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Operationalizing De-commodification and De-familization Outcomes via the  
relative Poverty Approach:  
An Application to Western European Countries

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## 1. *Introduction*

In the last two decades, de-commodification and de-familisation have gained great importance in the welfare state literature. As is well-known, Esping-Andersen (1990) inspired by Marx and Polanyi, has adopted de-commodification as a central characteristic of the welfare state effort. Accordingly, the social policies which result in de-commodification make it easier to maintain a satisfactory material standard without entering or exiting the workforce with little loss of income.

Esping-Andersen's thesis has achieved an enormous success. Nevertheless, several feminist scholars have soon questioned the de-commodification perspective since it was focused on the market independence of the average male worker, while women are usually constrained to reduce their family dependence in order to participate to labour market (Langan and Ostner 1991; O'Connor 1993; Orloff 1993). The de-familisation concept was then adopted to denote the extent to which the welfare state undermines women's dependence on the family and facilitates women's economic independence.

The debate about de-commodification and de-familisation has regarded not only the theoretical underpinning, but also the measurement problem. Numerous scholars have attempted to operationalise the two concepts in order to build welfare state classifications. Specifically, assuming that the state is the primary source in ensuring welfare aside from labour market participation and family relationships, both de-commodification and de-familisation have been primarily measured by emphasising social policy structure. However, such an approach exhibits two gaps. First, it ignores the family contribution in the de-commodification process and the market role in the de-defamilisation mechanism. Furthermore, the operationalisation based on the welfare state architecture does not allow to capture how many people are de-commodified and/or de-familised.

Accordingly, this paper tries to plug these gaps by investigating standards of living for citizens without job and without family relationships. Specifically, since both concepts share the emphasis on 'a socially acceptable standard of living for individuals' with the notion of relative poverty, the income poverty operationalisation has been adopted to estimate: (1) how many jobless people are not at risk of poverty and consequently de-commodified, and (2) how many single persons are not at risk of poverty and thus de-

familised. Decomposing the equivalent disposable income of jobless people and single persons, the role of state, market and family have been then examined. Such procedures have been employed to analyse de-commodification and de-familisation chances in 16 European countries and to evaluate whether such nations may (or not) be clustered according to the classic welfare regime typologies.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 proceeds with a critical overview on the existing operationalisations of de-commodification and de-familisation. Section 3 describes data and analysis strategy. Section 4 discusses the statistical results, while section 5 draws some conclusions.

## *2. From social policy to relative poverty*

The assumption that individuals may be primarily de-commodified and/or de-familised *via* state intervention has driven most scholars to operationalise these two concepts by referring to the social policy structure. Such a tendency has been inaugurated by Esping-Andersen. In his greatly celebrated *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Esping-Andersen (1990: 54) has developed his de-commodification index by considering five different characteristics (i.e., replacement rate, qualifying period, waiting days, duration of benefit, coverage ratio) in three core welfare state programs: unemployment benefits, sickness benefits, and state pensions. The respective scores obtained for the three programs must be added up in order to obtain the total de-commodification score of each welfare state. Esping-Andersen computed de-commodification scores for eighteen OECD countries for a single year (*circa* 1980) and ordered them in a ranking list. The list was then divided into three parts, namely the three worlds of welfare capitalism, with the Social Democratic regime (most pronounced in Scandinavian nations) showing the highest level of de-commodification, the Liberal regime (prominent in Anglo-Saxon countries) the lowest, and the Conservative regime (most developed in Continental European countries) standing in the middle.

Esping-Andersen's de-commodification index has been questioned for methodological and theoretical reasons. With respect to the methodological matter, Scruggs and Allan (2006) have provided a reassessment of such an index, by referring to a new time-series-cross-section dataset containing information on the generosity of the same three programmes used by Esping-Andersen. Such authors have been able to replicate the results quite closely to the original formulation, but discovering a number of likely errors. Once these have been accounted for, very limited empirical support has been found to the 'three worlds' typology. Though some clear differences remain, much less overall variation among countries has been discovered (Scruggs and Allan 2006).

From a theoretical point of view, Room (2000) argues that a comparative analysis of welfare systems which takes the Marxian notion of commodification, also needs to operationalise the concept of human self-creation through work, as well as to analyse how social policies support or block such a process. Such an author claims that the social policies adopted by Esping-Andersen, are suitable to operationalise the notion of de-commodification in relation to consumption, while education and training programs must be taken into account to measure the notion of de-commodification for self-development. Making use of the available data for a range of OECD countries, Room came to the calculation of scores challenging the mapping inherited from Esping-Andersen.

Like de-commodification, de-familisation has been largely operationalised *via* social policy structure. Jensen (2008) claims that, even though both de-commodification and de-familisation actually refer to transfers as well as services, de-commodification should be essentially measured *via* public transfers, while de-familisation should be operationalised primarily *via* public services. On the other hand, Bambra (2004) developed a de-familisation index based on four factors to highlight a certain aspect of how the welfare state undermines female dependency on the family and to emphasize woman economic independence. They are: relative female labour participation rate, maternity leave compensation, compensated maternity leave duration, and average female wage. After calculating pertinent scores for eighteen OECD countries, Bambra obtained similar results to those reached by Esping-Andersen about de-commodification. Specifically, the vast majority of countries are placed in similar groupings as in Esping-Andersen's classification. For

example, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA are in the lowest de-familisation group; Continental European nations are in the medium level de-familisation group; and four Scandinavian countries are by far the highest scoring countries.

Finally, focusing on childcare policy, Kröger (2011) developed a de-domestication index in order to measure the degree to which social care policies make it possible for people to participate in society outside their homes and families, including the sphere of paid work as well as social life in general. Like Esping-Andersen's score (see above), also the de-domestication index includes four main factors: 1) time replacement rate, 2) accessibility, 3) affordability, and 4) acceptability.

The above mentioned measuring procedures have two relevant drawbacks. First, stressing the welfare state architecture, they neglect the role of family and market in promoting de-commodification and de-familisation respectively. More precisely, scholars ignore that in order to operationalise de-familisation (1) the market is to be taken into account in addition to the state; and (2) also the family has to be considered, in addition to the state (see Figure 1). Indeed, some authors argue that the market contributes to de-familise women. Lister (1994) claims that individuals (especially women) may uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, regardless of family relationships, either through the market (paid work and private services) or through the state (social security system). Accordingly, Esping-Andersen (1999) highlights that, while Social democratic welfare states socialize women's otherwise unpaid care work by providing public childcare, Liberal regimes de-familise women via care services provided by the market. However, the market role has not been systematically operationalised by any author. Similarly, by analysing de-commodification, students disregard that living conditions of jobless people depend on public subsidies as well as on the economic resources of other family members. Clearly, if an individual is prevalently de-commodified via family assets and his relatives' income, he may be labelled as familised. However, this does not imply that one must ignore the family contribution in such an analysis.

Figure 1 around here

The second drawback of the above cited literature is that degrees of de-commodification and/or de-familisation experienced by different individuals are *de facto* neglected. Stressing the institutional arrangements, and in particular state intervention, we do not know which and how many people are de-commodified and/or de-familised in each developed country.

These two drawbacks may be addressed starting from a semantic convergence between the two concepts. As Kröger (2011) claims, even though de-commodification and de-familisation appear profoundly different, they are profoundly similar in the same way. In fact, even if de-commodification promises individuals and families freedom from the market, and de-familisation calls for freedom from families for (female) individuals, both are relative concepts since they denote ‘a socially acceptable standard of living for citizens’. This appears evident in two classic definitions of these concepts. According to Esping-Andersen (1990, 37), de-commodification denotes:

*‘the degree to which social policies permit people to make and maintain their living at a socially acceptable level independent of market forces, without having to sell their labour power on the labour market’.*

Similarly, Lister (1994, 37) asserts that de-familisation stands for:

*‘the degree to which individual adults can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living, independently of family relationships, either through paid work or through the social security system’.*

As is well-known, “a socially acceptable standard of living for citizens” is the core of another concept heavily investigated by social scientists: relative poverty. The seminal definition introduced by Townsend (1979: 31) states that:

*‘Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged, or approved, in the societies to which they belong’.*

By interpreting the first two definitions on the basis on the third one, one may assert that de-commodified and de-familised people are two groups of individuals which can not be assumed to be in poverty. De-commodified individuals are not poor aside from their labour market participation, while de-familised are not in poverty regardless of their family relationships. This means that both (de-)commodification and (de-)familisation can be examined in a similar manner of (non-)relative poverty. Specifically, if individuals can be considered as de-commodified, when they are able to achieve a standard of living approved by their societies without having to sell their labour power, they may be identified by considering how many jobless people are not poor. Similarly, if citizens can be defined as de-familised, once they are able to maintain their living conditions at a socially acceptable level, regardless of their family relationships, they may be distinguished by considering how many single persons are not poor.

Such analyses are clearly feasible if poverty is adequately operationalised. The indicators most frequently used in the poverty research are based on a monetary approach. This means that they mainly focus on equivalised disposable income<sup>1</sup>, whereby poverty is measured in relation to the national distribution of such an aggregate. In particular, a person is at risk of poverty if his or her equivalised disposable income is below the poverty threshold (for more details, see section 3). Therefore, jobless people are de-commodified if they are not at risk of poverty. Likewise, individuals without family relationships are de-familised if their incomes are above the national poverty threshold. This means that we are able to compute how many people are de-commodified and how many are de-familised. Therefore, the second drawback of the existing literature (see above) can be overcome by calculating appropriate national rates: (1) the de-commodification rate, represented by the percentage of jobless people with an equivalised disposable income above the poverty threshold; (2) the de-familisation rate, expressed by the proportion of persons without family relationships with an equivalised disposable income above the poverty threshold. Broadly speaking, such rates may provide the following information. If the de-familisation rate was close to 100, family relationships will be

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<sup>1</sup>According to Eurostat, to calculate the equivalised disposable income: 1) all monetary incomes received from any source (income from work, investment and social benefits, plus any other household income) by each member of a household are added up; 2) in order to reflect differences in a household size and composition, the total (net) household income is then divided by the number of 'equivalent adults', using a standard (equivalence) scale; 3) finally, the resulting figure is called the equivalised disposable income and is attributed equally to each member of the household (Eurostat).

not necessary to avoid poverty risks in a country. On the other hand, if the de-commodification rate was close to zero, labour market participation will be indispensable to escape from poverty condition.

Measuring de-commodification and de-familisation *via* income levels may be, however, questioned from several points of view. Therefore, some counterarguments must be pertinently developed. First, a growing body of research suggests that low income may be an imperfect indicator of deprivation of living standards (e.g. Böhnke and Delhey 1999, Barnes et al. 2002; Whelan, Layte and Nolan 2003). Nonetheless, equivalised disposable income results suitable to overcome the second drawback of the current literature (see above).

Indeed, it allows to take into account that, while de-commodification may be pursued via state and/or family, de-familisation may be obtained via state and/or market. This is because equivalised disposable income allows, by construction, to determine how income components (i.e., public transfers, income of other household members and personal income deriving from work) contribute to achieve (or not) a satisfactory standard of living. In other words, we can evaluate whether individuals who do not sell their labour power, are de-commodified through state (*via* public transfers) and/or family (*via* income of other household members). Correspondingly, one may establish whether persons who live alone are de-familised through state (*via* public transfers) and/or market (*via* income from work and investment) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 around here

The second critique regarding the adoption of income as unique indicator of standard of living regards the fact that both de-commodification and de-familisation are measured in a mono-dimensional way and, thus, other relevant dimensions are *de facto* disregarded. Leitner and Lessenich 2007) argue that the de-familisation concept includes not only an economic, but also a social dimension. From the parents' perspective, they remark, for example, that the social dimension of de-familisation would mean the right not to care for his or her child. On the one hand, the provision of child care services will contribute to the social de-familisation of the parent. On the other hand, the parent can become socially de-familised if other persons of the family or household take over (part of the) child care. Similarly, as said above, Room (2000) highlights

that the de-commodification concept denotes the basic consumption needs as well as self-development. However, these two critiques may be overcome by considering the argument developed by Esping-Andersen (2000) in his reply to Room. He asserts that de-commodification as consumption or acceptable standard of living is arguably a first and decisive precondition for just about any form of human self-development. Similarly, de-familisation as acceptable standard of living can be conceived as a prerequisite for escaping from family obligations. For instance, if a single mother is not at risk of poverty, she will be probably able to partially flee from child care responsibilities by referring to services provided by the market.

### *3. Data and analysis strategy*

The data used in this study are drawn from the wave 2009 of the EU-SILC (Eurostat 2009) which contains comparable statistical information on all EU-27 countries (except Malta) plus Switzerland, Croatia, Iceland, Norway, and Turkey. Since welfare regime classifications, based on de-commodification and/or de-familisation, have typically focused on developed countries, we have restricted the analysis to EU-15 countries plus Norway.

EU-SILC data do not allow to examine the same 18 OECD countries compared by Esping-Andersen (1990) and by his followers (e.g. Bamba, 2004; Scruggs and Allan 2006)<sup>2</sup>. In particular, Anglo-Saxon-Liberal countries are here under-represented (Ireland and the UK are the only cases examined). However, since EU-SILC contains information on all Southern European countries — unlike the above mentioned works — we have been able to examine more familistic nations. Theoretically, this allowed us to increase the variability in the balance between state, market and family. This is because Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain are quite similar to Conservative nations, but put stronger emphasis on informal welfare provision through family networks (Ferrera, 1996; Bonoli, 1997).

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<sup>2</sup> They were: Australia, Austria, Denmark, Canada, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, France, Norway, New Zealand, Germany, Sweden, the UK, Italy, USA, Japan, the Netherlands, Switzerland.

Starting from de-commodification, we have calculated the pertinent rate as the share of jobless people with an equivalised disposable income<sup>3</sup> (after social transfer) above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income after social transfers. This is based on the arguments provided in the previous section and inspired by the indicator officially used at EU level, namely the at-risk-of-poverty rate. Moreover, although joblessness is normally referred to people which are without job and are actively seeking work, we consider as jobless people those individuals who interrupt their normal earnings as a consequence of unemployment, retirement or sickness<sup>4</sup>. This is because Esping-Andersen (1990) has developed his index by considering social programs related to these job interruptions (see above). Nevertheless, since EU-SILC does not provide information about the number of months spent in sickness, unemployed and retired people only are considered. Consequently, we have computed the following rates for each country:

- 1) the de-commodification rate for retired people;
- 2) the de-commodification rate for unemployed people;
- 3) the de-commodification rate for the total amount of jobless (retired plus unemployed) people.

Since EU-SILC provides annual data about individual incomes, jobless people only include those who have been actively seeking work or have retired during the whole income reference period (i.e. 12 months), having an individual income entirely composed by social benefits. Nevertheless, considering long-term unemployed only provides a partial picture of the whole group of people who are actively seeking a job. Moreover, this prevents to have a sufficiently large number of observations. Consequently, we have considered those who have been unemployed for less than 12 months, namely short- and medium-term unemployed, separately. In their case, even employee income or cash profits or losses from self-employment play a role in determining their annual income<sup>5</sup>. Also, in order to isolate public transfers, we have simulated that those persons had been

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<sup>3</sup> The total disposable income is computed as the sum of all household members' personal income components (employee income, profits or losses from self-employment, social benefits) plus the sum of income components at household level (capital income, social benefits). This amount is then equivalized using the OECD modified equivalence scale.

<sup>4</sup> One could argue that also inactive persons (e.g., housewives) should be included into the jobless people category if they are eligible of some type of social protection. However, we have not taken into account them essentially because they are primarily interested in being de-familized rather than de-commodified (see section 1).

<sup>5</sup> EU-SILC provides few basic information on activity status during income reference period, namely, the number of months spent in work, unemployment, retirement, studying or other inactivity. Nonetheless, if more than one type of

unemployed for the entire year. Accordingly, we have ignored their work income and spread the sum of social benefits over the number of months it has been actually received. This amount has been then multiplied by 12 to obtain an annual income.

Furthermore, as specified in the previous section, in order to estimate the pure welfare state effect on de-commodification chances we have simulated that jobless people (i.e., retired and long-term unemployed persons) lived alone. To do this, we have calculated de-commodification rates by using new equivalised disposable income distributions (and new poverty thresholds), according to the new family sizes. Indeed, as a consequence of our exercise, jobless people form single households with equivalent disposable incomes equal to their personal income (composed by social benefits). On the other hand, the remaining members of the “split” families constitute new households with respective equivalized incomes. This means that new single households and new households are treated as the counterfactual of real family structure and that the new income distribution is not influenced by modified behaviors of individuals. This is because our manipulation is a simple arithmetical micro-simulation where a change is made in observed households under the assumption that individual behaviour is unchanged (Bourguignon and Spadaro 2006). Such an assumption may result unrealistic. Nevertheless, it is indifferently applied to all 16 countries in order to evaluate how the ranking list changes, and not in order to compare real with counter-factual situations.

Moreover, it must be noted that, since social benefits usually vary according to the number of years of contributions a person had paid, one should also estimate de-commodification chances taking into account the career length of those who have interrupted their activity. Nevertheless, EU-SILC does not provide information about the past labour force experience. To face that problem, at least in part, we have computed de-commodification rates for long-term unemployed persons by dividing age groups: aged 16-34 vs. 35-64. Turning to the de-familisation rate, this can be expressed by the percentage of individuals without family relationships with an equivalised disposable income (after social transfer) above the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income. Individuals without family

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activities occur in the same month, priority should be given to economic activity over non-economic activity and over inactivity. On the other hand, EU-SILC gives the total amount of work income and transfers received during the income reference period without any information about the length of time in which these sums have been maintained. Therefore, there is likely to be some mismatch between the activity status and the sources of personal income.

relationships comprise all persons living alone and single mothers with dependent children. More precisely, in addition to those groups emphasised by feminist perspective (i.e. single women and single mothers), we have taken into account young and old people who live alone. This is because they are involved by (de-) familisation processes as well as women (Leitner and Lessenich, 2007; Lohmann 2009). In contrast, single adult men have been left out from this analysis, because, in consequence of their typical job careers, they are more interested in de-commodification than in de-familisation. Hence, we have calculated for each country under inspection:

- 1) the de-familisation rate for young people living alone, aged 34 or less;
- 2) the de-familisation rate for women living alone, aged 35-64;
- 3) the de-familisation rate for old people living alone, aged 65+;
- 4) the de-familisation rate for single mothers with dependent children;
- 5) the de-familisation rate for the total amount of persons without family relationships.

However, to measure de-familisation it may be insufficient just to consider those persons who are actually living alone. Indeed, an individual who lives in family may be familised if he or she is unable to maintain an acceptable living standard once he or she has decided to live alone. This can be briefly explained by an example developed in the feminist research (Saraceno, 2004). If a woman (with or without an individual income) lives with her parents or her partner and, consequently, shares an adequate income, she does not appear at risk of poverty. However, if that woman does not have an adequate individual command on economic resources, she will not be able to act as an independent being and wish to form her own household (Hobson 1990; Orloff 1993). Accordingly, one may reasonably suppose that even some women who live in family are at risk of familisation.

On the basis of this argument, we have estimated the above cited de-familisation rates also for women with family relationships (with or without dependent children), but simulating that they lived alone. The same simulation has then been performed also for young people who live in family. Conversely, elderly living in

families have not been taken into account in this case because we have already tackled the role of the family in examining their de-commodification rate (see above).

Hence, the simulations have been performed for:

- 1) young people living in family aged 16-34;
- 2) coupled women without children;
- 3) coupled women with children.

By so doing, we have *de facto* split several families and, consequently, produced a lot of single-parent households. De-familisation rates have then been calculated using new equivalised disposable income distributions (and new poverty thresholds), according to the new family sizes. Like in the case of de-commodification, such simulations have been performed by changing family structure, but assuming that individual behaviour is not altered.

Finally, as argued in the previous section, in order to estimate to which extent the states contribute to ensure a socially acceptable standard of living for persons who actually live alone, a measurement of redistribution, calculated as the proportional increase in de-familisation rates effected by public transfers, has been adopted. It is computed as follow:  $100 \times \{1 - [(post-transfers defamilisation rate) / (pre-transfer defamilisation rate)]\}$ . Such an analysis has been performed for single women, single mothers, and lone young people, excluding elderly who live alone, essentially because the disposable income of this last group is almost entirely composed by public transfers, namely pensions.

#### *4. Results*

In line with the argument developed in the previous section, Table 1 shows the de-commodification rate for i) long-term unemployed persons; ii) short- and medium-term unemployed persons; iii) retired persons; and iv)

the total de-commodification rate<sup>6</sup>. Emulating the previous studies (see e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990: 52), the 16 European countries here compared have been ordered in descending order. Therefore, at the top of the list are placed those countries with the highest proportion of jobless people having an equivalised disposable income above the national poverty threshold.

According to mean scores, retired people appear more de-commodified than both long-term and other unemployed people (84% against 52.9% and 50.9%). Furthermore, the de-commodification rate computed for long-term unemployed persons denotes a higher range than those computed for retired people and short- and medium-term unemployed persons (35.6% against 25.6% and 18.7%).

Table 1 around here

If one looks at the ranking list arranged for the de-commodification rates calculated for long-term and other unemployed people, it will not be possible to group the 16 nations according to the usual welfare state typology. Indeed, Anglo-Saxon, Continental and Southern European countries are jumbled among each other. Three Scandinavian nations (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) are instead grouped and placed at the bottom of the list compiled for short- and medium-term unemployed people<sup>7</sup>.

Moreover, there is little evidence of grouping among 16 European nations by dividing long-term unemployed persons by age groups (see Table 2). As expected, aged people appear however more de-commodified than young ones.

Table 2 around here

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<sup>6</sup> The total de-commodification rate has been computed leaving out people who were actively seeking work for a period lower than a year because their disposable income has been actually manipulated via simulation (see previous section).

<sup>7</sup> The result for the Scandinavian countries could be partly driven by problems in measuring income and employment for the same reference period: problem of combining register and survey data (Lohmann 2011).

Similar conclusions can be drawn for the de-commodification rate computed for retired people. Although one may remark that three Continental European nations (Luxemburg, the Netherlands, and France) are at the top of the list while two Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Finland) are placed at the bottom, the clustering appears dramatically weak.

Furthermore, the nations here examined can not even be grouped when we look at the total de-commodification rate. In contrast to the rank-order arranged by Esping-Andersen (1990: 52), we found out that three Continental European nations (the Netherlands, Luxemburg and France) are, for instance, at the top of the list, while Scandinavian countries are in open order. Yet one might claim that such a distribution is not consistent with the ‘three, or four<sup>8</sup> worlds of welfare capitalism’ since de-commodification rates have been computed by considering the equivalent disposable income of jobless people determined by public transfers as well as income of other family members. Put differently, one might argue that the discordance observed between our ranking list and the clustering identified by Esping-Andersen derives from the fact that, unlike his analysis, we have estimated de-commodification chances without isolating welfare state effort.

Nevertheless, discordance still persists when we simulate that all jobless people lived alone and, consequently, did not benefit from any income by other family members. In this case, while de-commodification rates decrease for all countries, Western European nations continue to be substantially ungrouped (see Table 3). However, this analysis allows to confirm that old-age pensions are in general more de-commodifying than unemployment benefits (Esping-Andersen 1990; Scruggs and Allan 2006). Indeed, mean scores computed for retired people are substantially higher than those estimated for both long-term and other unemployed people (64.7% against 17.3% and 15.4%). By simulating that all jobless people lived alone, it also demonstrates that the absence of family relationships reduces de-commodification chances (compare the figures in Table 1 and 3). This corroborates the hypothesis that the family, in addition to the state, contributes to ensure an acceptable (or not) standard of living for individuals who interrupt their job activity.

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<sup>8</sup> “Four worlds of welfare capitalism”, if one distinguishes Mediterranean regime.

Table 3 around here

Turning to de-familisation, Table 4 reports the rates for: i) single persons aged 34 or less; ii) single women aged 35-64; iii) single mothers with dependent children; and iv) single persons aged 64 or more. In the same table the rate for the total group of people at prospect of de-familisation is also reported. Like in the de-commodification case, the 16 countries are listed in descending order. The ranking lists arranged for single persons aged 16-34, single women aged 35-64, and single mothers are then contrasted with the ranking list obtained by simulating that young people aged 16-34 living in family, coupled women without children and coupled women with children, would live alone (Figure 3, 4 and 5).

Comparing the mean values, one finds very similar scores for the total de-familisation rate, the defamilisation rate for young people and the defamilisation rate for elderly (see Table 4). On the other hand, the mean of the de-familisation rate for single women is the lowest one, while the mean of the de-familisation rate for single-mothers is the highest. The highest range results for single persons aged 16-34, with a score of 45, while the difference between the highest value and the lowest value for the total de-familisation rate is 15 only.

Table 4 around here

Although the 16 European countries can not be easily grouped according to a specific regime typology, one may highlight some patterns. In the ranking list of the de-familisation rate calculated for single persons aged 16-34, four Scandinavian countries are at the bottom of the ranking, while two Southern European countries (Portugal and Spain) are at the top. These figures are not surprising. Iacovou and Aassve (2007) remark that, although Social Democratic nations have by far the lowest general poverty rates in Europe, they exhibit some of the highest youth poverty rates. Such authors argue that the most likely explanation for these high rates may be driven by the fact that young people in Scandinavian countries leave home at an extremely early age (typically in their early twenties) and are therefore unlikely to have high enough earnings at the time of home-

leaving to protect them against poverty. Such an explanation does not appear quite convincing for de-familisation chances of young people. This is because the ranking list obtained by simulating that all persons aged 16-34 lived alone is very similar to that arranged for actual lone young people. Figure 3 shows that, after the simulation, all Scandinavian countries are at the bottom while all Southern European nations show very high scores. This seems to suggest that young people from Southern European nations continue to live in their parental homes for longer and longer periods of time regardless of their personal standard of living.

Figure 3 around here

In the ranking lists of de-familisation rates calculated for single women and single mothers, three Scandinavian countries are at the top (Norway, Sweden and Denmark for single women and Denmark, Finland and Norway for single mothers) (see Table 4). Apart from these patterns, the remaining countries result ungrouped. Moreover, Figure 4 and 5 show that the ranking list derived from the supposition that all coupled women and mothers lived alone are substantially similar to those compiled for single women and single mothers.

Figure 4 and 5 around here

Not counting Scandinavian nations, such results appear inconsistent with those obtained by Bamba (2004). As noted in the previous section, her de-familisation index — developed to highlight how social policies undermine female dependency on the family — reveals that the highest scores of de-familisation are shown by the social-democratic countries, the Anglo-Saxon nations exhibiting the lowest levels, the conservative countries standing in the middle.

Furthermore, we can not group European countries with respect to the de-familisation rate computed for lone elderly. This is simply because the four Southern countries and two Scandinavian nations (Sweden and Finland) are placed together at the bottom of the ranking list (see Table 4).

These notes demonstrate that the de-familisation order of European countries varies according to which social group is taken into account. Nevertheless, if one considers the total de-familisation rate, the clustering appears stronger (see Table 4). Indeed, even if two Anglo-Saxon countries do not cluster together and Germany and Spain constitute two real anomalies, Continental, Southern and Scandinavian countries cluster together. However, the ranking list arranged for this rate appears quite dissimilar from those compiled according to de-familisation policies. This is because Continental countries are at the top, Scandinavian countries are at the bottom, while Southern countries are in the middle.

Finally, regarding the state contribution in determining de-familisation chances, table 5 shows results obtained using the procedure described in the previous section. The state contribution appears significant for single women and, above all, for single mothers. More precisely, the mean scores computed for de-familisation augment are high for women who live alone or with their dependent children and low for lone young people (52.6%, 82.4% and 11.5%, respectively). Regarding the countries distribution, one may remark that Mediterranean countries tend to come at the bottom of the lists, but the clustering appears considerably feeble also in this case.

Table 5 around here

## *5. Conclusion*

Our work has aimed to develop an alternative approach for operationalising both de-commodification and de-familisation. Contrary to the existing literature which emphasises welfare state structure, we have tried to measure the two concepts by stressing living conditions of individuals. In so doing, we started from the assumption that both concepts share the emphasis on ‘a socially acceptable standard of living for individuals’ with the relative poverty notion. This semantic affinity has allowed us to build suitable de-commodification and de-familisation rates. Consequently, we have computed how many jobless people and how many single persons are not at risk of poverty.

Moreover, starting from the assumption that state is not the only source of both de-commodification and de-familisation, we have estimated to which extent jobless people are de-commodified via public transfers and/or income of other household members and to which extent single persons are de-familised as a consequence of public transfers and/or paid work.

Rates computed for 16 Western European countries do not allow to group such countries according to the classic welfare regime typologies. Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, Continental and Southern European nations are often in open order rather than clustered. Such a conclusion induces to think that de-commodification and de-familisation chances are not systematically associated with the institutional balances which characterize different welfare states. Clearly, this hypothesis has not been tested in our work. Consequently, future studies could examine more analytically how the institutional equilibrium between state, market and family affects the standard of living of jobless people and persons without family relationships.

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Tables and figures

Figure 1 - The contribution of state, family and market in de-commodification and de-familisation chances.

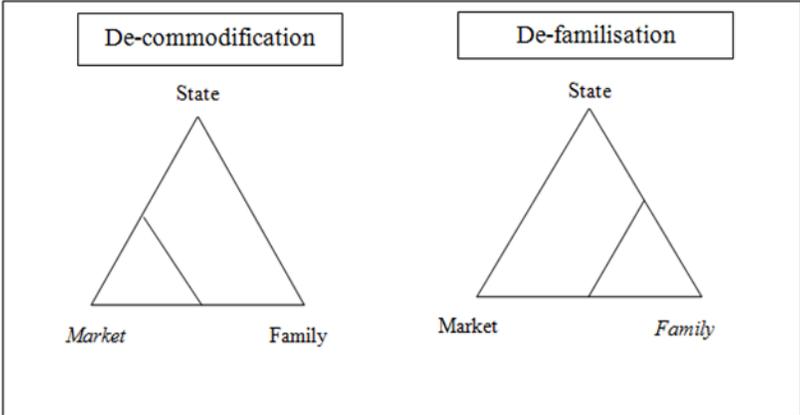


Figure 2 - The contribution of the equalised disposable income components in de-commodification and de-familisation chances.

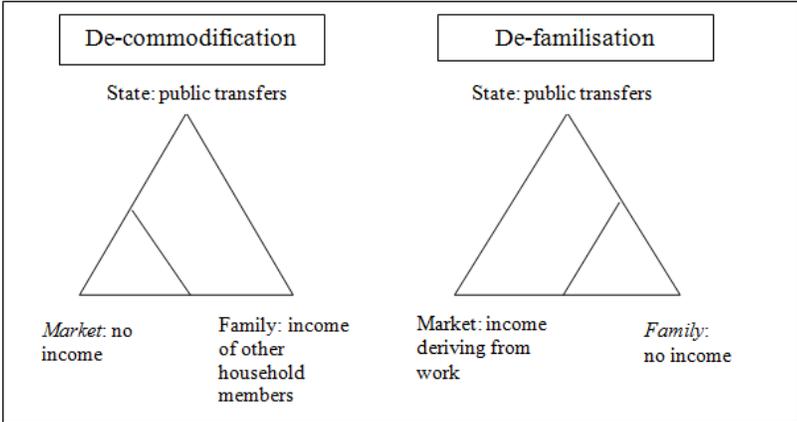


Table. 1 - De-commodification rates for long-,short- and medium-term unemployed and for retired people and total de-commodification rate.

Country	Long-term unemployed (A)			Country	Short- and medium-term unemployed (B)			Country	Retired persons (C)			Country	De-commodification rate (A + C)		
	Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N		Rate	Sd	N
IE	65.3	0.044	444	IE	66.0	0.027	1,163	LU	94.5	0.013	1,154	NL	89.9	0.011	3,079
BE	64.5	0.035	721	BE	60.8	0.028	1,139	NL	93.0	0.009	2,923	LU	89.3	0.017	1,287
PT	62.5	0.047	414	PT	60.2	0.032	912	FR	91.0	0.008	4,722	FR	88.0	0.009	5,138
NL	62.2	0.076	156	FR	55.4	0.025	1,505	NO	86.4	0.019	1,314	NO	85.0	0.019	1,385
AT	60.7	0.051	348	ES	55.2	0.015	4,202	AT	85.6	0.013	2,960	AT	82.3	0.013	3,308
GR	58.0	0.046	444	GR	54.3	0.029	1,173	IT	85.2	0.008	8,264	IT	80.0	0.008	9,745
NO	57.9	0.116	71	AT	53.1	0.032	921	DE	84.2	0.009	6,443	SE	79.6	0.015	2,957
FR	55.0	0.048	416	FI	52.8	0.022	2,045	IE	84.2	0.020	1,341	DK	79.1	0.017	2,174
ES	54.5	0.026	1,364	LU	49.7	0.042	555	PT	82.0	0.014	3,041	PT	78.9	0.014	3,455
DK	52.4	0.117	71	IT	49.5	0.019	2,553	BE	81.9	0.016	2,259	GR	78.2	0.012	4,266
IT	52.2	0.025	1,481	NL	49.3	0.047	440	SE	81.4	0.014	2,770	BE	77.9	0.015	2,980
SE	48.6	0.072	187	DE	43.8	0.025	1,544	GR	81.1	0.012	3,822	DE	77.0	0.010	7,201
LU	46.0	0.085	133	UK	42.1	0.021	2,173	ES	80.7	0.011	4,778	IE	76.9	0.020	1,785
UK	38.8	0.068	199	NO	41.1	0.063	236	DK	80.5	0.017	2,103	ES	74.4	0.011	6,142
FI	38.0	0.050	364	SE	40.7	0.026	1,382	FI	75.9	0.014	3,708	UK	73.1	0.014	3,896
DE	29.7	0.033	758	DK	40.3	0.056	295	UK	75.9	0.014	3,697	FI	72.9	0.014	4,072
Range 35.6			Range 25.6			Range 18.7			Range 17.0						
Mean 52.9			Mean 50.9			Mean 84.0			Mean 80.2						
SD 0.104			SD 0.078			SD 0.053			SD 0.054						

Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Tab. 2 De-commodification rates for unemployed by age group

Country	The unemployed aged 16-35			Country	The unemployed aged 35-64		
	Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N
BE	17.4	0.039	373	BE	47.0	0.036	736
IE	16.1	0.032	514	NL	31.4	0.052	306
ES	15.2	0.016	1,876	LU	31.0	0.055	277
DE	14.9	0.034	429	IE	30.8	0.036	623
LU	13.4	0.040	276	FI	22.2	0.023	1,290
NL	13.4	0.063	112	DK	21.9	0.065	155
FR	12.2	0.024	728	FR	21.9	0.029	762
FI	9.2	0.021	751	DE	21.2	0.024	1,111
DK	6.6	0.044	121	PT	20.5	0.034	528
IT	5.5	0.012	1,354	ES	19.9	0.016	2,263
PT	5.3	0.023	379	AT	13.1	0.030	473
NO	4.5	0.035	134	IT	11.5	0.018	1,189
AT	4.3	0.019	439	NO	11.0	0.065	91
UK	2.9	0.010	993	SE	9.7	0.025	559
SE	2.6	0.011	818	GR	7.0	0.022	526
GR	2.2	0.011	640	UK	4.6	0.013	1,034
Range 15.2				Range 42.4			
Mean 9.1				Mean 20.3			
SD 0.054				SD 0.110			

Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Tab. 3 De-commodification rates of jobless people calculated by simulating that they all lived alone.

Country	Long-term unemployed			Country	Short- and medium-term unemployed			Country	Retired persons		
	Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N
BE	46.5	0.036	721	BE	36.9	0.028	1,139	DE	86.1	0.020	1,154
DK	39.4	0.114	71	NL	25.7	0.041	440	ES	77.9	0.012	4,722
IE	24.5	0.040	444	IE	23.9	0.025	1,163	AT	76.8	0.012	4,778
NL	23.7	0.067	156	LU	22.3	0.035	555	IE	72.9	0.024	1,341
SE	20.3	0.058	187	DE	19.5	0.020	1,544	NL	72.5	0.018	2,259
PT	18.6	0.038	414	ES	17.6	0.012	4,202	GR	68.3	0.017	2,960
NO	18.3	0.091	71	FI	17.4	0.016	2,045	FR	68.0	0.015	3,822
FR	18.0	0.037	416	FR	17.1	0.019	1,505	LU	67.9	0.010	8,264
DE	14.4	0.025	758	PT	14.3	0.023	912	IT	65.7	0.017	2,923
LU	13.5	0.058	133	DK	14.2	0.040	295	NO	63.9	0.012	6,443
FI	12.4	0.034	364	AT	8.9	0.018	921	BE	61.8	0.017	3,041
ES	8.8	0.015	1,364	IT	8.3	0.011	2,553	DK	60.7	0.026	1,314
UK	8.0	0.038	199	NO	7.2	0.033	236	UK	54.5	0.019	2,770
AT	6.3	0.026	348	SE	05.4	0.012	1,382	PT	53.5	0.016	3,697
GR	2.9	0.016	444	GR	4.4	0.012	1,173	FI	43.3	0.016	3,708
IT	1.3	0.006	1,481	UK	3.6	0.008	2,173	SE	41.0	0.021	2,103
Range 45.2				Range 33.2				Range 45.1			
Mean 17.3				Mean 15.4				Mean 64.7			
SD 0.122				SD 0.091				SD 0.122			

Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Table 4 - De-familization rates calculated for singles aged 16-34, single women aged 35-64, single mothers, singles aged 65+ and total de-familisation rates.

Country	Singles aged 16-34 (A)			Country	Single women aged 35-64 (B)			Country	Single mothers (C)			Country	Singles aged 65+ (D)			Country	De-familisation rate (A + B + C + D)		
	Rate	sd	N		Rate	Sd	N		Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N		Rate	sd	N
PT	94.3	0.066	48	NO	93.0	3.6	191	DK	83.9	0.057	161	NL	0.937	0.016	904	FR	81.4	0.014	2,875
ES	84.6	0.044	256	SE	90.3	3.3	303	FI	78.2	0.060	181	LU	0.887	0.038	267	NL	80.4	0.016	2,278
IE	82.7	0.073	103	DK	90.0	3.8	243	NO	72.0	0.069	162	FR	0.845	0.020	1,307	LU	78.8	0.028	835
BE	81.9	0.046	270	FR	86.0	2.6	663	UK	69.1	0.048	358	DK	0.768	0.040	439	AT	76.7	0.020	1,711
LU	80.6	0.056	193	NL	84.6	2.7	665	SE	68.6	0.071	163	AT	0.762	0.031	719	BE	75.0	0.021	1,692
AT	79.0	0.045	313	AT	79.3	3.6	476	FR	68.6	0.045	413	BE	0.759	0.032	686	UK	72.7	0.018	2,314
FR	77.0	0.037	492	LU	77.9	5.8	198	GR	68.5	0.089	106	DE	0.747	0.023	1,319	GR	71.8	0.022	1,584
UK	76.6	0.064	169	FI	77.8	3.6	515	IT	66.9	0.041	495	IE	0.727	0.029	938	IT	71.0	0.013	4,816
IT	75.7	0.034	610	UK	77.2	3.7	494	PT	66.8	0.084	121	NO	0.715	0.048	345	PT	70.9	0.028	981
GR	74.9	0.045	360	PT	76.3	6.5	165	AT	65.3	0.066	203	UK	0.711	0.025	1,293	DK	70.9	0.027	1,094
NL	66.6	0.043	464	BE	75.1	4.1	436	IE	63.5	0.058	263	GR	0.694	0.030	891	IE	70.6	0.023	1,566
FI	66.3	0.037	644	GR	74.9	5.7	227	ES	62.6	0.061	242	IT	0.692	0.017	2,823	DE	69.4	0.015	3,404
DE	59.7	0.040	576	IT	74.6	2.9	888	BE	62.3	0.055	300	PT	0.673	0.036	647	NO	68.5	0.027	1,131
SE	59.2	0.041	563	DE	73.3	2.7	105	NL	62.2	0.061	245	SE	0.669	0.036	663	SE	68.1	0.022	1,692
NO	54.7	0.047	433	ES	71.2	4.1	466	DE	58.2	0.045	459	ES	0.590	0.027	1,240	ES	66.8	0.020	2,204
DK	49.3	0.062	251	IE	71.0	5.5	262	LU	45.8	0.074	177	FI	0.578	0.037	700	FI	66.3	0.021	2,040
range	45.0			range	22.0			range	38.0			range	36			range	15		
mean	73.0			mean	80.0			mean	66.0			mean	73			mean	72		
sd	0.12			sd	0.07			sd	0.08			sd	0.10			sd	0.05		

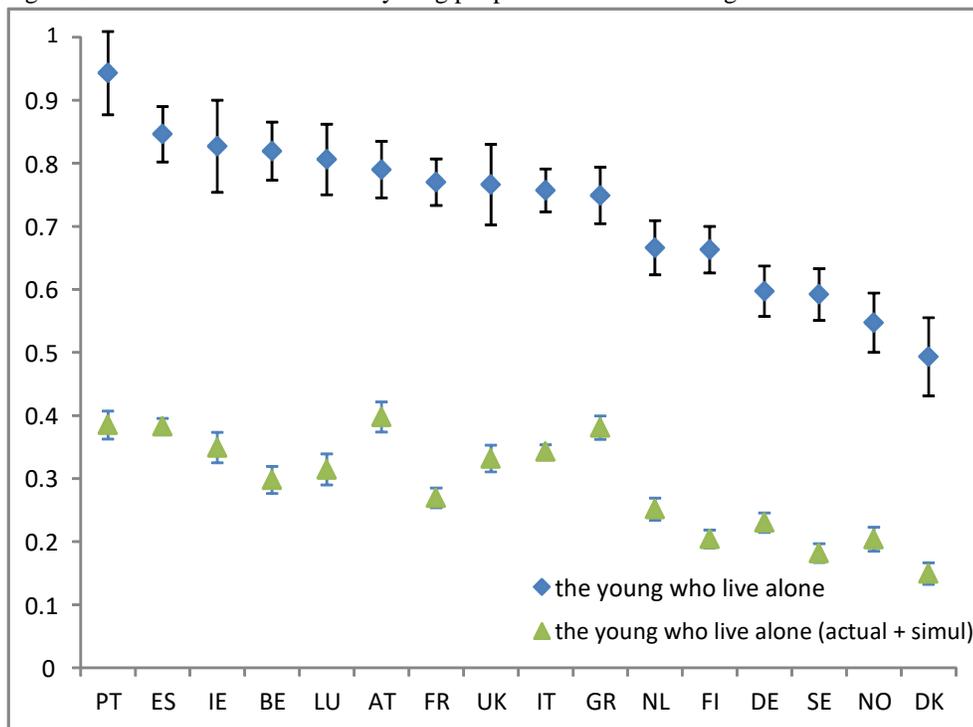
Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Tab. 5 - Proportional increase (%) in de-familisation rates effected by public transfers.

Country	Singles aged 16-34	Country	Single women aged 34-64	Country	Single mothers
NO	22.8	NL	78.0	IE	345.9
IE	22.3	PT	66.4	UK	236.8
NL	21.1	BE	62.5	NO	92.5
FI	19.5	FR	62.2	FI	84.9
SE	16.3	NO	61.8	NL	79.9
DK	15.0	DK	61.2	DE	71.1
FR	14.9	AT	59.9	DK	65.3
AT	12.1	IE	56.0	FR	60.9
BE	11.8	UK	54.6	AT	55.4
ES	7.0	LU	54.3	SE	55.4
DE	6.9	SE	52.3	LU	50.5
UK	6.1	GR	44.1	BE	46.8
IT	4.5	FI	41.6	GR	16.8
GR	3.9	DE	32.3	PT	15.6
PT	0.0	IT	30.6	IT	13.2
LU	-0.2	ES	24.2	ES	11.9
Range	23.0	Range	53.8	Range	334.0
Mean	11.9	Mean	52.6	Mean	81.4
Sd	7.75	Sd	14.51	Sd	88.14

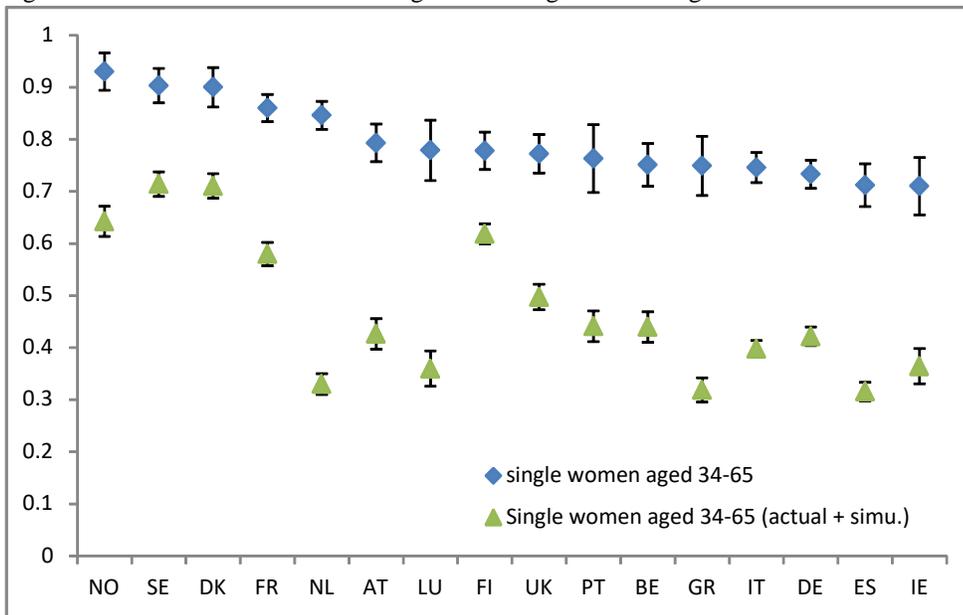
Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Figure 3 - De-familisation rates for young people who live alone. Figures derived from actual and simulated observations.



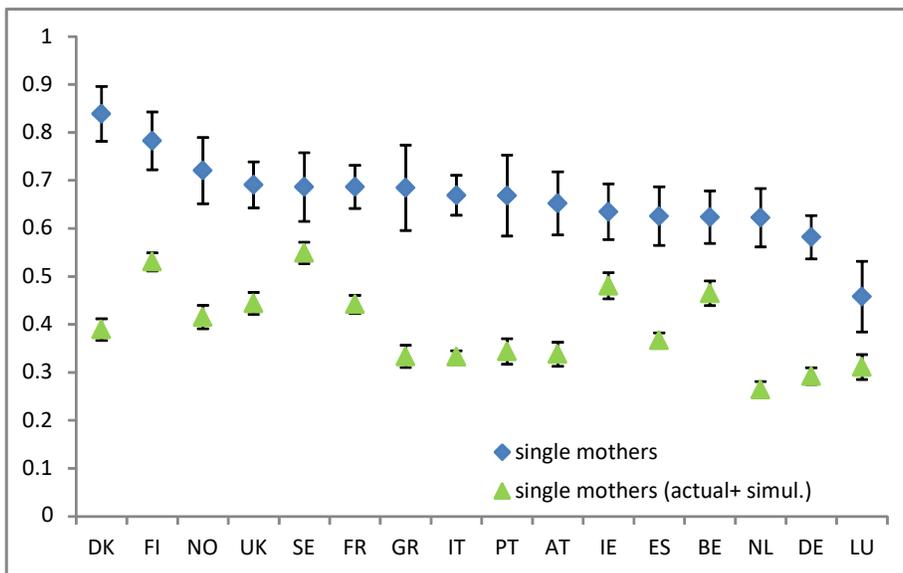
Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Figure 4 - De-familisation rates for single women aged 34-65. Figures derived from actual and simulated observations.



Source: EU-Silc, 2009

Fig. 5 - De-familisation rates for single mothers. Figure derived from actual and simulated observations.



Source: EU-Silc, 2009