

# FAMILIES IN ECONOMICALLY HARD TIMES

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*Experiences and Coping  
Strategies in Europe*

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*Edited by*  
**VIDA ČESNUITYTĖ**  
**GERARDO MEIL**

# **Families in Economically Hard Times**

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# **Families in Economically Hard Times: Experiences and Coping Strategies in Europe**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## List of Abbreviations

ADLs	Activities of Daily Living
A-MDS	Adapted Material Deprivation Scale
CAPI	Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing method
CEE	Central-Eastern Europe
CES-D	Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression scale
DF	Depressive Feelings
DI	Depression Index
ERC	European Research Council
ESA	Employment Support Allowance
EU	European Union
Eurostat	European Statistics
EU-SILC	European Union survey of Social Inequality and Living Conditions
EVS	European Values Study
FBS	Food Budget Standard
FSC	Family Social Capital
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HBAI	Households Below Average Income
HRS	Health and Retirement Study
IADL	Instrumental Activities of Daily Living
IMD	Index of Material Deprivation
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ISTAT	Italian National Institute of Statistics
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
LCFS	Living Costs and Food Survey
MD	Material Deprivation

MIS	Minimum Income Standard
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PiP	Personal Independence Payment
PRS	Parenting-Related Stress scale
SC	Social Capital
SD	Standard Deviation
SHARE	Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe
UK	United Kingdom
UNECE	United Nations European Commission of Economics
WWII	Second World War

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# Preface

The edited collection *Families in Economically Hard Times: Experiences and Coping Strategies in Europe* was initiated by the members of the European Sociological Association's Research Network 'Sociology of Families and Intimate Lives' (ESA RN13). The editors invited researchers to contribute their papers presented at sociological conferences, and also invited prominent authors who work on corresponding themes.

The book provides readers with novel knowledge on experiences and behaviour strategies of European families during the decade after the global economic crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The research studies provide answers to the questions: how challenges emerging in an economically hard context influenced the way of life of European families? Which known and unusual behaviour strategies are specific to families of various configurations in solving vital issues caused by the latest economic crises? Research results focus on material deprivation, functional solidarity and practices concerning co-residence, sharing of money and food acquisition.

Authors from six countries (Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Switzerland and the UK) present original research results by developing and applying innovative theoretical and methodical approaches for a deeper understanding of phenomena. The most promising papers that best correspond with the book's aims, and give an integrated vision, are included in the collection. The editors of the book express special gratitude to Benedicte Brahic, Donatella Bramanti, Berit Brandth, Esther Dermott, Jacques-Antoine Gauthier, Detlev Lück and Claude Martin whose valuable comments enabled to significantly improve the quality of the book's content.

The main benefits of the book are the following: the novelty of findings, innovative research approaches and, finally, international dimension in terms of countries represented and compared in the empirical analyses. The editors hope that this edited collection will be a useful reading for researchers, teachers, students, professionals and others who are interested in scientific knowledge on the family in economically hard times.

**Vida Česnuitytė & Gerardo Meil**  
Book editors

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# Introduction

*Vida Česnuitytė and Gerardo Meil*

## Introduction

Social research studies conducted in the twentieth century revealed sensitivity and vulnerability of the family in terms of economic conditions. Eventually, the concepts like material deprivation, the burden of dependants, feminisation of poverty, social exclusion and others related to the phenomena were introduced into discourse. Nowadays, particular importance of the topic of family in economically hard times is determined by at least two main factors:

- (1) Economically hard periods happen from time to time globally or at national level. Meanwhile, families' experiences and behaviours during recent economic crises may differ from the past since present reality is concomitant to late modernity characteristics marked by constant change, uncertainty, globalisation, mass migration, information society, etc.
- (2) Even welfare state takes over some functions of the family including support to persons in need; researches reveal that family members still tend to rely on themselves or their close networks during periods of hardships. However, pluralisation of the family model entrenched in the last few decades influenced negatively the ability of the family to respond to its members' needs.

The purpose of the edited collection *Families in Economically Hard Times: Experiences and Coping Strategies in Europe* is to provide readers with a novel and unique sociological knowledge on European families' experiences and behavioural strategies in the decade after economic crisis that ensued at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The main questions that the book seeks to answer are the following: how challenges emerged during recent economically hard contexts influenced the way of life of European families? Which known and unusual behaviour strategies are specific to families of various configurations in solving vital issues caused by the latest economic crises?

In order to extend knowledge on purposive experiences and behaviour strategies, prominent scholars from Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom joined efforts and created a volume based on their latest research study. The researches focus on hardships, functional solidarity and issues

of vital human needs, including practices of co-residence, sharing of money, food acquisition. Some investigations are conducted at national level, whereas others at international level. Quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, as well as international comparative perspective are used. Such multidimensional approaches enable us to identify both universal and unique experiences and behaviour strategies, and to ensure reliable results contributing to better understanding of the phenomena.

The edited collection consists of nine chapters divided into two main parts: *Economic Hardships Experienced by Families*, and *Families' Strategies Against Economic Hardships*. It also includes an Introduction and summarising Conclusions. At the end of each chapter, extended lists of references are given. For easier work with the book, at the end of it an Index of the main terms is provided.

## **Economic Hardships Experienced by Families**

Over a long time, the family was the main and almost the only shelter protecting family members from various external forces (Robila, 2004). The family builds material and immaterial backgrounds for life in adulthood. So far, family in need presupposes particular ways of life, unlearnt some kinds of lessons and learnt other lessons, possible obstacles in life of the adult. The latter forms individuals bring as their attitudes and behaviour patterns into the community and society. Thus, sustainable economic and social foundations of family itself are guarantors of a further successful development of almost everyone at a micro level, and in society at a macro level (Campiglio, 2010). Cultivating interpersonal relationships creates an environment that makes our lives more protective against both material and immaterial poverty that is rather common, especially in urban contexts (Bramanti, 2015).

The latest processes in global economy have undergone a severe downturn; financial hardship has become a significant public concern in many European countries. The depressed economic climate increased the unemployment rate and is affecting families, where a lot of families live in severe material deprivation and other measures are decreasing their level of living. In Chapter 1, Mazzucchelli, and Parise analyse the possibilities of making savings from jobs available for families. Studied processes are linked to educational qualification and marital status. Much attention is paid on primary family social capital, trust in institutions and satisfaction with conjugal life. The question is whether dimensions that are both internal and pertain to the link between the family and the context in which it lives are influential in opportunities of families to make savings.

Previous research studies on different forms of functional solidarity have shown that family generations are strongly connected, and these ties are particularly strong between parents and (adult) children in most European societies (Haber Kern & Szydlik, 2010), especially in economically hard periods. König, Isengard, and Szydlik in Chapter 2 focus on social inequalities at the micro, meso and macro level, and try to explain differences in family cohesion in general and intergenerational functional solidarity in particular. The chapter explores flows of

support between generations: who receive, and who gives economic resources. Authors look for answers to the questions: what behaviour is specific to those with better economic opportunities? And in the opposite: what behaviour is related to those who have complaints concerning health, material conditions, etc.? What are the experiences of competing family members, e.g. siblings? How the process of intergenerational solidarity is effected by societal inequality at the macro level?

For better material maintenance of the family, involvement of men and women in the labour market may contribute. Notwithstanding, men and women are unequally incorporated into the labour market in European countries ([Comisión Europea, 2009](#)). Dueñas Fernandez and Moreno Mínguez in Chapter 3 present an analysis on the conditions for both participation in the workforce and the type of work they do for women from the families with children in the home. The analysis considers the correction factor introduced by the recession, which to some extent favoured women. During the recession, the size and composition of families have varied, with a reduction in the number of children in the second decade of the twenty-first century and, consequently, a reduction in the number of children less than three years of age. So, the question is how has the behaviour of women changed in respect to work, and care after children in the home? Whether these women in Spain are more actively involved in the labour market, or is it the opposite? How is it related to the type of employment and work contract?

Meanwhile, single-mother families in many countries are exposed to high risk of poverty, social exclusion and lower overall quality of life ([Härkönen, 2017](#); [Maldonado & Nieuwenhuis, 2015](#)). Welfare state policies help these families cope with various disadvantages, and to strengthen their level of living. Often the latter are accumulated, or transmitted between generations, etc ([McLanahan & Percheski, 2008](#)). In Chapter 4, Maslauskaitė and Platukytė present research results on interrelation among household types, experiences of poverty and the social policy measures. Authors look for the answers on questions: what is the role of individual resources in managing the single-motherhood disadvantage? What are the outcomes for single mothers who are a heterogeneous group?

## **Families' Strategies Against Economic Hardships**

Since the middle of the twentieth century, some of the family's functions were taken by the welfare state. Individuals became socially and economically independent from the family and community more than ever before. At the same time, the family institution changed drastically – became more open for new ways of living and daily life arrangements, family model became pluralistic and dynamic ([Holstein & Gubrium, 1995](#); [Stacey, 1991, 1993](#)). In some cases, friends and others from beyond the nuclear and extended family replaced family members and their roles, including friendship, love, care and support. Nevertheless, researches reveal, in the periods of crises, as older, as young generations preferences give to the family ([Pahl & Spencer, 2004](#)). And then families meet challenges once changed families not always are able to satisfy vital needs of its members. On the other hand, those who live in the traditional nuclear or extended family, also,

meet some challenges because of various factors, e.g. unemployment, burden or dependants, etc. Considering what is said above, the following questions emerge: how families cope with challenges and hardships in the periods of economic crisis? What strategies do they apply?

Everyday routine and family practices connect people and generate personal networks or community as an element of social capital. It may include not only members of the nuclear or extended family but, also, friends and other persons beyond kinship (Morgan, 1996, 1999; Silva & Smart, 1999). Česnuitytė and Widmer in Chapter 5 present research on interrelation among problematic situations experienced, personal network and practices of support sharing. The questions are explored: what types of help and support Ego received and gave in cases of various problematic situations experienced? Who from the personal network gave and who received particular help and support? Which family practices build such personal networks that are ready to support Ego in need? Types of help and support analysed: services and care, financial and other material support, and emotional support. Personal networks consisting of members from the nuclear and extended families, as well as persons from beyond are investigated. From numerous family practices, investments into various aspects of individual life are considered.

Personal network may serve as a shelter in economically vulnerable situations, though it is very dependent on number and kind of events in individual life course and kind of personal network available for the individual and the family. It is especially true in case of young families who just started to generate their personal networks. Even so, Deindl and Brandt in Chapter 6 focus on issues related to a safety net provided by families. When do family members support each other? What are the links between social inequality and transfers between middle-aged people, their adult children and older parents? What is intrinsic in respect to individual social and material deprivation, regional social inequality and inter-generational transfer patterns?

In previous works was shown a substantial effect of regional social inequality on transfer patterns: higher inequality goes hand in hand with lower social cohesion (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). That is, where to live is a matter. Geographical proximity or distance between parents and their adult children can be seen as fundamental in functional solidarity. Isengard, König and Szydlik in Chapter 7 analyse spatial proximity – an important aspect of residential mobility. The questions explored are: what issues determine decisions to change the residence? How financial hardships influence the decisions on relocation of adult children when they are ready to run their own family and household? How are these processes influenced by the facts of having a child, need for additional space, etc.?

The global economic recession, as well, influence higher food prices, and so-called ‘austerity’ policies in some European countries. That has made food less affordable for families. O’Connell, Knight and Brannen in Chapter 8 analyse proportions of the food budget standard available to families, particularly, the United Kingdom. How is it changed over time? How does it relate to type and size of family? How do the families manage to provide enough food with less than

the food budget standard spendings? Issues on compromises in food quality and quantity, social participation and socially acceptable procurement are explored.

Similar questions, from a comparative perspective, are presented by Cappellini, Harman, Marilli and Parsons in Chapter 9. Cases of two single mothers, one in Italy, the other in Britain, are compared. In line with the discourse of intensive mothering where children are seen as ‘beyond market value’ (Lareau, 2003), additional efforts should be made to shield children from the impact of austerity. Thus, the following questions are analysed in the chapter: how do different cultural and social capitals contribute to everyday coping strategies in acquiring food? What are the roles of the emotional work and the everyday practices feeding the family in economically hard times? How much time and labour should be dedicated for stretching economic resources? How much creativity and effort should families invoke in the process?

## Conclusion

To conclude, global economic crisis, recession and austerity that emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century have made the lives of families harder and more complex for a long time. In some cases, intergenerational relationships, personal networks, collaborative consumption, strategies applied on issues of co-residence, sharing of money and food acquisition ensure the material provision for the family and its separate members during economically hard times. On the other hand, the processes are additionally influenced by the environment conditioned by the globalisation, spread of knowledge economy, mass migration, etc. Thus, there is evident need for novel knowledge on families in economic crisis. Authors in nine chapters ask according questions and provide answers that contribute as to benefit of the book, as to real life.

The main benefits of the book are the following: (1) the objects in study of families’ experiences and strategies in economically hard times, (2) the novelty of empirical findings and (3) multidimensionality, including methods applied in analyses, and empirical evidence from 18 European countries represented and compared in the analyses. It is expected that the book meets the attention of its target group – scientific and academic communities. It can be useful for specialists working with issues related to families, as well, and may attract a wider society once it provides examples of problem-solving problematic situations. The International perspective presented in the book will lead to suppose worldwide interest in it.

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**Part I**  
**Economic Hardships Experienced by**  
**Families**

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