by 2000 the rate had reached the same level as in Italy.

Table 3. Marriage and divorce rates, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2000

Country	1980	1990	1995	2000 ¹
Marriage rate per thousand population aged 15–64 years				
United States ²	15.9	14.8	13.6	12.8
Canada	11.5	10.0	8.1	7.4
Japan	9.8	8.4	9.1	9.3
Denmark	8.0	9.1	9.9	10.8
France ³	9.7	7.7	6.7	7.5
Germany ⁴	—	8.2	7.8	7.5
Ireland	10.9	8.3	6.7	7.6
Italy	8.7	8.2	7.5	7.2
Netherlands	9.6	9.3	7.7	8.2
Spain	9.4	8.5	7.5	7.7
Sweden	7.1	7.4	6.0	7.0
United Kingdom	11.6	10.0	8.5	7.8
Divorce rate per thousand population aged 15–64 years				
United States	7.9	7.2	6.8	6.2
Canada	3.7	4.2	3.9	3.4
Japan	1.8	1.8	2.3	3.1
Denmark	4.1	4.0	3.7	4.0
France ³	2.4	2.8	3.2	3.1
Germany ⁴	—	2.5	3.1	3.5
Ireland	(⁵)	(⁵)	(⁵)	1.0
Italy .....	.3	.7	.7	1.0
Netherlands	2.7	2.8	3.2	3.2
Spain	—	.9	1.2	1.4
Sweden	3.7	3.5	4.0	3.8
United Kingdom	4.4	4.4	4.5	4.0
Ratio of annual divorces to marriages				
United States ² .....	.50	.48	.50	.48
Canada .....	.32	.42	.48	.46
Japan .....	.18	.22	.25	.33
Denmark .....	.51	.44	.37	.38
France ³ .....	.24	.37	.47	.41
Germany ⁴	—	.30	.39	.46
Ireland	(⁵)	(⁵)	(⁵)	.14
Italy .....	.04	.09	.09	.13
Netherlands .....	.29	.30	.42	.39
Spain	—	.11	.16	.19
Sweden .....	.53	.48	.67	.54
United Kingdom .....	.38	.44	.53	.51

¹ Marriage data for Ireland and Italy are either provisional or estimated by Eurostat. The U.S. divorce rate is estimated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

² U.S. data include unlicensed marriages in California.

³ Data are for 1999 instead of 2000.

⁴ Data are for 1991 instead of 1990.

⁵ Divorce not allowed by law prior to 1997.

NOTE: Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: Marriage and divorce data: For the United States, 2000 data are from *National Vital Statistics Report* (Atlanta, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vol. 49, no. 6, 2001); all other years are from *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2001* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), tables 68 and 118. For Canada, data are provided by Statistics Canada. For European countries, data are from *European Social Statistics: Demography 2001 and European Social Statistics: Demography 2002* (Luxembourg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2001 and 2002), tables F–2 and F–14; and *Demographic Statistics 1997* (Luxembourg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 1997), tables F–2 and F–18. For Japan, data are from *Japan Statistical Yearbook 2003* (Tokyo, Japan Statistics Bureau, 2002).

Population data: For 1980, data are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). All other population data are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002).

The divorce rate remained significantly higher in the United States than in the other countries over the period. Still, the United States posted the most significant decline in its divorce rate, a drop of more than 20 percent. Canada and the United Kingdom experienced a moderate decline in divorce rates compared with the United States, and Denmark's rate held fairly steady. In France, the Netherlands, and Sweden, the divorce rate began to level out during the last 5 years of the century.

The relationship between divorce rates and marriage rates in a given year is also shown in table 3. Sweden, with the lowest rate of marriage and a higher-than-average divorce rate, had the highest ratio of annual divorces to marriages in all the years reported except 1990, when it was tied with the United States. The rate in Sweden peaked in 1995 at two divorces per every three marriages. The United States had about one divorce for every two marriages throughout the period. Denmark is the only country covered that showed a substantial decrease in the ratio of annual divorces to marriages during the 20-year period.

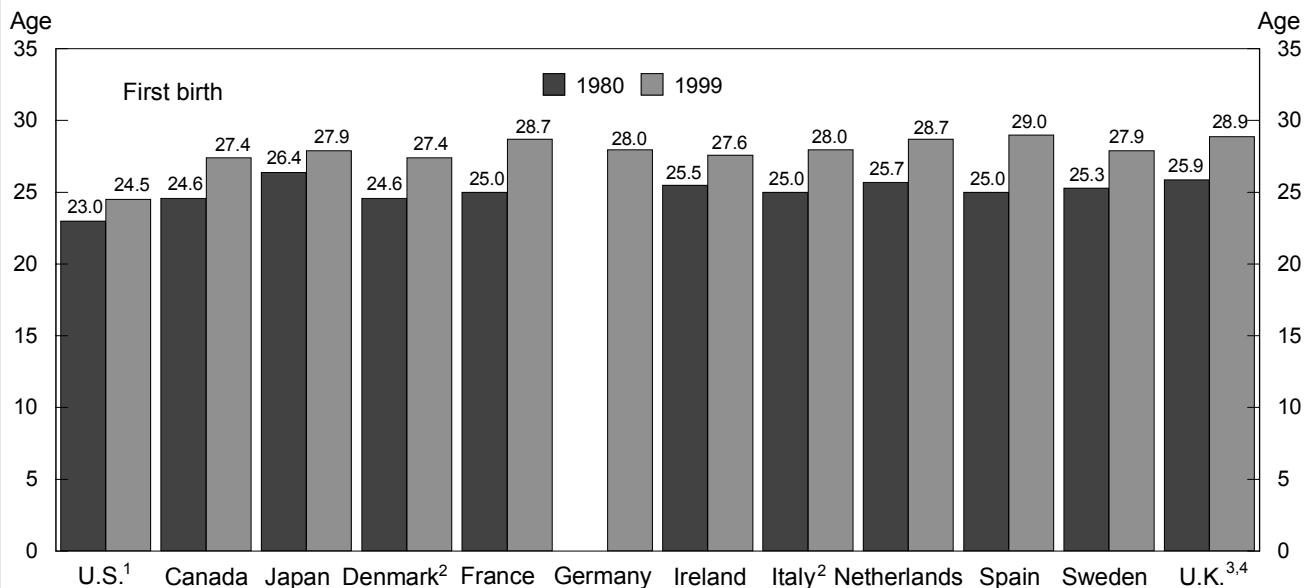
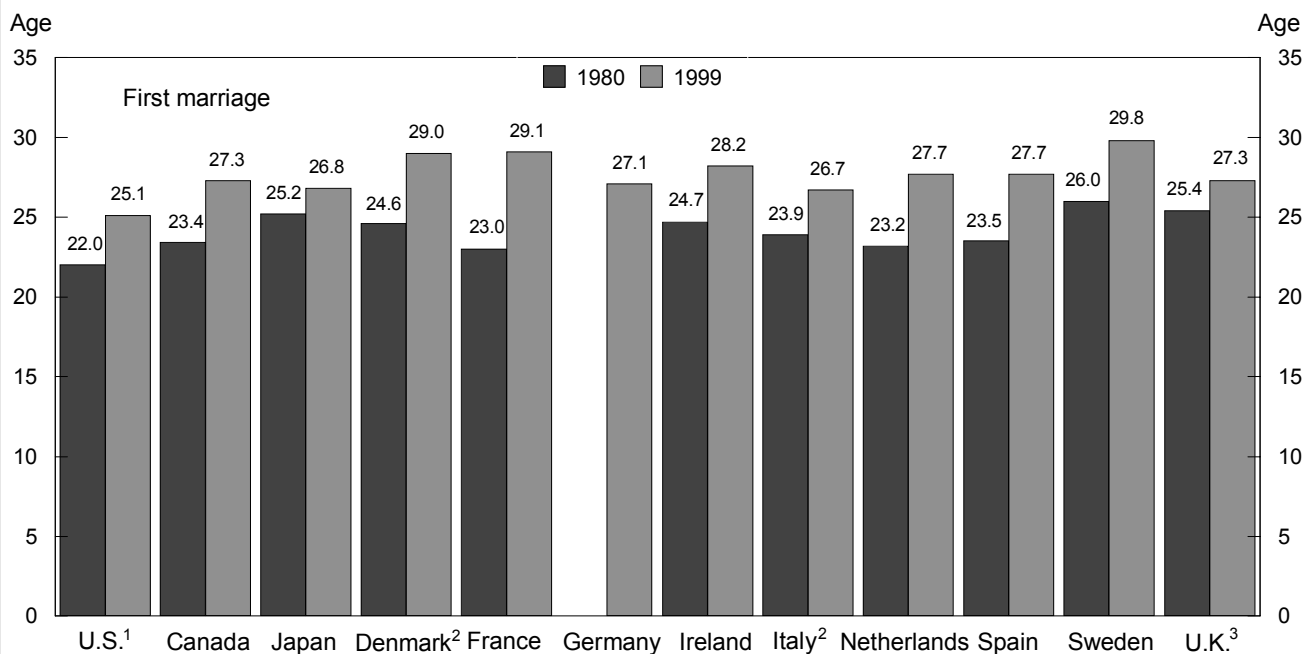
The ratio of annual divorces to marriages continued to be notably high in the United States, but it was lower than the ratio not only of Sweden, but of the United Kingdom as well, and it was only slightly higher than the German and Canadian ratios. Seen in this light, the U.S. propensity to divorce looks not so much greater than that of other countries in the group examined.¹¹

Births to unmarried women. Continuing the upward trend noted in the 1990 article, the proportion of children born outside of marriage increased in all industrialized countries between 1980 and 2000. (See table 4.) In 1980, the proportion of births out of wedlock was higher than 20 percent only in Denmark and Sweden, of the 11 countries covered. By 2000, 9 out of the 12 nations examined had reached that mark. The highest rate occurred in Sweden, where, by 1995, more than half of all children were born to unwed mothers. Denmark was close behind, while in the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, births to unmarried women approached or exceeded one-third of all live births. In Japan, by contrast, the rate of out-of-wedlock births, although having doubled, remained low.

The overall rise in births to unwed mothers can also be seen by comparing the mean age of women at first birth with their age at first marriage. (See chart 1.) In 1980, only in Sweden did the first birth, on average, come before the first marriage. During the 1990s, that was the case in the United States (1999), Denmark (1995), France (1999), and Ireland (1999) as well.

In the United States, the number of births to unmarried women more than doubled between 1980 and 2000, while births to married women declined by 8 percent.¹² An even more radical shift took place in France and the United Kingdom, where births out of wedlock more than tripled, while births to married women fell by 37 percent and 38 percent, respectively, over the same period.¹³

Chart 1. Mean age of women at first marriage and at first birth, 12 countries, 1980 and 1999



¹ Median age.

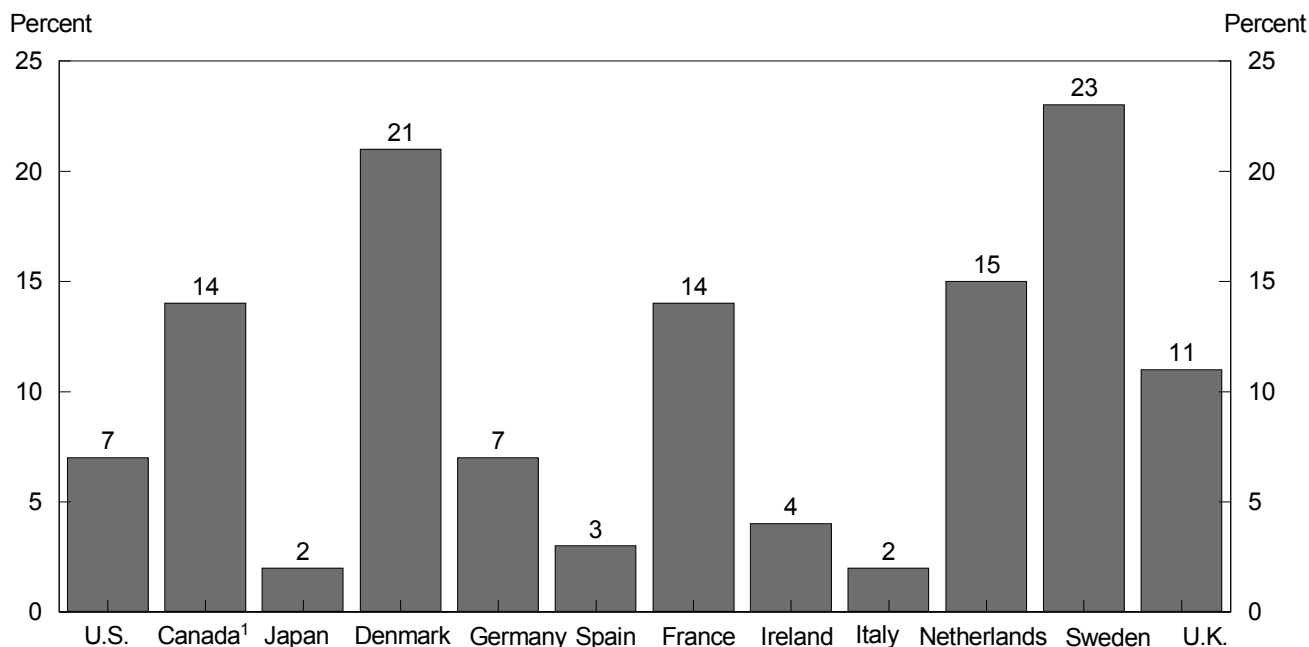
² Data for 1995 instead of 1999.

³ Data for 1985 instead of 1980.

⁴ Scotland and Northern Ireland not included.

SOURCE: Compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from various national and international sources.

Chart 2. Percentage of couples living in a consensual union, 12 countries, 1997



¹1996, based on common-law couples.

SOURCE: Compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from various national and international sources.

Nonmarital births in Europe, especially in the Scandinavian countries, are overwhelmingly to unwed parents residing together. By contrast, in the United States, fewer than half of births outside of marriage are to cohabiting couples.¹⁴ Furthermore, births to teenage mothers, the vast majority of whom are unwed, are much higher in the United States than in any other industrialized nation. The following tabulation shows the birthrates per thousand of 15- to 19-year-olds and the percentage of those children born to unwed teenage mothers in 1998:¹⁵

Country	Birthrate per thousand of 15- to 19-year-olds	Percent born to unwed teenage mothers
United States	52	79
Canada	20	83
Japan	5	14
Denmark	8	77
France	9	85
Germany	13	61
Ireland	19	96
Italy	7	45
Netherlands	6	65
Spain	8	60
Sweden	7	82
United Kingdom	31	90

Altogether, increases in the proportion of births outside of marriage, declining fertility rates, the continuing aging of the population, and the changing patterns of marriage and divorce have led to significant changes in the composition and size of households in developed nations. The next section analyzes these developments.

Household composition

In all of the countries studied, the composition of the household has changed over the past 20 years. Besides the major demographic trends already described, economic factors such as the availability of affordable housing and rising per capita income also may play a role. Most of the countries presented in this article continued to see their household size diminish throughout the 20th century. In the 1920s, the average household in most of these nations contained between four and five people; by the mid-1980s, that figure had dropped to between two and three per household, and it remained relatively constant during the 1990s. Even in Japan, a country in which three-generation households have long been common, the average household size in 2000 was only marginally higher than in the United States.¹⁶

Table 5 presents the distribution of households by major

Table 4. Births to unmarried women as a percent of all live births, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2000

Country	1980	1990	1995	2000 ¹
United States	18.4	28.0	32.2	33.2
Canada	12.8	24.4	27.6	28.3
Japan .....	.8	1.1	1.2	1.6
Denmark	33.2	46.4	46.5	44.6
France	11.4	30.1	37.6	42.6
Germany ²	—	15.1	16.1	23.4
Ireland	5.0	14.6	22.3	31.8
Italy	4.3	6.5	8.1	9.6
Netherlands	4.1	11.4	15.5	24.9
Spain	3.9	9.6	11.1	17.0
Sweden	39.7	47.0	53.0	55.3
United Kingdom	11.5	27.9	33.6	39.5

¹ Data for Ireland, Italy, and Spain are either provisional or estimated by Eurostat. For all other countries, data are final.

² Data are for 1991 instead of 1990.

NOTE: Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For the United States, *National Vital Statistics Reports* (Atlanta, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vol. 50, no. 5, 2002, and vol. 48, no. 16, 2000). For Canada, data are provided by Statistics Canada. For Japan, *Population Statistics of Japan* (National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, 2003), table 4–15. For European countries, *European Social Statistics: Demography 2002* (Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2002), table E–9; and *Demographic Statistics 1997* (Statistical Office of the European Communities, 1997), table E–4.

type in 10 countries for selected years between 1980 and 2002. Although differences in definitions do not allow for full comparability across countries, intracountry trends and some general distinctions between nations may be considered reliable. (See appendix for details.)

Married-couple households. The last two decades of the 20th century witnessed a redefinition of the family unit. Although the great majority of couples living together are legally married, an increasing number are not. Reflecting the trend, many developed countries now also include alternative unions in their statistics on couples. (See appendix.)

In spite of the broadening definitions, married-couple households lost considerable ground to other types of households over the period in the 10 countries studied in respect of this characteristic. (See table 5.) The traditional nuclear family unit, a married couple with children, has experienced a steady decline as a proportion of all households in all of the countries studied.

Apart from the two Scandinavian countries, the United States experienced the most moderate decrease in the proportion of married-couple households with children. By contrast, in Japan, this type of living arrangement went through a major decline during the 1980s and 1990s, far exceeding the decline in married-couple households overall.

The share of married couples without children remained relatively stable in all 10 countries examined, except for Japan and the Netherlands, where it rose substantially, and in Sweden,

where it fell. This type of living arrangement encompasses young couples who have not started a family, childless couples, and older couples whose children have left home. Both decreased fertility and increased longevity would, therefore, positively affect the proportion of couples without children. In countries where the proportion of such couples was up, it was because the strength of those factors generally was sufficient to overcome the overall decline in the proportion of married couples.

Consensual unions. As of the late 1990s, half of the countries compared had at least 1 out of 10 couples cohabiting outside of marriage. (See chart 2.) These consensual union rates were up sharply from earlier years. In Sweden, the rate was only 1 percent of all couples in 1960, 11 percent in 1975, and 19 percent in 1985. In France, the rate was 3 percent in 1975, 6 percent in 1982, and 8 percent in 1988. In the United States, the proportion of two unrelated adult members of the opposite sex living together—a proxy for cohabiting couples—rose from 1 percent of all couples living together in 1970 to 3 percent in 1980 and 5 percent in 1988.¹⁷

The practice of cohabitation is particularly prevalent among the young. In the late 1990s in Sweden, fully 70 percent of couples aged 16 to 29 lived in a consensual union. In Denmark, the figure was 57 percent; in the Netherlands, 56 percent; in the United Kingdom, 53 percent; in France, 41 percent; and in Germany, 35 percent. Even in Ireland, Spain, and Italy, where overall cohabitation rates were quite low, as indicated in chart 2, the rates for young couples were many times higher than the overall rates: 29 percent, 12 percent, and 11 percent, respectively.¹⁸ In the United States, 23 percent of all couples under 25 years old who were living together were unmarried.¹⁹ Japan, as with consensual unions generally, was the lowest in the practice of youthful cohabitation. In mid-1990s surveys, 2 percent of women in Japan aged 20 to 24 reported that they were in consensual unions, compared with 77 percent in Sweden, 63 percent in France, and 39 percent in Germany. For the 25- to 29-year-old age group, the percentages were 1 percent in Japan, 43 percent in Sweden, 33 percent in France, and 22 percent in Germany.²⁰ (Data for earlier decades were not available.)

Japan, Italy, Spain, and Ireland have very low rates of cohabitation. Compared with the northern European countries and Canada, couples in the United States also tend to choose marriage over cohabitation. Note, however, that in survey responses some cohabiting individuals may have identified themselves as married, thus understating the true number of cohabiting couples in the United States. The same situation may occur in other countries that do not provide explicit instructions in their surveys.

Cohabitation is generally not a protracted alternative to marriage in the United States. Rather, it is typically a stage that briefly precedes marriage or follows divorce. One study

Table 5. Percent distribution of households by type, 10 countries, selected years, 1980–2002

Country and year	Married-couple households ¹			Single-parent households ²	One-person households	Other households ³
	Total	With children ²	Without children ²			
United States:						
1980	60.8	30.9	29.9	7.5	22.7	9.0
1990	56.0	26.3	29.8	8.3	24.6	11.0
1995	54.4	25.5	28.9	9.1	25.0	11.5
2001	52.3	24.0	28.3	8.7	26.1	13.0
Canada:						
1981	66.8	36.3	30.5	5.3	20.3	7.6
1991	62.8	29.6	33.2	5.7	22.9	8.6
1996	60.5	27.8	32.7	6.4	24.2	8.9
2001	59.4	25.6	33.8	6.1	25.7	8.8
Japan:						
1980	68.4	42.9	25.6	2.2	19.8	9.5
1990	65.2	33.1	32.1	2.3	23.1	9.4
1995	62.8	27.4	35.4	2.0	25.6	9.6
2000	61.1	23.8	37.4	2.2	26.5	10.3
Denmark:⁴						
1980	50.3	25.0	25.3	3.9	44.9	1.0
1990	45.6	19.5	26.1	4.2	49.6	.6
1995	44.9	18.2	26.6	4.2	50.4	.5
2001	45.7	18.5	27.2	4.2	49.6	.6
France:						
1982	67.0	39.7	27.3	4.3	24.6	4.1
1990	64.9	38.6	26.2	6.6	26.1	2.5
1995	62.2	35.9	26.3	6.7	28.9	2.3
2000	60.0	32.8	27.1	7.2	30.8	2.0
Germany:						
1991	55.3	31.6	23.7	7.1	33.6	4.0
1995	53.3	28.8	24.4	7.3	34.9	4.5
2000	51.1	25.9	25.2	7.7	36.1	5.2
Ireland:						
1981	—	—	—	—	16.9	—
1991	61.6	47.9	13.7	10.6	20.2	7.6
1996	59.6	44.5	15.1	11.2	21.5	7.7
2002	59.2	41.4	17.7	11.7	21.6	7.6
Netherlands:						
1988	64.7	37.3	27.4	5.4	28.7	1.2
1993	63.1	33.3	29.9	5.0	30.9	1.0
1995 ⁵	61.2	32.6	28.5	5.6	32.6	.7
2000	60.2	30.6	29.6	5.6	33.4	.7
Sweden:						
1985	54.8	23.8	31.0	3.2	36.1	5.9
1990	52.1	21.9	30.2	3.9	39.6	4.4
1991 ⁵	52.6	22.4	30.2	4.1	41.2	2.2
1995	50.7	21.2	29.4	4.6	42.3	2.4
2000	45.8	19.1	26.7	5.8	46.5	1.9
United Kingdom:⁶						
1981	65.0	31.0	34.0	5.0	22.0	8.0
1991	61.0	25.0	36.0	6.0	27.0	6.0
1994–95	58.0	25.0	33.0	7.0	27.0	8.0
2001	58.0	23.0	35.0	6.0	29.0	7.0

¹ May include unmarried cohabiting couples. Such couples are explicitly included under married couples in Canada, Denmark, Ireland, France, and the Netherlands. For Sweden, all cohabitants are included as married couples. In other countries, some unmarried cohabitants are included in married couples, while some are classified under "other households," depending on responses to surveys and censuses.

² Children are defined as unmarried children living at home according to the following age limits: under 18 in the United States, Canada, Japan, Denmark, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, except that the United Kingdom includes 15-, 16-, and 17-year-olds in 1981 and 16- and 17-year-olds thereafter only if they are attending school full time; under 25 years in France; and children of all ages in Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands.

³ Include both family and nonfamily households not elsewhere classified. These households comprise, for example, siblings residing together, other households composed of relatives, and households made up of roommates. Some unmarried cohabiting couples may also be included in the "other" group. (See note 1.)

⁴ From family-based statistics. However, one person living alone constitutes a family in Denmark. In this respect, the Danish data are closer to household statistics.

⁵ Break in series. (See appendix for more details.)

⁶ Great Britain only (excludes Northern Ireland).

NOTE: Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: Compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from national population censuses, household surveys, and other sources. For the United States, data are from the March Current Population Survey; for Canada, Japan, and Ireland, from population censuses; for Denmark, from the Central Population Register; and for France and Germany, from household surveys, except 1982 for France from population census. For the Netherlands, two sources are used: 1988 and 1993 data are from the household survey, and 1995 and 2000 data are from the Municipal Population Register. For Sweden also, two sources are used: 1985 and 1990 data are from population censuses, and data for the later years are from income distribution surveys. For the United Kingdom, 1994–95 figures are from the household survey; data for all other years are from population censuses. Some earlier years' data are from Constance Sorrentino, "The changing family in international perspective," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1990, table 6, p. 47. Data for Canada have been adjusted to U.S. concepts by Statistics Canada. Statistics Sweden provided data using the age limit of 18 for children from both of the sources cited. (See Appendix 1 for further information on comparability issues.)

estimates that about half of all U.S. cohabiting couples formalize or dissolve their unions within 1½ years. Furthermore, the study concludes that nearly 90 percent of cohabiting couples dissolve their union or marry within 5 years, with the majority deciding on marriage. Married couples that cohabited prior to the marriage are more likely to break up than those which did not.²¹

Single-parent households. It is difficult to compare estimates of single-parent households, chiefly because of definitional differences across countries in the upper age limit of children and in the classification of consensual unions. In order to generate a more comparable series, statistics were acquired on households in eight countries, based on the U.S. definition of children as unmarried individuals under 18 years of age. These data are presented in table 6. Data for Ireland and Denmark are on a family, rather than a household, basis. Furthermore, children in Ireland are defined as those children under 15 years. Such data are included to show the trends in the two countries. Their levels should not be compared. Other measurement differences remain as well. (See appendix.) Note that the proportions of single-parent households are on a different basis from those in table 5, in which age limits are not adjusted and the denominator is all households.

There are a number of paths to single parenthood: divorce, childbirth outside of marriage or cohabitation, and, decreasingly, widowhood. All of the countries examined experienced significant increases in the number of single-parent households during the last 20 years. As was the case in 1980, the United States continued to have the highest proportion of single-parent households with children under the age of 18 as a percentage of all households with children. It has been estimated that well over half of all American children born in 1992 will spend some part of their lives in a one-parent household.²² By the year 1995, more than 1 out of 4 U.S. households with children were single-parent households, up from 1 out of 5 in 1980.

Among the countries that can be compared, only Sweden, with substantial increases in the last few years of the 20th century, approached the U.S. rate at the end of the period. The rest of the comparable European countries and Canada followed with single-parent household percentages between 13 percent and 21 percent in the latest available year. With its very low rates of divorce and extramarital childbirth, Japan had the lowest proportion of single-parent households of the countries studied, although its rate increased from 5 percent in 1980 to 8 percent in 2000.

Chart 3 captures single parenthood in a different way, highlighting the incidence of children under 15 years living with only one adult. It may be assumed that in most cases that adult was a parent: the U.S. Census Bureau reported that, in 1998, only about 2 percent of all U.S. children lived in families headed by a grandparent with no parent

present, and other nonparent family heads would be much rarer.²³ This proxy measure of single parenthood (that is, the incidence of children under 15 years living with only one adult) does not apply to the two Scandinavian countries and Japan, but it covers Italy and Spain, which were not included in table 6. The measure provides the same general picture as does that of the single-parent household; that is, during the 1990s, the number of children under 15 years living with only one adult increased in all of the countries studied, with the United States maintaining the highest figure, but with the United Kingdom and Canada rapidly approaching the U.S. level.

One-person households. One-person households as a percentage of all households grew in all of the countries presented in table 5. At the beginning of the period studied, only in Denmark and Sweden were there more one-person households than there were households consisting of married couples with children. At the end of the period, that was the case in 8 out of the 10 countries. In all of the countries except Ireland, at least 1 of every 4 households consisted of only one person by the latest year. In the two Scandinavian countries, about half of all households were one-person households.

The age at which young adults leave their parents' home varies by country and region. In Denmark and other Nordic countries, young men and women do so relatively early compared with their counterparts in the rest of the industrialized nations. In Denmark, by most recent estimates, the age at which half of young people had left home was 20 for women and 21 for men. In Italy, by contrast, the corresponding ages were 27 and 30. A similar late departure also can be seen throughout southern Europe and Ireland.²⁴ This disparity in age of departure from home is a major explanation for the fact that 35 percent of Danish men and 34 percent of Danish women between the ages of 20 and 24 lived alone in 1995, while only 2 percent of men and 2 percent of women of the same ages did so in Italy. The rest of the countries examined in this article fall between the extremes of the two Scandinavian countries, on the one hand, and southern Europe and Ireland, on the other.²⁵ The proportion of younger people living alone in the United States is closer to that found in southern Europe and Ireland: in 1995, only 6 percent of men and about 6 percent of women aged 20 to 24 lived alone.²⁶ The fact that people in the United States get married relatively early and in relatively greater numbers partially explains the lower rate of young people living alone.

The proportion of older people who live alone also varies greatly by country and by region, and, except for the United States, all of the countries studied posted an increase in the proportion of the elderly who live alone. In Denmark in 1998, 44 percent of those 65 years and older lived alone, up from 38 percent in the early 1980s. Over the same period, the proportion in Sweden increased from 40 percent to 42 percent and in the

Table 6. Single-parent households, 10 countries, selected years, 1980–2002

[Numbers in thousands]

Country and year	Single-parent households		Country and year	Single-parent households	
	Number	Percent of all households with children		Number	Percent of all households with children
United States:			Ireland: ¹		
1980	6,061	19.5	1981	30	7.2
1990	7,752	24.0	1991	44	10.7
1995	9,055	26.4	1996	56	13.8
2001	9,374	26.5	2002	69	16.7
Canada:			Germany:		
1981	437	12.7	1991	1,429	15.2
1991	572	16.2	1995	1,674	17.6
1996	690	18.7	2000	1,963	21.2
2001	707	19.3	Netherlands:		
Japan:			1988	179	9.6
1980	796	4.9	1993	180	10.0
1990	934	6.5	1995 ²	208	11.7
1995	884	6.9	2000	240	13.0
2000	1,003	8.3	Sweden:		
Denmark: ¹			1985	117	11.2
1980	99	13.4	1990	151	14.8
1990	117	17.8	1991 ²	166	15.2
1995	120	18.6	1995	189	17.4
2001	120	18.4	2000	251	23.1
France:			United Kingdom: ³		
1988	761	11.9	1981	1,010	13.9
1990	755	11.9	1991	1,344	19.4
1995	874	14.0	1994–1995	1,617	21.9
2000	1,039	17.1	2001	1,446	20.7

¹ Data are from family-based, rather than household-based, statistics.² Break in series. (See appendix for more details.)³ Great Britain only (excludes Northern Ireland).

NOTE: For the United Kingdom in 1981, children are defined as those under 15 and those who are 15, 16, or 17 and attend school full time; for later years, children are defined as those under 16 and those who are 16 or 17 and

attend school full time. For Ireland, children are defined as those under 15. For all other countries, children are defined as children living at home, or away at school, under the age of 18.

SOURCE: Compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from sources listed in table 5 and from unpublished data provided by foreign statistical offices.

Netherlands and the United Kingdom from about 30 percent to 40 percent. Ireland showed the largest increase, from 20 percent to 31 percent of elderly living alone. In the United States, 29 percent of those 65 and older lived alone in 1998, a proportion no different from that in 1980. At the other end of the spectrum, Spain's elderly living alone increased from 14 percent to 17 percent from the early 1980s to 1998, and Japan's proportion of elderly living alone rose from only 9 percent in 1980 to 13 percent in 1998.²⁷

The percentage of the elderly living alone is much smaller in Japan than in most other developed countries, because a higher proportion of older people there live with their own children. In the mid-1990s, half of the elderly population in Japan lived with their own children, compared with only 13 percent in the United States.²⁸

In 2000, 37 percent of all one-person households in the United States were composed of persons 65 years or older. This percentage was down from 1980, when 40 percent of those living alone were in the older age group.²⁹ The decline is associated

with the leveling out of the percentage of the older group living alone, combined with a rise in the percentage of other age groups living alone.

Women, on average, live longer than men and thus, on average, outlive their spouses and in many cases reside alone. Approximately 36 percent of all women 65 and older in the United States lived alone in 2000, compared with 16 percent of men in the same age group.³⁰

Proportions of the elderly living alone in Europe follow a regional pattern similar to that of their younger counterparts. For example, in 1998, 12 percent of Italian men and 39 percent of women aged 65 and older lived in one-person households, whereas in Denmark, 25 percent of men and 57 percent of women in the same age group lived alone.³¹

Family employment patterns

A major component of the relationship between work and the family is the extent to which women—and, more particularly, mothers—are employed. Women's employment and a number

of the demographic trends so far discussed also are intimately intertwined. This section chronicles the continued growth of the participation of women in the labor force in the last two decades of the 20th century. The measure used is the ratio of women's employment to women's population, expressed in percentage terms: the employment-to-population ratio, or, hereafter, the employment-population ratio.

First, the employment-population ratio for the overall population of working-age women—that is, all women 15 or 16 years old and older—is examined. Then the point of focus becomes the employment of mothers. This is first examined inferentially by looking at the employment of women in the prime childbearing and child-rearing years. Then, statistics are presented on the employment of mothers of young children in countries and for years for which available data permit. Other information presented in this section includes comparisons of (1) employment-population ratios for women according to their number of children, (2) part-time and full-time employment, and (3) working patterns of couple families.

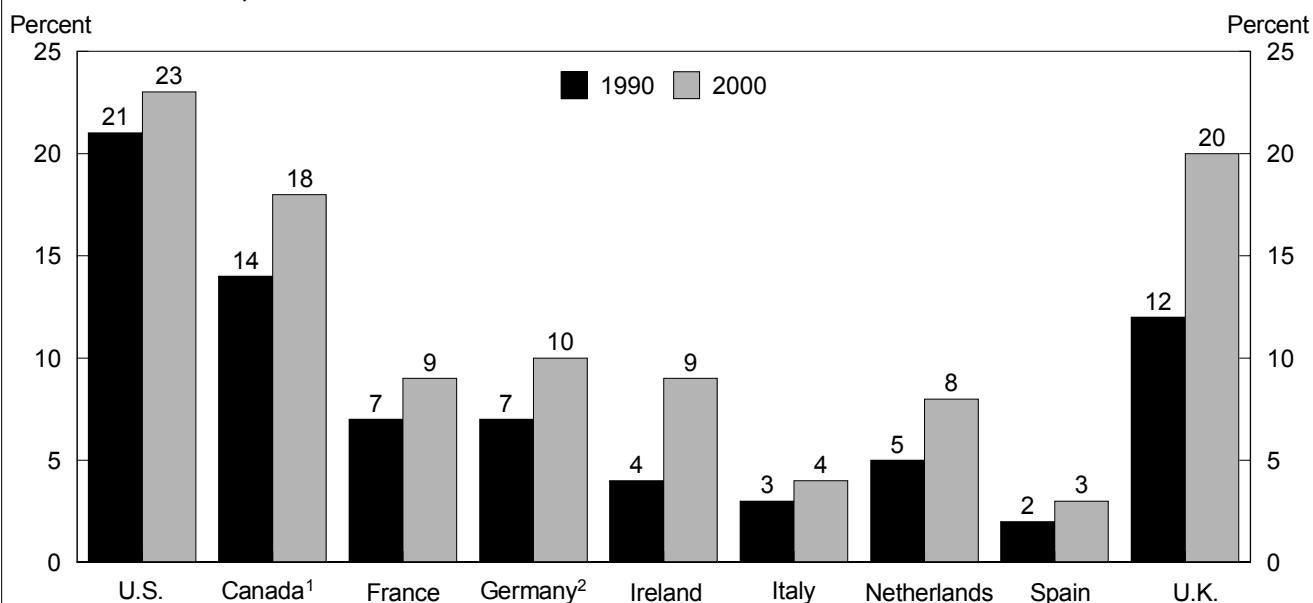
Women's overall employment-population ratios. The overall employment-population ratio involves important limitations regarding the analysis of work and the family. The overall ratio, covering the population aged 15 or 16 and older, reflects, among other things, school and work choices of

young people, retirement choices of older workers, and differences across countries in the age distribution of the population. Changes relating to the employment of mothers and women of prime working age can be masked in the overall statistics, as will be seen. That being said, the overall ratios for women are compared here as a first step in the analysis in order to cover broad trends in all countries studied and to use data that are adjusted to U.S. concepts by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. As has been mentioned, the more focused employment-population ratios of women are analyzed later in the section.

Sweden began the period with the highest women's employment-population ratio, by a considerable margin. (See table 7.) By 2001, Sweden was accompanied by five other countries with ratios of 50 percent or more: the United States, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Sweden's ratio declined only slightly, while the ratios of several other countries rose sharply, closing the gap with Sweden. Spain and Italy had the lowest ratios, with only about one-third of all women employed in 2001.

Over the period, Ireland and the Netherlands had by far the largest increase in the women's employment-population ratio, while a number of countries—most notably, Japan—exhibited only modest increases. Ireland, a country with one of the lowest employment-population ratios in 1980, experienced an

Chart 3. Children living in one-adult families as a percentage of children living in all families, nine countries, 1990 and 2000



¹1991 and 2001 data are based on a percentage of children (0–14 years) in single-parent families.

²1991 instead of 1990.

NOTE: Children are defined as persons under 15 years of age. An adult is defined as a person at least 15 years old.

SOURCE: Compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics from various national and international sources.

extraordinary rate of economic growth, accompanied by strong employment growth, in the 1990s, when most of the increase in the women's employment-population ratio occurred.³² The Netherlands also had a low level of women's employment as late as 1980. That country's enormous increase in the women's employment-population ratio over the period is attributable primarily to great growth in part-time employment for women, a development to be discussed in more detail later.

Sweden's leveling off in its employment-population ratio, after a steady rise in previous decades, suggests at first glance that there might be a sort of natural maximum in the ratio for women. Supporting that notion is the fact that the U.S. employment-population ratio, which is among the highest in the countries studied, declined slightly in both 2001 and 2002. More time will be needed before such a judgment can be rendered, however: the changes in each case could well reflect the dampening effects of short-term economic developments.³³

Japan and Italy continued to experience little increase in their women's employment-population ratios, a situation that, in contrast to Sweden, reaches back into the 1960s. Both countries, in fact, had higher women's employment-population ratios in 1960 than they did in 2000.³⁴ In Japan, the decline in the sixties and early seventies is attributable primarily to the reduction in the number of women working in family enterprises, mainly farming and often for no pay. By contrast, the proportion of Japanese women in paid employment actually increased quite rapidly over the period.³⁵

A similar explanation for the earlier decline in the women's employment-population ratio probably holds for Italy as well:

from 1960 to 1980, the overall percentage of that nation's civilian employment in agriculture fell from 33 percent to 14 percent. (Japan's decline was from 30 percent to 10 percent.)³⁶

Another reason for the leveling off of women's employment-population ratios in Japan and Italy is that those countries' populations are aging rapidly. As shown in table 2, both nations saw large increases in the percentage of the population 65 years of age and older. The increases are even larger when only women and the working-age population are considered. The portion of women's working-age population in Japan that was 65 years and older rose from 13 percent in 1980 to 24 percent in 2001. Italy's increased from 17 percent to 24 percent.³⁷ A growing proportion of the population at or above the age at which most people retire would, of course, depress the employment-population ratio.³⁸

The age profile of the population also plays a role in the overall ranking of the countries by employment-population ratio. But for its smaller percentage of older women, the United States would not be at the top in this ranking. In 2001, 18 percent of women aged 16 and older in the United States were in the 65-and-older age group. In Denmark and Sweden, the figures were 21 percent and 24 percent, respectively.³⁹ Of those women aged 15 to 64, Sweden had the highest employment-population ratio in 2001, 74 percent. Denmark was second at 71 percent, and the United States was third at 67 percent. (Appendix table A-1 shows additional employment-population ratios for women by selected age groups.)

Women of childbearing and child-rearing ages. The overall employment-population ratio, particularly for women, masks the

Table 7. Women's civilian employment-population ratios, 16 years and older, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2001

[In percent]

Country	1980	1990	2001	Percentage-point change	
				1990–2001	1980–2001
United States	47.7	54.3	57.0	2.7	9.3
Canada	46.8	54.1	56.2	2.1	9.4
Japan	45.7	48.0	46.2	-1.8	.5
Denmark ¹	51.4	56.0	57.0	1.0	5.6
France	40.3	41.5	45.0	3.5	4.7
Germany ²	–	44.3	44.8	.5	–
Ireland ³	27.3	31.1	45.9	14.8	18.6
Italy	27.9	29.2	31.6	2.4	3.7
Netherlands	31.0	39.4	54.0	14.6	23.0
Spain	23.3	25.3	33.4	8.1	10.1
Sweden	58.0	61.8	56.8	-5.0	-1.2
United Kingdom	44.8	49.8	52.7	2.9	7.9

¹ 1983 instead of 1980.

² 1991 instead of 1990.

³ 1981 instead of 1980.

NOTE: There are some breaks in series, and the lower age limit is different for some countries. (See appendix for details.) Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For 1980 data for Spain, BLS calculations are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001); for other years for Denmark, Ireland, and Spain, BLS calculations are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1981–2001* (Paris, OECD, 2002); for all other countries, data are from *Comparative Civilian Labor Force Statistics, Ten Countries, 1959–2002* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, April 2003); on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/fls/flsforce.pdf>.

most fundamental change that has been taking place in women's employment. Sharper focus is provided by looking at employment patterns for women in the primary childbearing and child-rearing ages: from 25 to 44 years.

Once again (see table 8), women in the two Scandinavian countries were in the vanguard in 1980: Denmark's women aged 25–44 had virtually no change in their employment-population ratio from the beginning to the end of the period, while Sweden's women reached much higher levels in 1990 and then fell back. Meanwhile, the steady increases experienced by a number of other countries were striking. Leading the way again were Ireland and the Netherlands, most likely for the same reasons as those behind the increases in the overall women's employment-population ratio: Ireland experienced dramatic economic and employment growth in the 1990s, and the Netherlands was and still is a leader in women's part-time employment.

Joining these two countries now, however, is Spain, with large increases in its employment-population ratio in both the 25–34 and 35–44 age groups. Japan also had a noteworthy increase in employment-population ratios in the 25–34 age group, in contrast to the absence of change seen in the overall statistics. Japan's women's employment-population ratio increased little overall because only that one age category demonstrated any substantial increase and, as mentioned previously, Japan's population aged greatly over the period.⁴⁰

In most of the countries in 2001, the employment-population ratio was higher in the 35–44 age group than it was in the 25–34 age group. This is hardly surprising, because the older age group is less likely to have young children to care for. However, in three countries—Ireland, the Netherlands, and Spain—the younger group had a higher employment-population ratio. It is probably no coincidence that these countries were the ones with the lowest employment-population ratios in both age categories in 1980 and the ones with the greatest increase in employment-population ratios in both categories over the 1980–2001 period. When traditions are being broken, younger people often break them first. In addition, once young women gain labor market experience, their relative wages increase, making work more attractive than it was for their predecessors.

Mothers of young children. Table 9 directly addresses the employment of mothers of young children (under 6 years) in nine countries and for a shorter time span than is shown in the other tables. (Canada, Japan, and Denmark are not covered, and Sweden is covered only partially.) These are mothers for whom child care is a crucial issue in the decision to take employment.

If having children at home to care for is the main factor reducing women's employment, the employment-population ratio of women with small children should be lower than that of women without children. That is, indeed, what is suggested by the generally lower rates of employment of mothers with children

under 6 years of age than that of women in the 25–34 age group in general.

Percentage increases in the employment-population ratio for these mothers over the 1989–99 period varied considerably across countries. The increases were somewhat higher, on average, than were those in the employment-population ratios of women aged 25 to 34 years, although the relationships across countries remained essentially the same. Only the Netherlands experienced a markedly greater change for mothers of young children than for young women generally. The increases for the Netherlands and Ireland were both quite large, considering the short period over which they occurred. The United Kingdom and Spain were not far behind.

Of the nations covered, Sweden had the highest employment-population ratio for mothers of young children in the most recent year, by a considerable margin, even though it was the only country to experience a fall in the ratio over the decade. Sweden's position, in respect of both level and trend, is similar to that observed in the previous two tables.

Sweden is of particular interest for other reasons as well. Not only did it have declines in employment-population ratios for young women and for mothers of young children in the decade of the 1990s, but also, the levels of the employment-population ratios for the two groups of women were about the same. For the other countries, as noted, the employment-population ratios of mothers of young children were much lower than the ratios for women in the 25- to 34-year-old category. This is no doubt a reflection of the fact that women in Sweden typically are absent from work on lengthy paid parental leave when they have young children. In other countries, women are more likely to quit work for a while and, hence, not be counted as employed. The standard definition of employment counts people on maternity or child-care leave as employed—that is, with a job, but not at work. Not counting that group as employed would reduce the employment-population ratios of all the countries in table 9 (and elsewhere), but it would have a particularly marked effect in countries where paid maternity leave is lengthy and generous, such as Sweden. It is estimated that the 2000 employment-population ratio for Sweden shown in table 9 would fall from 77.8 percent to 65.7 percent if women on parental leave were not counted as employed.⁴¹ Were such adjustments to be made for all the women's employment statistics in all of the countries examined, the employment-population ratios would go down, but probably not much in the United States, the only country in the group without a national program of paid maternity/parental leave. The effect on women's *overall* employment-population ratios would be far less, of course.

Along with Italy and Spain, Ireland was still among those countries with the lowest ratios of mothers' employment, in spite of its sizable increase in the employment-population ratio of women. Also, just as they did in the case of women 25 to 34

Table 8. Women's employment-population ratios, ages 25 to 34 and 35 to 44, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2001

[In percent]

Country	Ages 25–34				Ages 35–44			
	1980	1990	2001	Percentage-point change, 1980–2001	1980	1990	2001	Percentage-point change, 1980–2001
United States	60.8	69.4	72.0	11.2	62.0	73.2	74.2	12.2
Canada	58.1	70.5	74.8	16.7	57.5	72.6	75.7	18.2
Japan	47.3	54.8	60.7	13.4	59.9	65.2	63.5	3.6
Denmark ¹	78.3	78.6	78.5	.2	81.5	84.0	83.1	1.7
France	63.5	66.1	68.5	5.1	60.5	67.2	72.4	12.0
Germany ²	–	67.5	71.6	–	–	69.9	74.4	–
Ireland ³	33.9	52.3	73.5	39.6	22.3	33.9	63.1	40.8
Italy ⁴	47.3	49.9	50.6	3.3	43.2	53.1	56.8	13.5
Netherlands ^{1,5}	39.5	58.6	77.5	38.1	37.3	53.7	73.5	36.3
Spain ⁵	32.4	44.6	59.5	27.1	27.9	37.6	54.0	26.0
Sweden	79.4	87.0	78.1	–1.4	83.4	92.2	84.8	1.3
United Kingdom ⁶	52.8	64.9	71.8	19.0	64.5	72.0	74.8	10.4

¹ 1983 instead of 1980.

² 1991 instead of 1990.

³ 1981 instead of 1980.

⁴ Ages 25 to 29 instead of 25 to 34.

⁵ Unemployment rates for 25- to 39-year-olds and for 40- to 49-year-olds were used to calculate the employment-population ratios for 25- to 34-year-olds and 35- to 44-year-olds, respectively. (See appendix for more details.)

⁶ 1984 instead of 1980.

NOTE: There are some breaks in series. (See appendix for details.) Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For 1980 data, BLS calculations are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). For all other years, BLS calculations are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002).

years old, Italy and France stood out for their very small increase in mothers' employment-population ratios.

In 1999, Italy, Spain, and the United States were the only countries in which the employment-population ratio of single mothers was greater than that of mothers in couple families.⁴² (See table 9.) It is worthy of note that this was not the case in the United States in 1989. With the greatest increase in the employment-population ratio of single mothers, an increase that ran far ahead of the increase in the ratio for mothers in couple

families, the United States was likely showing, at least in part, the effects of the 1996 reform in its national welfare system. The very change in the name, from "Aid to Families and Dependent Children" to "Temporary Assistance for Needy Families" (TANF) spelled out the intent of the legislation. TANF is a \$16.5-billion-a-year block grant to States that requires minimum levels of work by participants in the program and provides bonuses to States for high levels of work by participants. States are expected to set time limits for individuals receiving benefits. To facilitate

Table 9. Employment-population ratios of women in families with children under 6 years of age, nine countries, 1989 and 1999

[In percent]

Country	All mothers			Single mothers			Mothers in couple families		
	1989	1999	Percentage-point change	1989	1999	Percentage-point change	1989	1999	Percentage-point change
United States ¹	54.0	61.5	7.6	45.4	65.6	20.2	55.7	60.6	4.9
France	52.6	56.2	3.6	67.6	49.0	–18.6	52.2	56.8	4.6
Germany ²	42.6	51.1	8.5	–	47.9	–	49.4	51.4	2.0
Ireland ³	25.3	44.4	19.1	17.4	34.1	16.7	25.8	45.5	19.7
Italy	41.3	45.7	4.4	59.2	69.5	10.3	40.7	44.9	4.2
Netherlands	31.7	60.7	29.0	26.4	37.5	11.1	32.5	62.3	29.8
Spain	29.8	41.8	12.0	61.1	61.5	.4	29.5	41.5	12.0
Sweden ⁴	86.6	77.8	–8.8	–	–	–	–	–	–
United Kingdom	42.7	55.8	13.1	23.6	34.2	10.6	45.3	61.3	15.9

¹ Couple families are married couples only. (See appendix for details.)

² 1991 instead of 1989.

³ 1997 instead of 1999.

⁴ Children under 7 years; 2000 instead of 1999; women aged 25–54.

NOTE: Except for Sweden, the data exclude families with members over 60

years. Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: *Employment Outlook* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, June 2001), table 4.1; BLS calculations for single mothers are based on table 4.2.

participation by mothers, a portion of the funds allotted goes into a child care and development fund.⁴³

The average employment-population ratio of single mothers in 20 large metropolitan areas in the United States increased from 59 percent in 1995–96 to 73 percent in 1998–99.⁴⁴ The work participation rate of TANF recipients increased from 31 percent in fiscal year 1997 (ending September 30) to 38 percent in fiscal year 1999. Probably illustrating the fact that overall economic factors also were important for this statistic, as they were for the other employment-population ratios, the TANF work participation rate fell to 34 percent in fiscal year 2000 and was basically unchanged in fiscal year 2001.⁴⁵

Although not included in table 9, the child-care factor in Japanese women's employment is illustrated in table 10. In 2001, in three-generation households with young children, the employment-population ratio of mothers was 49 percent. Without grandparents present, the ratio was only 32 percent. Whether a family member is or is not available at home to care for a young child clearly continues to be a very important factor in Japan. The resulting overall ratio of employment of mothers in couple families with a young child present, namely, 35 percent, would put Japan squarely at the bottom of the 10 countries compared in table 9 at the turn of the century.

In contrast to the other countries, in Japan the employment-population ratio of mothers with young children declined slightly over the period. Perhaps one reason is that there were fewer grandparents living in households with grandchildren. In 1987, such three-generation households constituted 13 percent of total couple-family households. In 2001, the figure had fallen to 8 percent of the total. The fall also could reflect the fact that there simply were fewer children with children of their own for would-be grandparents to live with. The percentage of older parents living with childless couples increased from 6 percent of total couple families in 1984 to 8 percent in 2001.⁴⁶

The drop in the employment-population ratio of mothers with young children also contrasts with developments in Japan's own 25–34 age category, with its major increases in both the 1980s and 1990s. Quite unlike the situation in Sweden, having a young child significantly reduced employment for a woman in Japan in the 1980s, and this continues to be the case today.

Effects of number of children. Table 11 shows clearly that, in most of the countries covered, there is, predictably, an inverse relationship between women's employment and the presence of children in the family. (The table focuses on women aged 25 to 54, unlike the other tables.) This inverse relationship holds as well for Japan, for which a specific breakdown by number of children is not available.⁴⁷ The U.S. data are illustrative of the averages of the countries as a group. The U.S. employment-population ratio for women with one child is 3 percentage points lower than the ratio for women without children, just about the average for the group. With two or more children, the ratio is

about 14 percentage points lower, compared with about 12 percentage points for the group.

The inverse relationship between women's employment and children in the household is weak to nonexistent in Sweden and Denmark, however. In Sweden, women with two or more children are employed at a slightly higher rate than women with only one child and at virtually the same rate as women with no children at all. In Denmark, women with one child are employed at a considerably greater rate than those with none, although women with two or more children are employed at a lower rate than those with none. France, too, shows a slightly higher employment-population ratio for women with one child than for those with none, but the rate falls substantially for women with two or more children.

Employment of men and women. Also of interest in table 11 are the continuing high employment-population ratio gaps between women and men in a number of the countries studied—most notably, Spain, Italy, Japan, and Ireland—and the much lower gaps between women and men in the two Scandinavian countries. In 2000 in Sweden, women with no children were actually employed at a slightly higher rate than were men. The overall male-female employment gaps for ages 16 and older, however, were lower for all countries than in 1980. The changes were very large for some countries: for the Netherlands, the gap fell from 43 percentage points to 20 percentage points; for Ireland, from 41 percentage points to 22 percentage points; for Spain, from 40 percentage points to 21 percentage points; and for Italy, from 38 percentage points to 25 percentage points. For Japan, the gap fell only from 32 percentage points to 25 percentage points. The decline in the gap in the United States was from 24 percentage points to 14 percentage points.⁴⁸

Part-time and full-time work. Working part time is an alternative to dropping out of the labor force for a woman with

Table 10. Employment-population ratios of mothers in couple-family households, Japan, 1987 and 2001

[In percent]		
Type of household	1987	2001
Households with youngest child under 7 years	36.0	35.2
Without grandparents	30.5	32.2
With grandparent(s)	51.6	49.4
Households with youngest child under 15 years	49.5	49.0
Without grandparents	45.2	44.3
With grandparent(s)	63.0	65.8

SOURCE: BLS calculations based on *Report on the Special Survey of the Labour Force Survey* (Tokyo, Japan Statistics Bureau, February 1987 and February 2001).

children who wants to remain employed, yet who does not want to work full time. When this option is taken into consideration, the overall change in the employment situation of women since 1980 looks somewhat less dramatic in some countries. In the Netherlands, for instance, the percentage of working-age women employed full time went up by only 6 percentage points from 1980 to 2001 (table 12), while the employment-population ratio for women went up by 23 percentage points (table 7). What has increased has been the percentage of women working part time. In Japan, the full-time employment-population ratio actually *declined* substantially over the period.⁴⁹ Germany also experienced a decline from 1991 to 2001.

For the United States, by contrast, the growth in women's employment looks even more striking. Of the countries for which statistics are available back to the early 1980s, only Denmark had a greater increase than the United States in the percentage of women employed full time.

Several reasons have been suggested for the greater tendency of U.S. women to work full time compared with their northern European counterparts. First, greater household income differentials and pay differentials are said to make part-time work less desirable for women in the United States than it is for women in the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries.⁵⁰ Second, U.S. part-time jobs are much less likely to offer health insurance as a fringe benefit, an important consideration for some women in the United States, in contrast to women in countries where health care is heavily subsidized by the government.⁵¹ Third, the tax credits provided by the U.S. Federal Government and by several States for child care expense, in

contrast with what is available in the United Kingdom, is said to make full-time work more attractive for women in the United States than in the United Kingdom.⁵²

Part-time employment, suited as it is for those who traditionally have a greater share of domestic responsibilities, has remained primarily the province of women in all of the countries studied.⁵³ Women accounted for an average of about three-quarters of all part-time employment in 2001. (See table 13.) This greater tendency of women to engage in part-time work takes on more significance when one considers the relative ages of the two sexes at which part-time work is most likely to occur. Men are most likely to work part time for a brief period at the beginning or at the end of their lifetime work cycle. Part-time employment eases their transition into and out of the labor force and does not interrupt their careers. Women, by contrast, often turn to part-time work when they have children.⁵⁴ Part-time work generally offers lower earnings and poorer career prospects than does full-time work, and for many women who resort to it during the child-rearing years, it is said to constitute something of a work "trap."⁵⁵

Women are particularly dominant in part-time employment in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Spain, and the Netherlands, but the range from highest to lowest in women's share of part-time employment is quite narrow. Their share fell in most of the countries over the 1980–2001 period, perhaps reflecting a gradual lessening of the distinctions between women and men in the workforce. The general influx of women into the labor market, compared with that of men, kept women's share of part-time employment from falling even

Table 11. Women's employment-population ratios and the employment ratio gap with men, by number of children under 15 years, persons aged 25 to 54 years, 12 countries, 2000

[In percent]

Country	Total		No children		One child		Two or more children	
	Rate	Gap ¹	Rate	Gap ¹	Rate	Gap ¹	Rate	Gap ¹
United States ²	74.1	14.8	78.6	7.2	75.6	17.4	64.7	29.0
Canada	74.0	11.8	76.5	6.0	74.9	14.9	68.2	23.6
Japan ²	62.7	31.6	—	—	—	—	—	—
Denmark ³	80.5	7.7	78.5	7.7	88.1	3.5	77.2	12.9
France	69.6	17.7	73.5	9.6	74.1	18.7	58.8	32.9
Germany	71.1	16.3	77.3	7.2	70.4	21.2	56.3	35.6
Ireland	62.7	25.3	73.0	12.8	60.6	28.5	51.7	39.1
Italy	50.7	33.9	52.8	26.2	52.1	40.9	42.4	49.9
Netherlands	70.9	21.4	75.3	15.6	69.9	24.3	63.3	30.8
Spain	50.6	34.8	54.6	26.0	47.6	44.7	43.3	48.6
Sweden ⁴	81.7	4.1	81.9	—4	80.6	9.8	81.8	9.4
United Kingdom	73.1	14.4	79.9	5.4	72.9	17.1	62.3	28.2

¹ Percentage-point difference between the employment-population ratios of men and women.

² 1999 instead of 2000.

³ 1998 instead of 2000.

⁴ Children under 16 years.

NOTE: Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: *Employment Outlook* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, July 2002), table 2.4, with the exception of Ireland. (See appendix.)

Table 12. Percentage of women 16 years and older, by employment status, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2001

Country	1980 ¹			1990			2001		
	Employed full time	Employed part time	Not employed ²	Employed full time	Employed part time	Not employed ²	Employed full time	Employed part time	Not employed ²
United States	34.4	13.3	52.3	39.9	14.4	45.7	43.1	13.9	43.0
Canada	34.7	12.1	53.2	39.6	14.5	45.9	41.0	15.2	43.8
Japan	32.6	13.1	54.3	32.0	16.0	52.0	27.3	18.9	53.8
Denmark	32.5	18.9	48.6	39.4	16.6	44.0	45.1	11.9	43.0
France	32.7	7.6	59.7	32.5	9.0	58.5	34.3	10.7	55.0
Germany ³	—	—	—	33.1	11.2	55.7	29.6	15.2	55.2
Ireland	22.5	4.8	72.7	24.7	6.4	68.9	30.8	15.1	54.1
Italy	23.3	4.6	72.1	23.9	5.3	70.8	24.1	7.5	68.4
Netherlands	17.1	13.9	69.0	18.7	20.7	60.6	22.6	31.4	46.0
Spain	—	—	—	22.4	2.9	74.7	27.9	5.5	66.6
Sweden	—	—	—	46.7	15.1	38.2	40.2	16.6	43.2
United Kingdom ⁴	26.8	18.0	55.2	30.1	19.7	50.2	31.2	21.5	47.3

¹ 1983 instead of 1980 for Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

² Unemployed or not in the labor force.

³ 1991 instead of 1990.

⁴ 2000 instead of 2001.

NOTE: Except with respect to Japan, *part-time employment* refers to workers who usually work less than 30 hours a week. There are some breaks in series, and the lower age limit is different for some countries. (See

appendix for details. Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For the United States, Bureau of Labor Statistics, unpublished data; for all other countries, underlying employment-population ratio is from table 7; for other countries' underlying full-time/part-time proportions, 1980 data are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001); data for all other years are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002).

more. Women's share of part-time employment increased in two countries: Ireland and Italy. In Ireland, the overall increase in women's employment was clearly the main factor at work.

Women's share of total employment rose in every country, increasing the least where it was already the highest—in Denmark and Sweden—as well as in Japan.

The great difference among countries in the degree to which employed women aged 25 to 54 are engaged in part-time work and its complementary relationship with child-care duties are revealed in table 14. Employed women in the United States in this age range have the lowest likelihood of part-time employment. In the United States, as in every country compared, the more children a woman has, the more likely it is that her employment will be part time. For men, the opposite is the case: not only is the rate of part-time work among men in these prime years very low in all countries, but it is lower still among such men with children.

The table also shows that having children is much more strongly related to the likelihood that women will work part time in some countries than in others. In the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Ireland, women with two or more children have far higher part-time employment-population ratios than women with no children have. Denmark, Spain, and Sweden are at the other extreme: having children has little or no effect on the rate of women's part-time work. In the two Scandinavian countries, the reason is likely that women with children continue with full-time jobs. In Spain, as will be seen more clearly in the

next section, it is that women with children are more likely to choose not to work.

Working patterns of couple families. Information on four work combinations of couples with young children is presented in table 15, which covers only eight countries. The percentages represent proportions of all couples with a child or children under the age of 6 and with no one older than 60 years in the family.

In spite of all the increases in women's employment over the period studied, the traditional pattern of the man working full time and the woman not working outside the home remained the most common arrangement in the countries covered for couple families with young children in 1999. Led by Spain and Italy, that working arrangement prevailed in five of the eight countries examined.⁵⁶ The United States was the only country in which the man and woman both working full time was the most prevalent arrangement, and even then it was only by the barest of margins over the traditional pattern. In the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, full-time work for the man and part-time work for the woman dominated by a considerable margin.

With the Scandinavian countries missing from the table, the United States was at the top in 1999 in the percentage of couple families in which both parents worked full time (37 percent) and had a child or children under the age of 6 with no one older than 60 years in the family.⁵⁷ France, Italy, Spain, and Ireland were in the 30-to 33-percent range. This work combination was notably low in the Netherlands, where only 4 percent of these couple

Table 13. Women's share of civilian total and part-time employment, 12 countries, persons 16 years and older, selected years, 1980–2001

[In percent]

Country	1980 ¹		1990		2001		Percentage-point change, 1980–2001	
	Total	Part time	Total	Part time	Total	Part time	Total	Part time
United States ²	42.4	68.4	45.2	68.2	46.5	68.1	4.1	-0.3
Canada	39.6	71.4	44.4	70.1	46.2	69.1	6.6	-2.3
Japan	38.7	70.6	40.6	70.5	41.0	67.5	2.3	-3.1
Denmark	45.5	81.3	46.1	71.5	46.8	66.7	1.3	-14.6
France	41.1	81.0	43.0	79.8	45.4	80.4	4.3	-6
Germany ^{3,4}	–	–	42.1	89.4	43.9	84.5	–	–
Ireland	30.8	71.6	34.8	71.6	41.1	78.1	10.3	6.5
Italy	32.8	67.4	35.1	70.8	37.8	72.6	5.0	5.2
Netherlands	33.6	79.6	38.4	70.4	43.3	76.3	9.7	-3.3
Spain	29.0	–	31.6	79.4	37.3	78.9	8.3	–
Sweden ⁵	45.0	–	48.0	81.1	48.0	79.2	3.0	–
United Kingdom ⁴	41.4	89.3	43.3	85.1	45.0	79.9	3.6	-9.4

¹ 1983 instead of 1980 for Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom.

² Part-time share is for wage and salary workers only.

³ 1991 instead of 1990.

⁴ 2000 instead of 2001.

⁵ Ages 16 to 64 only.

NOTE: Except with respect to Japan, *part-time employment* refers to

workers who usually work less than 30 hours a week. There are some breaks in series, and the lower age limit is different for some countries. (See appendix for details.) Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For 1980 data, *Labour Force Statistics, 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001). For all other years, data are from *Labour Force Statistics, 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002), with the exception of U.S. data. (See appendix.)

families were composed of two full-time workers.

Over the 1994–99 period, for which data are available for all eight of the countries studied, the working arrangement of full-time work for the man and part-time work for the woman increased in every country, except the United States. Full-time work for both partners during this recent period increased significantly

in the United States, Ireland, Spain, and the United Kingdom. During 1994–99, the United States was the only country with an upward trend in the more traditional pattern of the husband working and the wife not working outside the home, although the trend was distinctly downward from 1984. The United Kingdom and Ireland each had a very large increase in the

Table 14. Percentage of all employed in part-time employment, by sex and number of children under 15 years, employed persons aged 25 to 54 years, 12 countries, 2000

[In percent]

Country	Women				Men		
	Total	No children	One child	Two or more children	Total	No children	With children
United States ¹	14.6	10.1	15.8	23.6	2.7	3.5	1.8
Canada	21.4	17.0	22.9	30.7	4.3	5.2	3.2
Japan	38.4	–	–	–	6.2	–	–
Denmark ²	16.6	18.5	13.3	16.2	3.7	–	–
France	23.7	20.0	23.7	31.8	4.4	5.2	3.6
Germany	35.2	24.0	45.3	60.2	3.4	4.2	2.3
Ireland	29.7	16.6	37.2	46.4	4.0	4.3	3.6
Italy	24.1	20.0	27.2	34.4	5.1	5.5	4.5
Netherlands	55.9	38.3	72.6	82.7	5.5	6.2	4.6
Spain	15.3	13.7	17.4	18.6	1.9	2.6	1.2
Sweden ³	17.9	14.6	16.7	22.2	4.3	5.2	3.4
United Kingdom	38.6	23.7	46.6	62.8	3.7	4.1	3.2

¹ 1999 instead of 2000.

² 1998 instead of 2000.

³ Children under 16 years.

NOTE: *Part-time employment* refers to workers who usually work less than 30 hours a week, or to workers whose usual hours of work vary, and

declare themselves to be part-time workers. Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: *Employment Outlook* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, July 2002), table 2.5.

Table 15. Work combinations of couple families with at least one child under 6 years, eight countries, selected years, 1984–99

[In percent]

Country	Man full time, woman full time			Man full time, woman part time			Man full time, woman not working			Neither man nor woman working		
	1984	1994	1999	1984	1994	1999	1984	1994	1999	1984	1994	1999
United States	26.3	33.7	36.5	15.6	19.2	18.6	44.3	33.5	35.2	5.4	5.0	2.6
France	35.9	33.4	31.3	11.9	16.7	19.7	44.2	36.5	35.1	4.1	6.6	6.6
Germany	—	20.6	20.9	—	21.6	26.3	—	47.1	41.6	—	5.4	5.9
Ireland ¹	11.4	25.4	29.6	3.6	9.6	11.4	67.0	43.1	41.8	15.1	14.8	10.9
Italy	33.3	31.3	32.6	3.7	6.3	9.5	57.9	51.7	47.5	2.6	6.5	6.3
Netherlands ²	3.0	3.5	4.2	15.1	37.9	47.8	67.4	41.5	31.5	8.2	6.9	3.5
Spain	—	24.3	31.0	—	4.0	6.9	—	53.4	52.1	—	12.8	5.8
United Kingdom	7.3	15.7	19.5	22.5	33.1	38.4	54.8	33.8	29.4	13.1	12.4	7.0

¹ 1997 instead of 1999.

² 1985 instead of 1984.

NOTE: The information in this table is restricted to families with no one older than 60 years. (See appendix for other details.) Percentages do not

add up to 100, because not all work-nonwork combinations are considered. Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: *Employment Outlook* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, June 2001), table 4.2.

percentage of both parents working full time, but those two countries began at very low levels in 1984.

AS MUCH AS THEY MAY DIFFER CULTURALLY, countries at or near the same stage of economic development are seen to experience many of the same fundamental changes in demographic trends, family living arrangements, and employment patterns, although at different degrees and paces. Three of the four major demographic trends in industrialized countries noted by Sorrentino in her 1990 *Monthly Labor Review* article—declining fertility, aging of the population, and increasing childbirth outside of marriage—continued to the beginning of this century. The fourth trend, the rate of divorce, which was increasing rapidly during the earlier period, showed a mixed pattern during the past two decades. Some convergence occurred in marriage and divorce rates across the industrialized world.

Other continuing trends across the developed countries from 1980 to 2001 were increases in single-parent households, one-person households, the age at first marriage and of mothers at the birth of their first child, and rates of cohabitation. Accompanying these trends, and not entirely unrelated to them, has been a dramatic increase in the employment of women, particularly women in the prime childbearing and child-rearing ages of 25 to 44 years. The employment of women with young children also has risen, as has the participation of women in part-time employment.

Ireland and Spain showed the same direction of trend as the other countries examined—indeed, sometimes to an exaggerated degree. Of the 12 countries surveyed, Ireland and Spain had the greatest decline in fertility, and Ireland joined the Netherlands with the largest increase in births to unmarried women—a sixfold increase. Ireland also had the largest increase in the employment-

population ratio of women in the prime childbearing and child-rearing age groups, and Spain was not far behind in third place. Both countries had very low women's employment-population ratios in 1980, but were becoming more like the others by the end of the previous century.

Denmark and Sweden, demographic pace setters and women's employment leaders in almost all categories in the earlier study, exhibited a clear leveling out, almost across the board. By the end of the century, Denmark even showed a small increase in fertility and in marriages, a reversal of earlier trends, and during the 1990s, Sweden experienced a decline in the employment-population ratio of women.

Japan, still traditional in many features of family life, was seen to have a much higher propensity for women to be employed outside the home when they had no young children or when they had an elder parent at home to care for their young children. Japan's divorce rate and births to unmarried women jumped upward, but remained low compared with the rates of other countries.

The United States had the highest rate of fertility and, next to Ireland, the greatest proportion of its population under the age of 15. Even with the high proportion of children to be cared for, the United States was next to Denmark in the proportion of women employed full time.

Family employment patterns may be related to many factors besides the demographic ones discussed in this article. Economic, social, cultural, and legal factors play an important role, and they are difficult to sort out in terms of their impact. For example, the United States and the two Scandinavian countries have the most substantial employment of mothers, yet are very different in terms of policies designed explicitly to support mothers in the labor market, such as paid maternity leave and publicly provided child care. Still other factors also differ across these and other countries compared in this study.

For example, tax structures differ widely, and employment opportunities for women may vary for a variety of reasons.

An analysis of the determinants of these employment patterns is beyond the scope of the article.⁵⁸ □

Notes

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¹ Constance Sorrentino, "The changing family in international perspective," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1990, pp. 41–58; on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1990/03/art6full.pdf>.

² Even in Scandinavian countries, this was the case during the 1950s. See Yvonne Hirdman, "State Policy and Gender Contracts: Sweden," in Eileen Drew, Ruth Emerek, and Evelyn Mahon (eds.), *Women, Work and the Family in Europe* (New York, Routledge, 1998), pp. 36–46. "[In the 1950s,] joint taxation drove home the message that women were part of households and that work outside the home was undesirable though not prohibited by law. Employment was also made difficult for mothers with small children as child-care was nonexistent....In the 1960s, dramatic changes took place in Sweden" (pp. 40–41). The author goes on to recount how the two-income family became the standard in Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s.

³ The fertility rates would have been lower in the United States and most of the European countries but for high rates of immigration. In the United States, from June 1999 to June 2000, the rate of births per thousand women aged 15 to 44 was 62 for native-born women and 85 for foreign-born women. For native-born, non-Hispanic women, the figure was 60, and for foreign-born Hispanic women it was 112. Births to foreign-born women accounted for 17 percent of all births in the United States during this period. (See "Fertility of American Women: June 2000" (U.S. Census Bureau, October 2001), table 2.)

In Europe, the picture was much the same. In 1980 and 1998, the share of foreign births to total births relative to the share of foreigners in the total population was near 2 to 1 for both years in Sweden and the United Kingdom and around 1.5 to 1 for both years in France. Births to foreign-born women accounted for 13 percent of all births in Sweden and the United Kingdom in 1998 and for 10 percent of all births in France. (See *Trends in International Migration, Annual Report* (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2000), chart 1.8; on the Internet at <http://www1.oecd.org/publications/e-book/8101011e.pdf>). Because more immigrant than native-born women tend to be in the prime childbearing years, births per thousand would be relatively higher for them than would the total fertility rate.

⁴ For U.S. total fertility rates in 1921 and 1941, see Sorrentino,

"The changing family," table 1, p. 42.

⁵ *Statistics in Focus: Population and Social Conditions* (Luxemburg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, theme 3–17, June 7, 2002).

⁶ Sorrentino, "The changing family," table 1, p. 42.

⁷ Divorce rates mentioned in the 1990 article were stated per thousand married women, as opposed to per thousand population aged 15 to 64 years, but calculations of the earlier rates on the latter basis reveal the same sharply positive trend.

⁸ "Denmark – Conditions of Life – The Family" (Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs); on the Internet at <http://www.um.dk/english/danmark/danmarksbog/kap3/3-3.asp>.

⁹ Sorrentino, "The changing family," p. 43.

¹⁰ Sheila B. Kameron and Alfred J. Kahn, *Mothers Alone: Strategies for a Time of Change* (Dover, MA, Auburn House Publishing Company, 1988), p. 27.

¹¹ Nonetheless, a recently published study using early to mid-1990s surveys covering behavior over the previous 6 years and projecting the results forward using life-table techniques predicted (see table 2) that 42 percent of U.S. marriages would have ended in divorce or separation in 15 years and 28 percent of marriages in Sweden would have dissolved. Next among the countries also covered in the current article were France at 20 percent and Italy and Spain at 8 percent each. In addition, the study (table 3) projected separation rates for all unions, whether of married or unmarried couples. The data predicted that the dissolution rates after 15 years were higher than the divorce rates: 61 percent for the United States, 54 percent for Sweden, 41 percent for France, 20 percent for Spain, and 14 percent for Italy. (See Gunnar Anderson, *Dissolution of Unions in Europe: A Comparative Overview* (Rostock, Germany, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, 2003).

¹² *National Vital Statistics Reports* (Atlanta, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, vol. 48, no. 16, October 18, 2000, table 1; and vol. 50, no. 5, February 12, 2002, tables 1 and 19).

¹³ *Demographic Statistics 2002* (Luxemburg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2002), tables E–9 and E–2.

¹⁴ Lawrence L. Wu and Barbara Wolfe (eds.), *Out of Wedlock: Causes and Consequences of Nonmarital Fertility* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2001), p. xvii.

¹⁵ *Teenage Births in Rich Nations* (Florence, Italy, United Nations Children's Fund, Innocenti Research Centre, July 2001), pp. 4, 12.

¹⁶ For early years, see Sorrentino, "The changing family," p. 45. For other years, for the United States, see *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2001* (U. S. Census Bureau, 2001), table 54; for Japan, see *Statistical Yearbook of Japan 2003* (Tokyo, Statistical Bureau, 2003), table 2–17; and for Europe, see Richard Berthoud and Maria Iacovou, *Diverse Europe: Mapping Patterns of Social Change across the EU* (Colchester, U.K., University of Essex, Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2002), p. 13.

¹⁷ Sorrentino, "The changing family," p. 43.

¹⁸ The Clearinghouse on International Developments in Child, Youth and Family Policies at Columbia University, "Cohabitation, marriage, and divorce," table 2.16; on the Internet at <http://www.childpolicyintl.org/contexttabledemography/table216.pdf>.

¹⁹ The authors' calculations, based upon *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1999* (U.S. Census Bureau, 1999), tables 64 and 68.

²⁰ Japan Information Network, International Comparisons of Cohabitation Rates, <http://www.jin-japan.org/stat/stats/02VIT34.html>.

²¹ Sheila B. Kamerman and Alfred J. Kahn, *Family Change and Family Policies in Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States* (Oxford, U.K., Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 316.

²² Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, *Growing up with a Single Parent: What Hurts, What Helps* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 2–3.

²³ *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2000*, table 71.

²⁴ Berthoud and Iacovou, *Diverse Europe*, chart 4, p. 14.

²⁵ *Demographic Statistics 1995–98* (Luxemburg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 1999), tables B–20 and B–21.

²⁶ *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1996* (U.S. Census Bureau, 1996), table 64.

²⁷ For the early 1980s, see Kevin Kinsella, *Living Arrangements of the Elderly and Social Policy: A Cross-National Perspective*, staff paper (U.S. Census Bureau, Center for International Research, 1990), table 1. Figures for later years were derived from various national and international sources.

²⁸ Gerard F. Anderson and Peter F. Hussey, "Health and Population Aging: A Multinational Comparison" (The Commonwealth Fund, International Health Policy, October 1999); on the Internet at http://www.cmwf.org/programs/international/aging_chartbook.asp.

²⁹ For 2000 data, see *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2001* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), table 48; for 1980 data, see *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1985* (U.S. Census Bureau, 1985), table 71.

³⁰ *Statistical Abstract 2001*, tables 21 and 63.

³¹ *The Life of Women and Men in Europe: A Statistical Portrait* (Luxemburg City, Statistical Office of the European Communities, 2002), table A49.

³² Changing mores, accompanied by new legislation, also have been important factors in the increase in women's employment in Ireland.

For example, not until 1973 was the law prohibiting the employment of married women in the civil service and in banks eliminated. (See Evelyn Mahon, "Class, Mothers and Equal Opportunities to Work," in *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, pp. 170–81.)

³³ Sweden's economy was sluggish for most of the decade of the 1990s. The average unemployment rate from 1990 through 1999 was 7.4 percent, compared with a 1980–89 average of 2.5 percent. The United States registered increases in overall unemployment in both 2001 and 2002. (See *Comparative Civilian Labor Force Statistics, Ten Countries, 1959–2002* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, Apr. 14, 2003), table 2; on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/fls/flslforc.pdf>.)

³⁴ In 1960, the women's employment-population ratio was 51.8 percent in Japan and 31.0 percent in Italy. The ratio for Sweden that year is not available, but in 1961 it was 45.0. (See *Comparative Civilian Labor Force Statistics, Ten Countries, 1959–2002*, table 5.)

³⁵ Andrew Mason and Naohiro Ogawa, "Population, Labor Force, Saving and Japan's Future," in Magnus Blomstrom, Byron Ganges, and Sumner La Croix (eds.), *Japan's New Economy: Continuity and Change in the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, U.K., Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 57. (See also Sawako Shirahase, "Women's Working Pattern and the Support to Working Mothers in Contemporary Japan," paper presented at the Workshop on Political Economy of Childcare and Female Employment: Japan in Comparative Perspective, Yale University, Jan. 18, 2002, p. 4; on the Internet at <http://www.yale.edu/leitner/pdf/pecfe-shirahase.doc>.)

³⁶ *Comparative Civilian Labor Force Statistics*, table 7. Family labor predominates in European agriculture, accounting for 4 out of 5 agricultural jobs in 1995. One-third of those jobs were held by women. (See Pierre Antoine Barthelemy, "Changes in Agricultural Employment," on the Internet at http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/envir/report/en/emplo_en/report_en.htm.) Falling agricultural employment in Italy would therefore tend to bring down the employment-population ratio of women.

³⁷ *Labour Force Statistics*, 1980–2000 and 1981–2001 editions (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001 and 2002).

³⁸ The employment-population ratio of women 65 years and older in Japan is comparatively high, standing at 13.7 percent in 2001. The next-highest ratio was that of the United States, 9.7 percent. The average for the other 10 countries was 2.4 percent. Still, the fact that Japan has a disproportionately large percentage of women in the 65-years-and-older category brings its employment-population ratio down. (The source of this information is *Labour Force Statistics 1981–2001*.)

³⁹ *Labour Force Statistics, 1981–2001*.

⁴⁰ Both countries, in fact, have had substantial increases in the average age of their populations, as shown in table 2. The proportion of the women's working-age population that is 65 or older also increased sharply. Spain's percentage of women's working-age population in this group rose from 17 percent in 1980 to 23 percent in 2001. (See *Labour Force Statistics, 1980–2000 and 1981–2001* editions.) That development would counteract, to a degree, the large employment increases among women in their prime childbearing and child-rearing years shown in table 8. In Japan, women 65 and older would typically be out of the labor force because they have retired; in Spain, with an age composition almost as old as Japan's, but without its history of women in the labor force, the older group of women would likely be out of the labor force because they are of the generation of women whose work has been, and continues to be, primarily of the domestic sort. In the age category of 55 to 64 years, Spain has the lowest employment-population ratio for women, 21.7 percent, while Japan's, at 47.4 percent, is among the highest. (See Appendix table A-1.)

⁴¹ *Employment Outlook* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, June 2001), p. 155, note 2.

⁴² Separate data obtained from Statistics Sweden indicate that the employment-population ratio is much higher there as well for women in couple families than for single women.

⁴³ *2002 Annual Report to Congress* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2002), p. I–1. The TANF program is a part of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, whose explicitly stated goal is "making welfare a transition to work."

⁴⁴ Robert I. Lerman and Caroline Ratcliffe, "Are single mothers finding jobs without displacing other workers?" *Monthly Labor Review*, July 2001, pp. 3–13, table 2.

⁴⁵ *2002 Annual Report to Congress*, p. III–93. Not all "work participation," as defined in this report, is actual paid work. In fiscal year 2001, only 59 percent of it met the standard definition of employment. Community/work experience accounted for 11 percent, job search for 9 percent, vocational education for 8 percent, and education and training for 6 percent; seven percent fell into the "waiver and other" category (*2002 Annual Report to Congress*, p. III–94).

⁴⁶ *Report on the Special Survey of the Labour Force Survey* (Tokyo, Japan Statistics Bureau, every February).

⁴⁷ Tables 10 and 11 together show the strong effect of having children upon the likelihood of women's employment in Japan. The

total employment-population ratio for women in the 25–54 age group in Japan is about 10 percentage points higher than that in Spain and Italy. However, the Japanese ratio for mothers in households in which the youngest child is less than 15 years old (table 11) is about the same as the ratio for mothers with one child less than 15 years old in the other two countries. Japan's employment-population ratio for all women in the 25–54 age group is the same as the total for Ireland, but its employment-population ratio for women with the youngest child less than 15 is more than 10 percentage points lower than that for women in Ireland with the youngest child less than 15.

The 1998 National Family Survey of Japan reported that more than 70 percent of mothers stopped working when they gave birth to their first child (Shirahase, "Women's Working Pattern," p. 6). In 1998, the Ministry of Welfare in Japan reported that a majority of Japanese women believed that a mother should look after her children until age 3. (See Marcus Rebeck, "Japanese Labor Markets: Can We Expect Significant Change?" in Blomstrom, Ganges, and La Croix, *Japan's New Economy*, p. 126.

⁴⁸ The source for all these statistics is table 7 and BLS calculations using the same sources as that table.

⁴⁹ "Women in Japan typically work full time after leaving school until either their marriage or...the birth of their first child. At this point their labor force participation rate falls from 75 per cent to 50 per cent. As their children get older, women typically reenter the labor force as part-time workers and the participation rate rises again to some 70 per cent" (Rebeck, "Japanese Labor Markets," p. 126). "Among married women working for pay, slightly more than half of them worked part-time in 1998" (Mason and Ogawa, "Japan's Future," p. 58). According to both of these sources, the tax code is partly responsible for the preference of Japanese married women for part-time work. When a wife earns more than a certain rather low level of income, the couple's income tax rate rises, and the wife can no longer be counted as a dependent in the calculation of her household's household incomes in the lowest decile of the income range are 61.5 per cent of average household earnings; the equivalent figure for the United States is only 34.7 per cent. The high level of acceptance of part-time work in Scandinavia is probably not unconnected with the low pay differentials between the various sectors of the economy, as a result of the wage solidarity policy pursued there" (Gerhard Bosch, "Working Time: From Redistribution to Modernization," in Peter Auer (ed.), *Changing Labour Markets in Europe: The Role of Institutions and Policies* (Geneva: International Labor Office, 2001), p. 104.)

⁵¹ Evelyn Mahon, "Changing Gender Roles, State, Work and Family Lives," in *Women, Work and the Family in Europe*, p. 154.

⁵² Mahon, "Changing Gender Roles," p. 154.

⁵³ In several developed countries in the 1980s and 1990s, Essex University, in the United Kingdom, conducted time-budget surveys of women and men in couple families with a child under 5 years. The surveys found that mothers working full time still spent about twice as much time at home on child care as did fathers. They also spent

almost twice as much time on other unpaid work. Altogether, mothers' total paid and unpaid work time was about 10 percent more than that of fathers. The total work time of women working part time, by contrast, was only about 3 percent more than the total work time of fathers. (See *Employment Outlook*, June 2001, pp. 137–41.)

⁵⁴ *Women and Structural Change, New Perspectives* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1994), p. 84.

⁵⁵ *Women and Structural Change*, p. 84. Consider also the following observation with respect to Europe: "One of the most formidable barriers to the voluntary reduction of working time is the damage it can do to careers. In a culture that places a high value on full-time work and a willingness to do overtime, employees seeking to reduce their working time are regarded as without ambition and can more or less write off their career prospects." The source is Bosch, "Working Time," p. 104. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's *Employment Outlook 2001* claims, "in most countries transitions from part-time working to full-time working are rare" (p. 154). All three sources agree that Sweden, with a program that permits mothers to work part time temporarily when their children are small, is an exception and that women who take advantage of the program do little harm to their career prospects.

⁵⁶ Even if children are defined as those under 20 years instead of those under 6, the traditional pattern of the man working and the woman not working was most prevalent in 1999 in four of the eight countries. Only France, with 36 percent of both partners working full time and 29 percent with the man working full time and the woman not working, falls from the group. (The source of this information is BLS calculations from data provided by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.)

⁵⁷ The high level of women's full-time employment in the United States has come at some cost in time available for other important things. U.S. families are increasingly experiencing what the 2000 *Economic Report of the President* referred to as a time crunch: "With more women working more hours, the amount of family time devoted to work has increased, while that available for leisure and other family activities has declined. This time crunch affects a wide range of families from poor single mothers to prosperous two-earner couples" (p. 182).

⁵⁸ For a detailed treatment of the interaction between government family policies and women's employment, see Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers, *Families That Work, Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 2003). For a comprehensive international survey of government programs for families, see Jonathan Bradshaw and Naomi Finch, "A Comparison of Child Benefit Packages in 22 Countries," Research Report No. 174 (York, U.K., University of York, 2002); summarized on the Internet at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/174summ.pdf>. See also "Balancing Work and Family Life: Helping Parents into Paid Employment," *Employment Outlook* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, June 2001), Chapter 4, pp. 129–56.

APPENDIX: Sources, concepts, and definitions

This article is a follow-on to the 1990 *Monthly Labor Review* article "The changing family in international perspective," which analyzed trends in households and families, mainly from the 1960s to the late 1980s. An appendix to that article described concepts and definitions pertaining to households and families in some detail. The section titled "Household composition data" of the current appendix will summarize some of that material; the reader is referred to the earlier article for more details.¹

In all tables and charts appearing in the current article, data for Germany are from 1991 onward only. Comparable data generally are not available for East Germany prior to unification, and because data for earlier years are for just the former West Germany, 1991 data are substituted for 1990 data in all the tables and charts. Otherwise the trends would have been difficult to analyze in virtue of the change in composition of the country. Suitable data for Japan, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, and Spain were not available for certain topics covered

in the article. In those cases, alternative data sources were sometimes used to fill out the analysis, and these are described in the text.

The section on household composition considers definitional issues relevant to tables 5 and 6 of this article. Some of the information is relevant to the employment tables as well; however, some of the employment tables use variants of the definitions concerning families and children, and these are noted in the section titled “Employment data,” which describes the data pertaining to the study of the relationship between work and the family that are used in tables 7 through 15 and in Appendix table A-1. The sources and definitions used in tables 1 through 4 are not described further, because the information shown in these tables is deemed adequate for their understanding.

Household composition data

Tables 5 and 6 were compiled by the Bureau of Labor Statistics mainly from population censuses and household or labor force surveys, as indicated in the source notes to the tables. Possible breaks in historical comparability caused by changes in sources for three countries—France, the Netherlands, and Sweden—are discussed at the end of this section.

Trends in the composition of families can be analyzed from the point of view of two types of related statistics: those based on all households and those based on families. For international comparisons, the data presented in the article are based on households, rather than families, because household data are more readily available, are more comparable across countries, and cover a longer span of time than most family-based data. Further, the fastest-growing type of household is the one-person household. Such a household is not included in family-based statistics, because, by definition, a family must include more

than one person. Households take many forms and are not limited to families. In 2000 in the United States, there were 105 million households, but only 72 million families. In addition, there are other types of nonfamily households, such as roommate and housemate living arrangements.

A *household* is defined as one or more persons sharing a housing unit. Households are generally the basic unit of family life. Households contain family members residing together, but they also may include non-family members sharing the dwelling. By the U.S. definition, a *family* is two or more persons residing together and related by blood, adoption, or marriage. Cohabitants are generally excluded by this definition, but may be included in practice. (See next subsection, on married couples.) In the other countries studied, the concept of a family generally differs from the U.S. definition: these countries’ definitions are more inclusive in that they encompass cohabiting couples, but less inclusive in that they limit family statistics to couples with or without children and to single-parent families.

Household-based statistics were not available for Denmark, where, however, one person living alone is considered a family. In this respect, the Danish data used in the tables on household distribution resemble household statistics. The figures for Ireland presented in table 6 were compiled from family-based data, because Ireland lacks household data with limits on the age of children. By contrast, the figures given in table 5 use household-based statistics. Both data sets for Ireland were derived from the same source.

Some definitional differences do not allow full comparability of household composition data. Among these differences are the concepts of married couples, families with children, and single-parent households.

Married couples. The classification “married couple” increasingly includes couples living together who are not, in fact, legally married.

Table A-1. Women’s employment-population ratios, selected age groups, 12 countries, selected years, 1980–2001

[in percent]

Country	Ages 15-64			Percent-age-point change, 1980–2001	Ages 15-24			Percent-age-point change, 1980–2001	Ages 45-54			Percent-age-point change, 1980–2001	Ages 45-64			Percent-age-point change, 1980–2001
	1980	1990	2001		1980	1990	2001		1980	1990	2001		1980	1990	2001	
United States	55.4	64.0	67.2	11.8	53.9	56.2	56.2	2.3	57.2	68.8	74.2	17.0	39.9	43.9	51.6	11.6
Canada	52.5	62.8	66.0	13.5	56.1	59.9	56.3	.3	49.7	63.9	72.2	22.5	30.9	33.0	39.3	8.4
Japan	51.4	55.8	57.0	5.6	42.5	43.0	42.4	–.1	61.1	67.8	68.0	6.9	44.8	46.5	47.4	2.6
Denmark ¹	64.3	70.6	71.4	7.1	49.9	61.9	58.7	8.8	68.5	78.2	78.5	9.9	39.1	42.4	49.8	10.8
France	50.0	50.3	55.1	5.1	33.5	25.2	20.7	–12.8	54.3	60.4	71.2	16.8	37.6	28.7	31.8	–5.8
Germany ²	–	56.3	58.6	–	–	54.4	43.8	–	–	63.5	70.4	–	–	22.8	28.4	–
Ireland ³	31.9	36.6	54.0	22.1	47.2	39.9	42.1	–5.0	22.8	28.2	53.2	30.4	18.5	18.6	28.9	10.4
Italy ⁴	33.4	36.2	41.2	7.8	28.6	25.4	22.1	–6.4	36.8	45.9	54.9	18.1	22.0	21.2	25.4	3.3
Netherlands ⁵	34.2	47.5	63.9	29.7	42.7	53.4	66.1	23.4	28.0	42.0	63.5	35.5	14.0	15.9	26.4	12.4
Spain	28.5	31.6	43.7	15.2	33.9	28.7	29.7	–4.2	26.5	27.9	42.5	16.0	20.9	18.1	21.7	.8
Sweden	73.3	81.0	73.5	.1	66.2	66.0	48.4	–17.8	82.2	89.7	84.4	–2.3	54.4	64.6	64.4	10.0
United Kingdom ⁶ ...	54.5	62.9	66.1	11.6	56.5	65.9	58.6	2.1	64.6	69.3	74.2	9.5	33.5	36.8	43.2	9.7

¹ 1983 instead of 1980.

² 1991 instead of 1990.

³ 1981 instead of 1980.

⁴ 30–39 instead of 35–44; 40–49 instead of 45–54; 50–64 instead of 55–64; lowest age is 14.

⁵ Unemployment rates for 25–39, 40–49, and 50–54 used for calculating employment rates for 25–34, 35–44, and 45–54, respectively.

⁶ 1984 instead of 1980.

NOTE: There are some breaks in series, and the lower age limit of 15 is different for some countries. See appendix text for details. Dash indicates data not available.

SOURCE: For 1980 data, BLS calculations are from *Labour Force Statistics 1980–2000* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2001); for all other years, BLS calculations are from *Labour Force Statistics 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002).

Statistical agencies in France, Ireland, and Sweden now make no distinction between married and unmarried couples and provide statistics for “couples” only. The Canadian census questionnaire now directs such persons to classify themselves as husband-and-wife couples. The figures provided have not been adjusted by the authors, so the category “married couples” includes some unmarried couples in table 5. However, this is not always the case in the statistics for the countries studied. In fact, such couples are generally categorized as nonfamily households in U.S. data, rather than as married couples. In the United States, the reported number of married couples depends upon the answers of survey respondents, as indicated in the article. Those who are cohabiting may respond that they are married; if so, they are classified as residing in married-couple households. Those who say that they are unmarried partners, friends, or roommates are classified as residing in nonfamily households if they have no children living with them. If they have children living with them, the household is classified as a family household if the children are those of the reference person or “householder.” In this case, the grouping could even be classified as a single-parent household, despite the fact that there are two cohabiting “parents” in the household. If unmarried cohabitants were included in U.S. figures for “married couples,” the latter would be increased by nearly 2 percent in 1980 and by 4 percent in 1999.²

In Denmark, same-sex registered partnerships are delineated separately as a type of family, beginning in 1990; in Canada, similar partnerships became a part of family household composition in the 2001 census; in the United Kingdom, “same-sex couples” were enumerated in 2001 also. Such partnerships are not included in “married couples” in table 5, for comparability with U.S. concepts that exclude them. Other countries do not appear to make explicit the classification rules for same-sex partnerships.

Children. National definitions of households with children vary considerably because of differences in age categories applied to children. Most countries count as children all unmarried persons under a certain age and living at home or away at school. The United States, Japan, Denmark, and the United Kingdom consider children to be all those under the age of 18, except that the United Kingdom counts 16- and 17-year-olds only if they attend school full time. In Sweden, children are officially defined as all those 16 years and under. France counts those under the age of 25 years, while Canada, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands include children of all ages. Statistics Sweden provided special tabulations to the Bureau for table 5, based on the under-age-18 cutoff. Statistics Canada also provided tabulations based on the U.S. age cutoff and other aspects of U.S. definitions as well.

The different age limits for children affect comparisons of married couples with and without children and of single-parent households. In table 5, for France, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands, the proportions of households with children are overstated in comparison to the proportions in countries that define children as those who are under 18 or that have provided special calculations based on the under 18 cutoff.

Single-parent households. The main issues in comparing single-parent households across countries relate to the age of children and the presence or absence of cohabiting parents. A further issue, which involves all countries except Denmark and Ireland, is that the household statistics on single-parent families understate the number of such families because they exclude single-parent families that are part of a larger household.

The age of children in families encompassed by the term “single-parent family” differs across countries. Ideally, the concept should cover families with one or more unmarried children who live at home (or are away at school) and receive their financial support from the parent. As discussed earlier, there is little agreement across countries as to the specific age limit required for an individual to qualify as a child of a single-parent family. However, all countries shown in table 5, except for Ireland, that do not use the U.S. age limit of under 18 were able to provide unpublished tabulations using that age limit for the single-parent household comparisons presented in table 6.

Another important issue is that the data in table 6 are for households rather than families, except for Denmark and Ireland. Single-parent households include only those which form a single household on their own. Thus, a single-parent household occurs in household statistics only when the single parent is the head of the household or the reference person for the household. Situations in which single-parent families are part of a larger household—such as a husband-and-wife household with an unmarried daughter and her young child—will be excluded from the figures, except in Denmark and Ireland. Hence, on this account, the Danish and Irish figures are overstated in relation to the figures for the other countries. In contrast, the data for all other countries understate the true extent of single parenthood in countries where a sizable portion of single parents live in their own parents’ or other people’s households.

It would be preferable to define a single-parent household as a household in which there is a parent with no cohabitant. In practice, however, cohabitants may be included in figures for single parents, except in Canada, Denmark, France, Ireland, and Sweden. For the other countries, it depends on how people classify their status in the surveys and censuses. However, it should be recognized that the rise in consensual unions in some countries means that the number and growth of single-parent families may be overstated to some extent.

This problem of measuring and comparing single-parent families is circumvented to a degree in chart 3, in which there is unequivocally only one adult present and the age of children is standardized to under 15 years.

Finally, data for the United States and Canada include only “own” children in the total family households with children and the total single-parent households. Other countries may also include “related” children. The inclusion of “related” children (for example, a household consisting of a single grandparent and a grandchild) would increase the U.S. proportion of single-parent households by more than 2 percentage points in 2000 (from 27 percent to 29 percent).

Changes in data sources. For tables 5 and 6, changes in data sources occurred for France, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Still, the time-series data for each country are historically comparable, except for the Netherlands, in which the break occurs in 1995 because of a change in the source of data from the household survey to the Municipal Population Register. In table 5, 1982 data for France are from the French population census; all later figures were derived using the French household survey. According to French statisticians, the definitions in the two sources are compatible for time-series analysis. For Sweden, figures for 1985 and 1990 are from the population census, whereas data for 1991, 1995, and 2000 were derived from the Swedish Income Distribution Survey, with the assistance of Statistics Sweden. The small change in the numbers from 1990 to 1991, when the shift in sources occurs, suggests that they are reasonably good substitutes for one another.

Employment data

The employment data used in tables 7 through 15 and in Appendix table A-1, with the exception of table 10 for Japan, were obtained from two sources: the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Some of the OECD data used are published regularly, while other statistics are from special tabulations furnished by member countries to the OECD or are prepared by the OECD directly. The next two subsections, about employment ratios and part-time and full-time employment, are followed by a table-by-table discussion of various specialized definitions used by the OECD.

Employment ratios. The primary measure of the labor force activity of women used in the article is the employment-population ratio, expressed in percentage terms. The numerator is the total number of women employed; the denominator is the total working-age population. In the BLS series, both numerator and denominator are adjusted to exclude military personnel. In the OECD data for some countries, career military personnel are included, but women do not account for significant numbers of such personnel. Other comparability issues arise because of differences with respect to age limits and in the treatment of maternity leave.

Lower age limits for employment and population vary across countries. The minimum age is usually the age at which mandatory schooling ends, which, in the United States, is 16 years. The foreign countries covered in the article currently use limits of either 15 or 16 years. Spain and Sweden, like the United States, use a lower limit of 16. Those using the 15-years limit are Canada, Japan, Denmark, France, Ireland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Italian data use a lower limit of 14 years in 1980 and 1990 and 15 in 2001. In the BLS series, the data for Canada and France are adjusted to the 16-years-of-age limit. The OECD makes no adjustments for lower age limits in its series. Sweden imposes a maximum age limit of 64; other countries have no maximum limit. The BLS series adjusts data for Sweden to include persons over 64 years of age.

These differences in age limits have virtually no effect on the comparability of the data on overall employment-to-population ratios. The ratios for countries with age limits of 15 may be slightly understated compared with the ratios for countries with limits of 16, because there is very little labor force activity at the younger ages. Neither do the differences in age limits come into play in those tables in which comparisons are in specified higher age ranges that are the same for all countries.

A larger comparability issue in the comparisons of employment-population ratios results from differences in policies with respect to maternity leave. Almost all national definitions of “employed” include those people who are temporarily absent from work for any number of reasons, including maternity leave. As pointed out in the text, some countries are far more generous than others with maternity leave, which means that at any one time many more women are likely to be on maternity leave in those countries than in others.

Although some might construe this distinction to be a distortion, in a certain sense it is not a distortion at all. Paid maternity leave is very much like paid sick leave or paid vacation: the woman partaking of it still has a job to which she will return when the leave is over. The differences in maternity leave policies also would obviously make a greater difference in the comparative employment statistics for women in the prime child-bearing years or for those with young children. (See, for example, tables 8, 9, and 15.) Thus,

it should be recognized that a portion of the “employed” mothers is actually on maternity leave.

Part-time and full-time employment. Tables 12 through 15 involve estimates of part-time and full-time employment based on standardized OECD definitions, which differ from U.S. definitions. The OECD definition of part-time employment covers persons usually working 30 or less hours per week on their main job. By contrast, the U.S. definition covers persons usually working less than 35 hours per week on all jobs.

The OECD prepares an adjusted series of data on part-time and full-time work according to the definition noted. The agency was unable to obtain an adjusted series for Japan; hence, that country’s data on part-time work are not comparable to corresponding data from the other countries for two reasons: (1) Japanese data are based on “actual hours worked” rather than “usual hours worked,” and (2) part-time employment in Japan is defined as working less than 35 hours per week. Thus, Japan’s part-time employment is overstated to an unknown degree compared with part-time employment in other countries. As a result, because table 13 deals with women’s *share* of part-time work, it is unclear how the more generous definition might bias Japan’s numbers in comparison with those of other countries. A greater number of both women and men would be defined as part-time workers in Japan, but there is no reason to expect one to be so defined in a greater degree than the other.

The OECD breakdown of part time versus full time for the United States also differs from that of the other countries in that it covers only wage and salary workers. Using BLS statistics, this article is able to adjust U.S. data to cover all employed persons in table 12 only.

Table 14 uses a variant of the OECD definition as follows: *part-time employment* refers to workers who usually work less than 30 hours a week or to workers whose usual hours of work vary and who declare themselves to be part-time workers. This variation is not believed to cause much difference in the resulting figures.

Breaks in series. Some distortions in the comparisons of employment-population ratios between earlier and later years may result from breaks in series, which most often occur because national statistical agencies periodically improve their survey methods. The cost of doing so is felt in time-series comparability: the estimates made with the later methods are not precisely comparable to those using the earlier methods.

The breaks are as follows: for the United States, 1990 and 1994; for Denmark, 1992; for France, 1982; for Ireland, 1998; for Italy, 1993; for the Netherlands, 1981, 1987, and 1992; for Spain, 1991; for Sweden, 1987 and 1993; and for the United Kingdom, 1992. For the United States, the breaks occurred in 1990 because of adjustments to the findings of the 1990 population census and in 1994 because of a major redesign of the questionnaire and the collection methodology. At least one change in 1994 may have affected the proportion of full-time work reported: the questionnaire was changed to reduce the likelihood that the respondent would simply give usual hours worked during the reference week instead of actual hours worked.³ Whether this modification would result in a greater or lesser number of hours of work being reported—and thus a higher or lower proportion of full-time work being reported—depends upon whether extra work or time taken off was overlooked more often previously.

In Ireland, a more comprehensive survey resulted in a better

recording of part-time employment and a consequent increase in the degree of part-time employment and in overall employment figures.⁴

The following table-by-table notes describe certain aspects of the data that are important to their comparability:

Table 7. The BLS series of employment ratios adjusted to U.S. concepts is used for the countries included in that program. For Denmark, Ireland, and Spain, the figures are from the OECD's published series. The two series are close in concepts, the main differences, as noted earlier, having to do with the age limits and whether the career military are or are not included.

Table 8 and Appendix table A-1. These two tables are based on OECD data on participation rates and unemployment rates and were adapted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to represent employment-population ratios. The OECD publishes participation rates and unemployment rates only for the age categories and the years the agency needs; it does not publish employment-population ratios by detailed age group. The data presented in table 8 and in Appendix table A-1 were derived by the Bureau separately for each age group by first subtracting the unemployment rate from 100 to get the percentage of the labor force that was employed and then multiplying the resulting number by the participation rate to get the percentage of the population employed:

$$\frac{\text{employment}}{\text{labor force}} \times \frac{\text{labor force}}{\text{population}} = \frac{\text{employment}}{\text{population}}$$

Tables 9 and 15. The data in these tables are from a special OECD study on the family published in 2001 and are derived from household surveys. Data for the European Union countries, except for Sweden, are from the spring European Union Labor Force Surveys. (Statistics Sweden submitted its data directly to the OECD.) Member countries (and EUROSTAT, the European Union's statistical office) were asked by the OECD to submit data according to special units of analysis and definitions. The basic unit of analysis called for was the household, narrowly defined. In order to provide a relatively homogeneous set of households that would facilitate international comparisons and simplify the analysis, the OECD requested that the population of households be restricted in the following ways:

- Multifamily households were excluded. (For example, households consisting of a couple with a child and another unrelated person were excluded.)
- Households with one or more members aged 60 or older were excluded. (For example, a household consisting of a couple with a child and a grandparent were excluded.) The reason for the exclusion is that it is difficult to interpret the contribution of persons aged 60 or older to the household. Some may have an important caring role, while others may need care themselves.
- Households were decomposed basically into couple households and single-parent households. The requested definition of a couple was that the notion include both married and cohabiting couples. The OECD noted that the United States was an exception in that only married couples were defined as

couples. Single-parent households were defined as an adult living together with a child.

Canada, Japan, and Denmark submitted no data to the OECD; Sweden submitted data covering all mothers, but not broken down by single mothers and mothers in couple families. (See the earlier section on part-time employment for coverage of those mothers in table 13.)

Table 10. The data for Japan shown in table 10 were compiled by the Bureau from Japanese labor force surveys published by Japan's Statistics Bureau. Table 10 was included to supplement table 9, which does not cover Japan.

Tables 11 and 14. These two tables, on women's employment ratios and the employment gap with men (table 11) and women in part-time employment by number of children (table 14), were compiled by the OECD for a 2002 study, cited with the tables. For European Union countries, except Sweden, the data are from the spring European Union labor force survey. For Sweden, Canada, and Japan, the data were provided by the national statistical offices from national labor force surveys. The U.S. data were calculated by the OECD from the outgoing rotation group file of the Current Population Survey (CPS). These data are annual averages for the subgroup of outgoing respondents in each month's CPS data. Labor force estimates based only on the outgoing rotation group data have a higher variance than estimates from the full sample have.

Children are defined as under 15 years of age, except in Sweden, where they are classified as under 16 years of age. Children are proxied by the presence of children in the respondent's household, rather than in a particular family group within the household. Adults with children are defined as those who are reference persons or spouses of the reference person whose household contains children. For Canada, however, information on women and men with children refers only to parents. For Sweden, the data relate to the presence of children within the respondent's family group, where the children are one's own children, foster children, or children of the husband, wife, or cohabitant who live in the same household as the respondent.

Table 11 uses corrected figures for Ireland that have been furnished by the OECD.

In table 14, *part-time employment* refers to the employment of workers who usually work less than 30 hours a week or to that of workers whose usual hours of work vary and who declare themselves to be part-time workers. This definition is slightly different from that used in the other tables on part-time work.

Also, in table 14, because published BLS data for the United States for 2001 differ slightly from those published in the basic OECD source, the BLS data are used instead of the OECD data.

Table 12. This table combines BLS and OECD data. The employment-population ratios of table 7 (which presents BLS data for 9 of the 12 countries) were multiplied by the percentage of the employed who work full time (OECD data). The employment-population ratio is subtracted from 100 to get the percentage who are not employed. The figures for the United States have been compiled by the Bureau and include *all* persons employed, rather than only wage and salary workers; the OECD's published series for the United States cover wage and salary workers only.

Table 13. The percentage of U.S. part-time employees who were women in 2001, as published by the OECD, is slightly lower than

the percentage determined by the Bureau. For 2001, the BLS number is used instead of the OECD number.

Notes to the Appendix

¹ Constance Sorrentino, "The changing family in international perspective," *Monthly Labor Review*, March 1990, pp. 41–58; on the Internet at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/1990/03/art6full.pdf>.

² *Statistical Abstract of the United States 2001* (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001), tables 52 and 54.

³ *Employment and Earnings* (Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 1994), p. 15.

⁴ *Labour Force Statistics 1981–2001* (Paris, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2002), p. 318.