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## Poverty and social integration in the enlarged Europe

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## Abstract

Empirical studies of the “old EU” countries suggest that poverty brings limited social relations and a lack of social support in its wake. At the same time, it is thought that in the transition countries, especially, individual supply crises are compensated for by a composite and stable network of social relations as well as a tradition of solidarity as a dominant value. This paper looks at the ways in which cultures of support vary across the enlarged Europe and to this end examines the link between poverty and social disintegration in countries characterised by different economic, cultural and welfare state regimes. The empirical analysis is concerned with (1) the distribution of social integration across the enlarged Europe, and (2) the verification of the hypothesis of accumulation and compensation in the individual countries. An additional step seeks to identify (3) the reasons for the variation across countries in the relationship between poverty and social disintegration. This macro-sociological perspective examines context effects that allow conclusions to be drawn regarding two hypotheses, in particular – that of stigmatisation and that of crowding out. Is poverty, which only affects a minority of the population in countries with a generally high standard of living, closely associated with stigmatisation, and does it lead to social withdrawal? Does a precarious system of social protection increase private solidarity and is support potential reduced in an environment of universal risk insurance? Within this same context, the paper also looks for evidence of (4) greater recourse to family support in precarious life situations. The data on which the study is based is taken from the European Quality of Life Survey – a representative survey of living conditions and quality of life in Europe that was carried out in October 2003.

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### Discussion

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## Introduction

People with low incomes and a low standard of living depend on assistance and have a particular need for social support. The perception of the role and of the relationship between the state and private networks as regards the provision of support varies from country to country. The object of this paper is to determine whether poor people are just as well integrated in social networks as well-off people, whether they can perhaps count on receiving more support than the latter or whether being materially disadvantaged increases the likelihood of social disintegration. It is assumed in the study that the degree to which poor people are socially integrated varies across Europe in accordance with the characteristics of each individual country. What will be examined here is to what extent the social integration of the poor is influenced by the general standard of living in a country, by strategies to combat poverty and norms of equity and solidarity that are specific to different welfare state regimes.

The question as to whether and how economic and social disadvantages interact in different countries is substantial both from a sociological and a socio-political perspective. There is still a tendency in inequality research to focus primarily on the material dimension of social disadvantage and to neglect the role of social relations, even though embeddedness in social networks is widely recognised as an indicator of integration. One merit of the current debate – as popular as it is heated – on the risks of social exclusion is that it has drawn attention to the multi-dimensionality and relationality of social disadvantage (European Commission 2004, Atkinson/Davoudi 2000, Room 1995, Silver 1994). The accompanying diversification of poverty research has brought questions regarding the relationship between monetary and non-monetary disadvantage, and as to whether social support is particularly jeopardised by a low standard of living or whether, on the contrary, such conditions render it particularly robust.

The social policy agenda of the EU also strongly emphasises the need for a poverty policy that is not based exclusively on monetary resources and encourages the widespread promotion of social integration. Family support and social integration via employment are particularly important in this respect. In a context of welfare state reform in the form of privatisation and benefit cuts, social networks are an extremely important resource for individuals who are coping with precarious situations, and they may become increasingly important in the future as a means of compensation. These developments suggest that the relationship between material and immaterial inequality is worth exploring. The possible effects of regime-specific norms of equity, solidarity and supply on the dynamics of this relationship is an area of research that has been rather neglected.

Country-specific variations in the relationship between poverty and social disintegration have not yet been examined for the enlarged EU. A pattern of accumulation appears to be prevalent in the old member states, although its strength vary. Transition studies of the

post-communist countries, by contrast, often argue that these populations compensate for supply crises by means of a comprehensive and stable network of social relations and the extensive practice of solidarity. We know, for example, from Eurobarometer surveys that family support for the poor is widespread in the new member states. A total of 28.6 % of the people in these countries responded in 2001 that it was first and foremost their families who provided support when they lacked basic supplies. This share amounted to only 17 % in the EU-15 countries. So is there a different pattern of interaction between material poverty and social integration in the new member states, where the standard of living is significantly lower than in the old EU countries? And do cultures of support vary according to the type of regime in place?

This paper focuses on investigating the hypothesis of accumulation and compensation. It also asks under which conditions material and social disadvantages accumulate to a greater or lesser degree. Thus, particular consideration is given to the context in which people are poor. To what extent does it depend on the type of welfare state regime, on country-specific strategies to combat poverty and on other national parameters whether poor people receive substantial or little support from their families and friends? Do poor people in prosperous countries withdraw more rapidly into social disintegration because they are stigmatised as a minority and because poverty is interpreted as a personal failure? Is this stigmatisation effect absent, on the other hand, in countries where poverty is widespread because precarious circumstances have become a common experience of life and are considered a consequence of economic crises and government error? The aim of the comparative analysis of data from the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) carried out in 2003 in all member states of the enlarged EU is to reveal patterns of interaction between material poverty and social integration and to find explanations for any differences that emerge between countries.

# 1 Poverty and social integration in the welfare state: Current research and hypotheses

Social relations are considered a useful resource from the perspective both of the individual and of society in general. The provision of support through social relations fulfils basic individual needs for social embeddedness, sense of location and sense of belonging. Family, friendship and organised networks provide emotional support and are a source of various courtesies, helpful information and financial assistance (Diewald 1991). Social disintegration, by contrast, causes anxiety and depression, leads to a decline in general well-being and is associated with bad health and increased mortality (Wilkinson 1996, Putnam 2000). Participation in relationship networks is considered a form of social capital that can be activated when necessary and that under certain conditions can also be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1983). From the macro-sociological point of view, embeddedness in social networks is seen as an important indicator of solidarity, integration and social cohesion. Embeddedness in personal relationships and networks generates trust, creates reliable expectations and is seen as a corner stone for the establishment of and the adherence to norms (Granovetter 1985, Coleman 1988).

Degrees of social support and embeddedness in social networks vary across Europe. Family cohesion is especially predominant in the Mediterranean and eastern European countries, while in the Scandinavian countries, social contacts are less family centred and are also established via friends and organised activities (Paugam/Russell 2000, Oorschot et al. 2006, Kääriäinen/Lehtonen 2006). “Defamilialisation” of this kind is often equated with a lack of social capital and is seen as being associated with a universal welfare state that renders the family superfluous as a producer of welfare and consequently reduces its solidarity, causing social disintegration (Scheepers et al. 2002). This view is based on the general assumption that there is a link between social policy and private readiness to provide help. Where assistance from the state and social services are weak, so the argument goes, then the provision of help is necessarily shifted to the private level. However, this crowding-out hypothesis has been refuted on the basis of empirical evidence. Welfare state support does not necessarily prevent private solidarity, rather can even promote it in some cases (Künemund/Rein 1999, Oorschot/Arts 2005). The Scandinavian welfare states with their universal social insurance systems are characterised by a pluralisation of social contacts and a diversification of social networks, both of which increase the potential for support and strengthen social capital (Saraceno/Olagnero 2006). Thus, while the focus on the family promises a dependable source of support, especially in the Mediterranean and post-communist countries, it also impedes the evolution of a more comprehensive support network and goes hand in hand with a lack of trust in others and with limited extra-familial contacts (Oorschot et al. 2006, Kääriäinen/Lehtonen 2006, Saraceno/Olagnero 2006).



Social relations are particularly valuable in emergencies and difficult circumstances and can be a source of support that mitigates the negative consequences of precarious supply situations. It is well known that burdens are felt to be less stressful when emotional, material and immaterial coping resources are available (Turner 1983, Andreß 1999). As facilitators of access to information and contacts, social networks play an important role in overcoming unemployment, for example (Wegener 1989, Lin 1999, Freitag 2000), and here, too, it is weak ties and weak acquaintances that can prove to be particularly useful (Granovetter 1973). The quality of support provided by the social networks of people with a high level of education and a high income tends to be better than that found in the lower strata of the population, and these networks tend to be both larger and spread over a larger geographical area (Fischer 1982, Diwald 1986, Crow 2004). Subjectively perceived isolation, especially, is very prevalent amongst the poor, who suspend cost-intensive activities (Kern 2003). While cross-country empirical studies mainly show that social embeddedness is dependent on status and confirm to varying degrees the thesis of accumulation, in actual fact only a minority of the materially disadvantaged have no social support (Tsakloglou/Papadopoulos 2002, Russell/Whelan 2004). The link between material and social disadvantage is weaker in the southern than in the northern European countries. Whether it exists at all clearly also depends on the chosen indicator. While poor people and the unemployed more often live alone, contact with neighbours or organised activities, for example, are not restricted (Gallie/Paugam/Jacobs 2003).

On this evidence, the state of research is therefore not clear cut, and two rival hypotheses regarding the association between poverty and social integration emerge: The *thesis of compensation* assumes that in the event of material disadvantage, solidarity will increase, networks will become more tightly knit, and help will be availed of that could be useful in coping with the precarious supply situation. Seen rationally, it is not withdrawal from, but turning to other people that is plausible in situations of need. An example that supports this view is the intensification of family support in emergency situations, for example the delayed exit of unemployed youth from the parental home in Mediterranean countries (Saraceno 2006).

In relation to the transformation of Eastern Europe, in particular, and the associated rapid spread of poverty there, attention has been drawn to the widespread solidarity, the strength of the social networks and the wealth of the relationships found in the post-communist countries. Under the thesis of compensation, if the state does not provide an adequate social insurance net, and if it cannot guarantee a minimum level of subsistence, then this deficit is compensated for by increased recourse to social networks and collective or private coping strategies (Sik/Wellman 1999, Prisching 2003).

If this assumption is true, then we should expect to see an increased readiness to provide support through private social networks in post-communist and Mediterranean countries that have only rudimentary social welfare benefits and a deeply solidaristic value orientation. Thus, both cultural and religious traditions that emphasise solidarity and family cohesion, and social security systems aimed only at a minority and covering only basic needs, can be at the root of this compensatory response. In developed welfare states

with universal social insurance systems, by contrast, poverty should have a stronger effect on social disintegration because, according to the logic of compensation, state assistance should displace private support.

The *thesis of accumulation* sees social disintegration as a consequence of, or as a companion to poverty. The predominant view in the debate on social exclusion and the underclass is that disadvantages accumulate. One explanation is the thesis formulated by Bourdieu, for example, that social networks require maintenance and that maintenance generates costs. Whereas within the family the rule may be a principle of solidarity that is not based on direct reciprocity, most extra-familial social relations are based on a logic of exchange and reciprocal support. When a person's life situation is determined by poverty, he or she lacks the means to uphold the principle of reciprocity. Family relationships are also not always impervious to financial difficulties, which are inevitably accompanied by conflict; in fact, male unemployment and low incomes increase the risk of divorce (Andreß/Lohmann 2000: 73). Disadvantages such as poverty and unemployment are often associated with shame and stigmatisation, so that those affected withdraw from social contact or are shunned. The result is the breakdown of relationships that were linked to a certain standard of living or life situation that no longer exists. As a consequence, the social contacts of the poor are focused on the family, while extra-familial networks are curtailed. Arguments of this nature seem particularly plausible when poverty is a result of downward mobility. The notion of stigmatisation is probably more applicable to affluent societies, where social disadvantage in the form of a low standard of living is restricted to a minority. Where poverty is a widespread phenomenon, by contrast, it is seen as a collective fate and it therefore causes less ground for feelings of stigmatisation (Clark 2003, Böhnke 2004). The fact that poverty is often accompanied by lack of acknowledgement, resignedness and reduced possibilities for social participation renders the assumption that poverty and social disintegration accumulate very likely for all countries. The strength of the association between the two will probably vary depending on the general level of prosperity in a country, the value given to solidarity and family cohesion, and the scope of the social welfare system.

We know little about the context-dependent variations of the cumulative relationship between poverty and social disintegration. There have been no studies to date on the behaviour of the new EU member states in this respect. The following empirical analysis illustrates characteristics of social integration in the enlarged Europe and examines whether poverty is accompanied by social disintegration (accumulation) or whether integration is reinforced in precarious supply situations (compensation). In the same context, the study seeks to determine whether there is greater recourse to the family in precarious supply situations and in which countries this is the case. Finally, reasons are sought for the differences between countries as regards the relationship between poverty and social integration. Here, the socio-demographic characteristics of the poor population, the welfare-state context, the general standard of living and prevailing norms of solidarity are chosen as explanatory mechanisms.

## 2 Data

In order to respond to the above research questions, we need an up-to-date European survey that also covers the new EU member states and that provides comparable information on material living conditions and social integration. Although the situation regarding data availability has improved immensely in recent years for comparative European research, even just these few questions represent a major challenge when it comes to selecting appropriate data, for social integration is an item that is rarely included in a comprehensive manner in surveys that also cover the new member states, and it is even more rarely included in combination with poverty indicators.

In the following, we draw on the European Quality of Life Survey of 2003, which contains information on the living conditions, attitudes and perceptions of all EU citizens (Alber et al. 2004, Kohler 2006, 2007). The relatively rough income data contained in the EQLS can be supplemented with additional information on supply with consumer goods. In addition, the subjective evaluation of the respondents' social lives is also well documented. We provide information on 25 European countries, excluding Romania and Bulgaria, because these countries lack some aggregate indicators which become decisive when the paper proceeds.

We use the household-weighted per capita income in order to identify individuals living on low incomes. Unfortunately, income data are not reliable to construct a poverty indicator, therefore, data on the availability of everyday basic goods are used to identify people in poverty (Table 1). For determining the integration potential of individuals, several indicators are available. These include the frequency of contacts with friends and neighbours, the availability of support in emergencies, and the assessment and evaluation of social and family life as well as social integration. A synoptic measure is constructed on the basis of the single indicators by adding up several deficits in the sphere of social relations so as to operationalise potential social disintegration. Most of these indicators do not reflect actual receipt of support, rather the respondents' evaluation of and degree of confidence in their own personal networks and their expectation of being able to depend on them should the need arise. This is, therefore, a measure of perceived social integration and not a direct quantification of help that has been accepted or of support that would actually be available in a real situation. The expectation of remaining isolated in situations of need and personal dissatisfaction with one's social environment, family life and participation in society are sure signs of a lack of social capital, and all the more so when they coincide.

Following Esping-Andersen (1990, 1999) and other classifications that modify his work (Leibfried 1992, Siaroff 1994, Ferrera 1996, Bonoli 1997), five types of welfare regime are distinguished that each represent their own redistribution mechanisms and relationships between market, state and family: The southern European countries represent one cluster

Table 1: Indicators for the operationalisation of precarious material supply and lack of social support, EQLS 2003

	Indicator	Operationalisation	Item
Material supply situation	Low income	Equivalent household income, bottom quartile	
	Deprivation	Lack of basic goods that guarantee a minimum standard of living (the threshold for deprivation is calculated individually for each country on the basis of the average for the missing items)*	For each of the following items, can your household afford it if you want it? Keeping your home adequately warm; paying for a week's annual holiday away from home (not staying with relatives); replacing worn-out furniture; a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day if you want it; buying new, rather than second-hand clothes; having friends or family for a drink or meal at least once a month; car or van for private use; home computer; washing machine (No)
Social (dis)integration	Frequency of contact	Contact with friends or neighbours	On average, thinking of people living outside your household, how often do you have direct face-to-face contact with any of your friends and neighbours? (several times a year/less often)
	Support potential	No support whatsoever in emergencies	From whom would you get support in each of the following situations? If you needed help around the house when ill, if you needed advice about a serious personal or family matter, if you were feeling a bit depressed and wanted someone to talk to, if you needed to urgently raise 1000 (EU-15) / 500 (NMS) to face an emergency (nobody)
	Perception of social integration	Dissatisfaction with social/family life	Can you please tell me on a scale from 1 to 10 how satisfied you are with your family life (social life), where 1 means you are very dissatisfied and 10 means you are satisfied? (0-5)
		Perception of social integration	I feel left out of society (yes)
		Aggregate index of eight individual indicators (Cronbach's alpha: .613).	Limited contact to friends and neighbours, no support (illness, advice, depression, money), dissatisfied with family and social life, feeling left out of society

\* Deprivation is defined as not being able to afford twice as many basic goods as the average for the overall population of the country. The following deprivation thresholds emerge: More than two missing items out of nine (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden), more than three missing items (Cyprus, Malta), more than four missing items (Czech Republic, Greece), more than five missing items (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Portugal), more than six missing items (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania).

that also comprises Malta and Cyprus. The regimes in this region are characterised by the extreme importance they attribute to family cohesion and to inter-generational solidarity and by an only rudimentary provision of social benefits. The post-communist countries represent another cluster. This is suggested by their common experience of the upheaval of transition – especially the curtailment of social benefits despite growing need as a result of rising poverty and unemployment. While liberalisation strategies are pursued more consistently in some post-communist countries than in others, generally welfare state practices that follow both the Bismarckian and the Beveridgian approaches are being implemented (Deacon 2000). Attitudes towards religion and family cohesion, especially, also help to explain differences between countries as regards social integration and must be appended as a supplement to the typology of welfare states.

### 3 Social integration in Europe

Social integration is readily available for the large majority of the population in most European countries (Table 2). The aggregate index adds together eight indicators of deficits in social integration. Around half of the population in almost all countries has none of the problems with social support and integration listed here, but the situation is much less favourable in the post-communist countries. In Latvia, especially, only around a third of the population reports a problem-free social life. By contrast, social integration is guaranteed for a relatively large share of the population in the northern European countries. A total of 75 % of the Scandinavian population perceives no deficits as regards social integration.

We speak of a heightened risk of social disintegration and a pronounced lack of social capital when three or more of these disadvantages coincide. The share of people who are only inadequately integrated according to this definition varies from one country to the next and also according to the type of welfare regime. The Scandinavian countries are particularly integrative, for only 2.5 % of their populations have severe problems with social integration. The share is below 5 % in the liberal and continental European countries, although the fluctuations between the individual countries are quite pronounced in these two groups. Austria (2 %) does better, for example, than Germany and Belgium (5 %). Although Ireland is considered a liberal welfare state just like the United Kingdom, it is a highly solidaristic society compared to the latter. While Ireland's population is very well integrated and only 2 % report substantial problems, the risk of social disintegration is much more widespread in the UK (6.5 %). The share in the Mediterranean countries varies substantially as well: Spain and Malta (2 %) do far better than Cyprus (8 %), Greece (7

Table 2: Social integration in Europe

	No deficits	1 or 2 deficits (out of eight)*, % of the population	3 or more deficits
<b>Social democratic</b>	<b>74.4</b>	<b>23.2</b>	<b>2.5</b>
Finland	74.9	22.8	2.3
Denmark	74.7	23.8	1.5
Netherlands	74.0	22.9	3.1
Sweden	73.9	23.2	2.9
<b>Continental</b>	<b>70.1</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>3.6</b>
Austria	79.3	18.8	1.9
Italy	75.9	21.0	3.1
Germany	71.3	24.6	4.1
Luxembourg	70.4	26.9	2.6
France	62.4	33.3	4.3
Belgium	61.6	32.9	5.5
<b>Mediterranean</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>5.0</b>
Spain	77.8	19.8	2.4
Malta	70.8	27.4	1.8
Greece	66.4	26.9	6.7
Cyprus	63.4	28.4	8.2
Portugal	62.4	31.5	6.1
<b>Liberal</b>	<b>66.8</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>4.2</b>
Ireland	75.4	22.7	1.9
UK	58.4	35.1	6.5
<b>Post-communist</b>	<b>46.0</b>	<b>43.0</b>	<b>11.1</b>
Slovenia	58.4	37.8	3.8
Czech Republic	55.7	37.2	7.1
Hungary	54.6	38.3	7.1
Poland	49.8	42.4	7.8
Slovakia	47.3	43.8	8.9
Lithuania	45.0	41.9	13.2
Estonia	41.3	45.3	13.4
Latvia	35.2	46.3	18.5

Note: \*The percentage values refer to the aggregate index for social integration, which sums up eight deficits (see Table 1).

Source: EQLS 2003.

%) and Portugal (6 %). In the post-communist countries, a substantial share of the population – an average 11 % – has problems with social support and integration. Especially in the Baltic countries the proportion of the disintegrated population is very large and goes up to 19 % in Latvia.

On the basis of the distributions described here, what stands out in particular is the marked difference between the old member states and the post-communist countries. Even such differently organised regimes as the Scandinavian and southern European countries

produce similar outcomes as regards the social integration of their populations. A possible explanation for this pattern could be that while solidarity is highly important in both regime types, it is organised differently. The new member states, by contrast, and especially the Baltic countries, have the weakest solidarity structure. Based on these overall distributions, the crowding out hypothesis, which predicts that private support potential will be displaced in developed welfare states and will be particularly high where the state assumes little responsibility for redistribution, can be initially refuted. It could only lay claim to validity if the Scandinavian populations, in particular, were highly disintegrated and the post-communist countries showed better results. But how is the risk of social disintegration distributed when the categories of low-income earners and deprived people are examined separately?

#### 4 Does poverty increase the risk of social disintegration?

The focus in the following will be on the link between poverty and social integration in each individual country. Do social disadvantages accumulate, so that to shortfalls in material supplies is added a lack of social support, or can people in precarious supply situations count on the fact that they belong to a social network and can therefore compensate for material poverty through integration and social proximity?

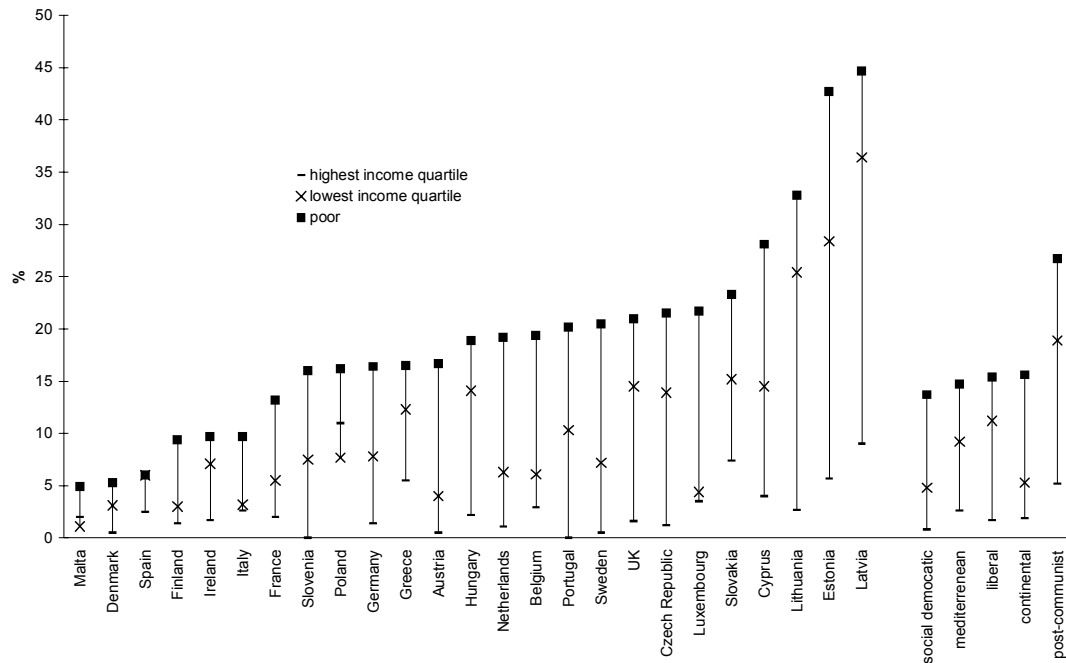
Figure 1 shows the distribution of social disintegration in three different population groups per country: high-income group, low-income group and poor individuals, where the latter are defined as people whose standard of living falls significantly below the average level for their country. This latter indicator is understood as a poverty indicator that explicitly distinguishes the category of poor from that of low-income.

In all the countries of the enlarged EU, people with higher incomes are most integrated socially. Especially in the old EU-15 countries, social disintegration is extremely rare amongst the well off. People with low-income run a higher risk of being socially disintegrated. Throughout the EU, they are on average four times as likely to be affected by social disintegration as people in the upper income quartile (12 % vs. 3 %).

However, the least support is given to those whose standard of living is severely limited and whose basic sustenance is difficult to guarantee. The share of social disintegration among the poor ranges from 5 % in Malta to 45 % in Latvia. Material disadvantage is not compensated for by emotional proximity and support networks and is also not accompanied



Figure 1: Social disintegration by population group (%)



Note: Respondents are classified as socially disintegrated if they have agreed to at least three of the eight indicators of inadequate social integration (see Tables 1 and 2 for the operationalisation and distribution of the index values).

Source: EQS 2003.

by greater solidarity. Those who have the greatest need for social integration receive it the least. The worse the material supply situation, the more widespread is social disintegration – which confirms the hypothesis of accumulation quite clearly.

The variation in the degree of polarisation between rich and poor is conspicuous. It is lowest in some Mediterranean countries (Malta, Spain) and some northern European countries like Denmark and Finland, where although poor people are likely to enjoy less social integration than well-off people, the difference is less pronounced than in other countries. The same applies to Italy and Poland, for example. The share of poor who are weakly socially integrated is very high compared to high-income earners in Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, where the share of socially disintegrated people is around ten times as high amongst the poor as in the highest income group.



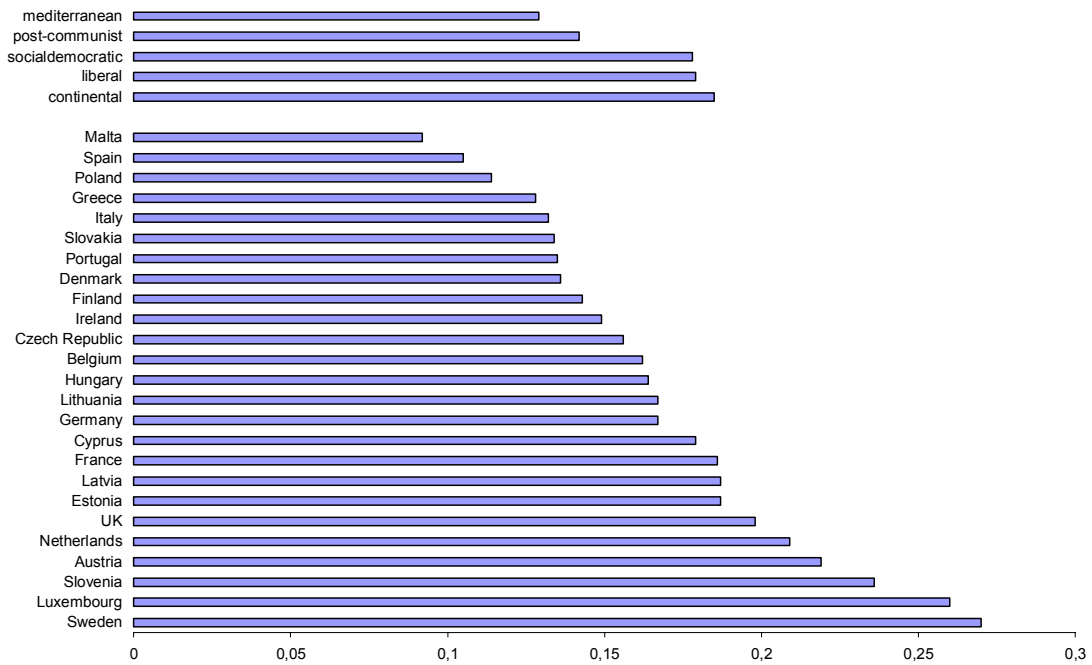
It is difficult to carry out a classification by type of welfare state on the basis of these distributions. The heterogeneity within the country clusters is so strong that it is practically impossible to identify corresponding patterns of solidarity and integration. There are some countries where only a very small share of the population is socially disintegrated and where the differences between rich and poor appear to be minor: Malta, Denmark, Spain. On the other hand, the population in most of the post-communist countries is not very well socially integrated and the polarisation between rich and poor is quite high. Generally, the difference between old and new member states is the most striking visible pattern that arises from the given results. However, also the new member states fail to present a homogenous picture. The poor bear a particularly high social risk in the Baltic states. Indeed, the Baltic countries already stood out above on account of the extreme lack of social integration in their general populations.

## 5 Country-specific variations in the relationship between poverty and social integration

The mechanism of accumulation of material and social disadvantages affects every country in the enlarged Europe. The more the supply situation is limited, the less are social support and social networks available and satisfactory. However, differences in the strength of this association can still be observed. The poor are not socially disintegrated in equal measure in all countries. This section will investigate the causes of the differences between countries as regards the strength of the cumulative interaction between poverty and lack of social integration.

The poverty effect illustrates the strength of the association between poverty and disintegration when other factors of influence are held constant. Figure 2 presents an indicator obtained from linear regression analyses that shows the strength of the effect of poverty on social disintegration when age, gender, education, household structure and employment status are kept constant. Without these controlling indicators, the influence of poverty on social integration would possibly be quantified inaccurately. For example, if the poor population consists mainly of young people, as it does in Ireland, then one can assume that the effect of poverty on social disintegration will be under-estimated because young people can unquestionably count to a greater extent on family support than people in middle age. It is also important to control for the effect of unemployment because there are numerous associations between both unemployment and poverty, and unemployment and social contact, which are not, however, the focus of this paper (Paugam/Russell 2000,

Figure 2: The effect (regression coefficient B) of poverty on social disintegration (controlling for employment status, age, education, household structure and gender)



Note: The regression coefficient B indicates the effect of poverty on the degree of social disintegration when age, employment status, education, household structure and gender are held constant. Model: Index of social disintegration as the dependent variable, index of lack of consumption goods as the independent variable (see Table 1).  
 Source: EQLS 2003.

Gallie/Paugam/Jacobs 2003). Moreover, household structure is decisive, because support might be easier to obtain when the family context is large and people are living under the same roof. The higher the value of the poverty effect, the greater is the explanatory power of a significantly below-average standard of living for the lack of social integration as it is experienced by individuals.

In addition to Poland, the southern European countries, in particular, stand out as being characterised by a relatively minor degree of association between poverty and social disintegration. The effect is also relatively slight in the post-communist countries. Thus, it is in the countries whose social systems tend to be limited to basic assistance and that value family cohesion highly that the poor are more likely to receive social support. Social disintegration is much more strongly associated with material disadvantage in the affluent

“old EU” countries of continental Europe and Scandinavia – Sweden, Luxembourg, Austria, the Netherlands, UK. Even if strong poverty is a rarer phenomenon in these countries because an above-average standard of living is guaranteed for the large majority of citizens, solidarity with the relatively small group of deprived people is less apparent, and there is therefore more scope for feelings of stigmatisation. It is only when poverty is widespread that it is blamed less on the individual and interpreted more as a collective problem of society, so that it also leads less often to social disintegration, we can suppose. However, heterogeneity within country groups is large. The two countries characterised as liberal welfare regimes perform quite differently: The United Kingdom stands out as a country with a large association between poverty and inadequate social integration. Poverty and inequality are relatively widespread in the UK and the social welfare system is geared towards satisfying only basic needs. In Ireland, these characteristics of the liberal welfare state are evidently offset by stronger ties of solidarity.

## 6 Context effects to explain the link between poverty and social disintegration

Is it possible to explain the different strengths of the associations between poverty and social disintegration in the European countries on the basis of context features and to recognise systematic variations? Here, a few indicators regarding each country’s economic situation, social benefits and welfare system, and predominant religion and prevailing values will be used to examine macro-structural links. We use per capita gross national product as an indicator of the general economic situation (Table 3). Both the risk-of-poverty rate and the share of deprived individuals allow conclusions to be drawn about stigmatisation effects. It is also conceivable that religiosity has a positive influence on readiness to help and that Catholicism, in particular, with its strong emphasis on family values, strengthens social integration. The indicator that can be used here is the dominant religion in each country and the importance for her or his life that each individual attributes to religion in general.

Cultural values and traditions of helpfulness can be ascertained via attitudes to solidarity with the poor and to the imputation of responsibility. There are three possible indicators in this case: One measures the diffusion of family solidarity with the poor, while the other two provide details as to whether the prevalent opinion in a population is that poverty is the personal responsibility of each poor individual or that poverty is a

Table 3: Macro indicators of context effects

Indicator	Source/Year	Notes
<u>Economic situation</u>		
Per capita GNP	Eurostat, structural indicators, 2005 data	
Risk-of-poverty rate	Eurostat 2005, 2003 data	
Share of deprived	EQLS 2003	
<u>Religiosity</u>		
Religious denomination	World Value Survey 1999/2000	Do you belong to a religious denomination? If yes, which one?
Importance of religion	World Value Survey 1999/2000	How important is religion in your life? (% very important)
<u>Values and attitudes</u>		
Family responsibility	Eurobarometer 52.1, 1999 / Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2002	In your opinion, which of the following currently provide most of the help to poor or socially excluded people in your country? (% "their family" mentioned among the top three)
Poverty as individual failure	Eurobarometer 56.1, 2001 / Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2002	Why in your opinion are there people who live in need? (% of "because of laziness and lack of willpower")
Poverty as societal failure	Eurobarometer 56.1, 2001 / Candidate Countries Eurobarometer 2002	Why in your opinion are there people who live in need? (% of "because there is much injustice in our society")
<u>Welfare</u>		
Social protection expenditure as % of GDP	Eurostat structural indicators 2002	
Means-tested social protection as % of overall social protection expenditure	Eurostat structural indicators 2002	

consequence of injustices in society. Solidarity with and willingness to help the poor will probably be more widespread when responsibility is ascribed to a greater extent to injustice in society.

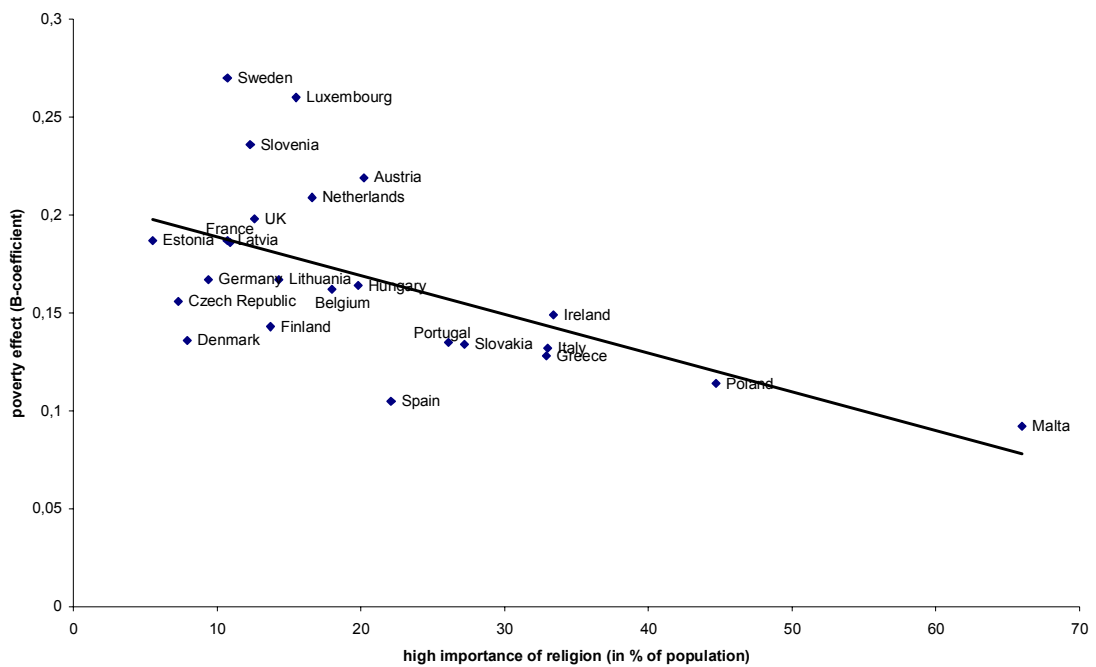
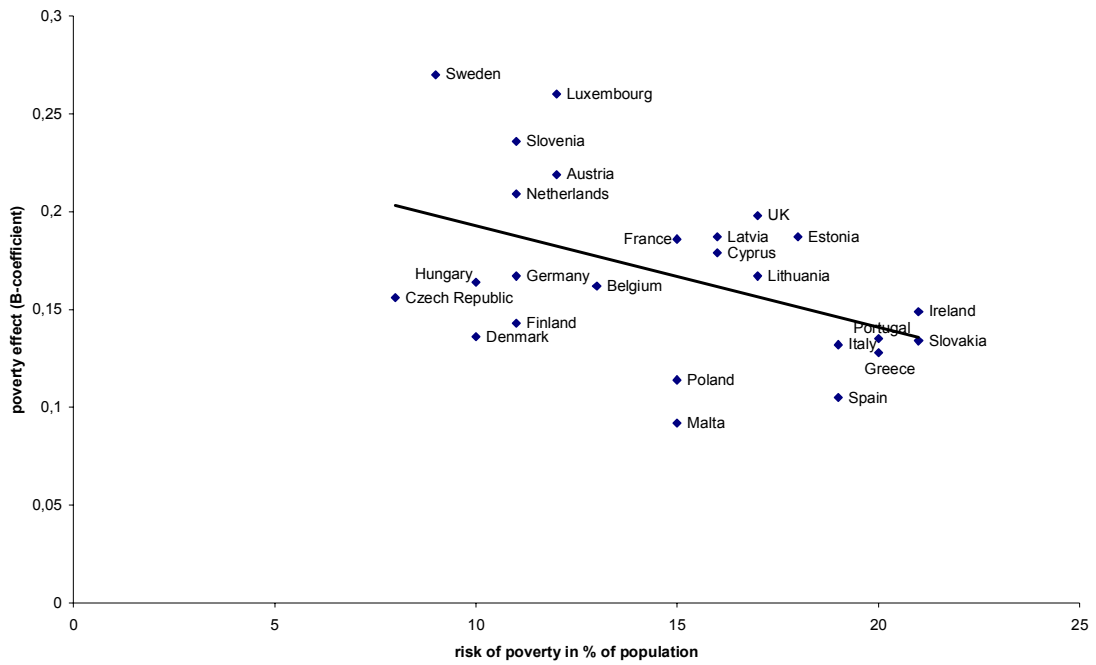
A final block of indicators captures the features of welfare states. The amount of spending on social protection is an indicator of the scope of social benefits. The higher the spending, the better the poor are likely to be provided for materially. According to the

crowding-out hypothesis, we should then be able to conclude that poor people will be less socially integrated in these circumstances because private assistance will become less necessary. The share of means-tested benefits in relation to all social benefits indicates the universality of social welfare. The more widespread are means tests, the more restrictive will state support be, and accordingly the greater will be the need for private assistance. Under this assumption, social integration should therefore be strong amongst the poor. The categorisation of welfare state regimes, finally, differentiates countries according to specific characteristics concerning the provision of social benefits and also distinguishes different traditions of social equalisation. The question is whether the social capital of the poor varies according to type of regime. For example, does the combination in the Mediterranean countries of more restrictive social security systems that guarantee only basic sustenance to the needy with a strong tradition of family solidarity contribute to the fact that the poor are particularly well integrated here?

Figures 3a and 3b provide a graphic representation of the link between two context factors and the above-illustrated poverty effect. Country-specific characteristics such as the relative income poverty rate and the importance of religion are depicted in relation to the influence of individually experienced poverty on social disintegration. The higher the risk of poverty rate in a country, the weaker is the effect of poverty on social disintegration. In other words, when many people are poor, the probability that individual poverty will weaken social integration is lower. Stigmatisation effects enter into play in particular when poverty only affects a minority and is interpreted as a result of personal failure. However, this link is rather weak. There is a stronger connection between religion and the social integration of the poor. The more important the value of religion in a country, the weaker is the effect of poverty on social integration. Thus, the principle of solidarity with the needy and the significance given to family cohesion which are associated with Christianity possibly have a positive effect on the stability of social networks and the availability of social support for the poor.

Table 4 presents a range of multi-level models that make use of both individual and context features to explain social disintegration amongst the poor. First, model 1 only considers the influence of socio-demographic factors. Not only unemployment strongly determines the degree of social disintegration amongst the poor, but the probability of losing social support also increases for pensioners and homemakers in precarious supply situations. The level of education of the poor does not help very much to predict the probability of social integration. This is because the group of the poor already represents a screened selection and already constitutes a group of people who have enjoyed only a brief education. The only exception are people who belong to the population of the poor because they are still studying, and these are at a lower risk of social disintegration. Controlled for retirement and illness, age, however, is a provider of social integration amongst the deprived. Household structure is decisive: Living as a couple with or without children reduces the risk of social disintegration in the event of material deprivation. Even single

Figures 3a, b: Effect of poverty on social disintegration and its relationship with context factors (risk-of-poverty rate, importance of religion)



Source: EQLS 2003, World Value Survey 1999/2000, Eurostat 2005.

parents who are deprived can count on social support compared to those living alone. A chronic illness, by contrast, has a decisively negative effect on the social integration of the population of the severely poor.

When context variables are inserted into multi-level models, some interesting effects emerge and provide insights about differences between countries that cannot be explained on the basis of the individual characteristics of the poor population. However, only some of the chosen indicators prove to be significant in a statistical sense. As already illustrated in the figure above, the poor are less well socially integrated when they live in countries in which poverty and deprivation are relatively rare. The calculations also substantiate the significant effect of religiosity. Compared to mainly Protestant countries, countries with a majority Catholic population are better able to guarantee social integration for poor people. The more important is religion in the life of the people of a country, the more it is evidently considered a matter of course to socially integrate the poor. The poor are also more likely to be socially integrated in a country where the prevalent opinion is that it is not laziness or a lack of willpower that places people in crisis situations, rather that a large part of the responsibility is borne by injustice in society or more generally by the societal circumstances. When poverty is considered a consequence of personal failure, then the poor are left to a greater extent to look after themselves and have less access to supportive networks. These associations indicate that the attitudes of a population to poverty and how it should be combated have a substantial influence on the integration of the poor.

Welfare state characteristics do not influence the social integration of the poor. Although the coefficients all point in the anticipated direction – the higher the spending on social protection, the more likely it is that the poor will be disintegrated; the share of means-tested benefits in relation to social benefits as a whole has a positive effect on the integration of the poor – they remain weak and are not significant in a statistical sense. This is due to the household structure in every country captured with the individual variables discussed in model 1. There is a strong association between welfare state characteristics and the composition of households throughout Europe. The share of single households is higher in northern and continental Europe, whereas larger families and family solidarity are more common in southern Europe and post-communist countries. Household composition and welfare state characteristics are intertwined quite closely, so that the aggregate indicators lose their explanatory potential.

Table 4: Which context features explain the country-specific risk of social disintegration of the poor? (random intercept regression analysis)

		B coeff.	Significance	Notes
Model 1	Gender ( <i>men</i> )	-.129	.053	Individual level only
	Educational ( <i>higher level</i> )			
	Lower education	.066	.549	
	Mean education	.112	.264	
	Still studying	-.597	.029	
	Age	-.009	.002	
	Labour market ( <i>employed</i> )			
	Homemaker	.373	.002	
	Unemployed	.542	.000	
	Retired	.322	.003	
	Household structure ( <i>single</i> )			
	Single parent	-.303	.008	
	Couples with or without children	-.529	.000	
	Chronically ill	.369	.000	
		B coeff., semi-standardised	Significance	Notes
Model 2	GDP per capita	.017	.796	Individual level plus macro variable
Model 3	Risk of poverty	-.056	.043	
Model 4	Percentage of deprived	-.024	.645	
Model 5	Religion (Protestant)			
	Catholic	-.190	.000	
	Mixed	-.077	.018	
	Orthodox	-.070	.130	
Model 6	Importance of religion	-.108	.012	
Model 7	Family responsibility	.060	.190	
Model 8	Poverty as individual failure	.112	.021	
Model 9	Poverty as societal failure	-.071	.036	
Model 10	Amount of social expenditure	.058	.296	
Model 11	Means-tested social support	-.049	.463	
Model 12	Welfare regime type (social democratic)			
	Continental	.055	.657	
	Liberal	.123	.171	
	Mediterranean	-.041	.739	
	Post-communist	-.080	.575	
Model 13	No confidence in social benefit system	.063	.200	

Notes: The sample consists of the deprived population in 23 countries (N = 4506); data were not available from Cyprus and Malta for some of the context factors. The dependent variable is social disintegration (index, see Table 1). Models 2 to 13 also incorporate the individual variables from Model 1, but only show the effect of the relevant macro variable. Due to the index construction a positive coefficient indicates a higher risk of social disintegration compared to the reference group, whereas a negative sign indicates higher chances to be socially integrated.

Source: EQLS 2003.



## 7 Family solidarity in precarious supply situations

To conclude, this section will use an example to seek to identify the main source of social support. Will the results indicate that the poor – even if they experience less solidarity overall – tend to depend more on family support than the well off as suggested by the literature? The assumption seems plausible for within the family, support is usually given unconditionally and without any expectation of reciprocity, whereas help from friends is possibly more likely to be withdrawn when a person's life situation is characterised by poverty. How, then, does the source of support vary from country to country? Finally, this section will under which circumstances family solidarity will be strong and reliable in cases of poverty.

Table 5 shows how many people in each country would turn in emergency situations first to their family or first to friends, neighbours or workmates. The question asked concerns the support potential if advice were needed about a serious personal or family matter, if a person to talk to were needed in a moment of depression, if help around the house were needed in the event of illness, or if a large sum of money were urgently needed in an emergency situation. If the respondents say they would turn to their family for help in at least three out of four of these emergency situations, then the type of support expectation is considered to be family oriented. If they name their friends, neighbours or workmates as the potential source of support in at least three of the four cases, then they are classed as having an extra-familial orientation.

The results show that family solidarity is very strong in Europe. At least half of the population in each country (only rarely is it less) can count on their family when they need urgent help. This is most true for the Mediterranean countries and for the majority of the post-communist, new EU member states. In the Baltic countries, but also in Finland, Denmark and France, recourse to the family is not particularly prevalent in cases of extreme emergency, whereas extra-familial support through friends, workmates or neighbours is more important. In the southern European countries (Italy, Malta and Greece) and in some post-communist countries (Poland and Hungary) extra-familial support plays only a minor role.

A very surprising pattern emerges as regards the support that low-income earners and deprived people would avail of in emergencies. Contrary to the assumption made above, recourse to the family does not increase in precarious life situations. It actually decreases in most countries – especially in welfare states of the socialdemocratic type, and also in some of the continental-corporatist and post-communist countries. In some countries the picture is not clear cut or the differences between the population groups are not significant. Only in the southern European countries is the trend reversed – here, poor people have greater recourse to family support. In Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, support from the family increases the more precarious a person's material situation becomes.

Table 5: Family and extra-familial support in emergency situations (in %)

	Primarily family <sup>1</sup>			Primarily friends, workmates, neighbours <sup>2</sup>		
	High income	Low income	Poverty	High income	Low income	Poverty
<b>Mediterranean</b>	<b>64.3</b>	<b>71.7</b>	<b>71.7</b>	<b>12.7</b>	<b>9.4</b>	<b>10.1</b>
Cyprus	77.8	72.2	58.2	3	12.4	21.8
Portugal	67.5	72.2	73.2	16.6	13.2	10.6
Spain	65.6	65.1	75.9	8.8	12.5	10.8
Malta	59.3	77.8	54.2	7.7	5.6	3.3
Greece	52.3	74.3	76.1	23.5	2.9	8
<b>Post-communist</b>	<b>60.2</b>	<b>54.3</b>	<b>53.3</b>	<b>15.5</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15.2</b>
Hungary	72.3	68.3	69.8	8.4	10.3	9.1
Poland	71.7	65.1	66.3	6.4	7.8	7.1
Slovenia	66.9	67	49.1	7.9	13	16.1
Slovakia	66	65	66	14.4	13.2	10.8
Czech Republic	63.6	55.9	56.7	15.9	14	14.5
Lithuania	56.3	47.3	50.8	17.2	17.3	16.7
Estonia	43	36.1	36.3	23.7	21	22.8
Latvia	40.6	28.1	32.6	28.3	25.5	24.6
<b>Liberal</b>	<b>58.5</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>47.5</b>	<b>18.7</b>	<b>19.3</b>	<b>32.8</b>
UK	59.3	55.9	43.2	16.5	16.4	31.4
Ireland	56.6	56.1	53.5	22.4	23.4	35.3
<b>Continental</b>	<b>55.9</b>	<b>59.7</b>	<b>48.5</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>16.1</b>	<b>24.2</b>
Austria	63.4	58.3	50	18.3	18.7	21.1
Luxembourg	61.6	65.8	-	9.4	13.3	-
Germany	60.1	62.8	53.6	17.7	9.6	20.2
Belgium	55.8	51.5	38.5	19.2	21.7	33.8
Italy	55.2	74.7	90.6	12.3	7.3	3.1
Netherlands	54.2	51.8	-	16.3	19.5	24.3
France	41.6	49.7	31.4	35.1	24.3	34.8
<b>Social democratic</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>46.1</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>15.9</b>	<b>20.7</b>	<b>25.9</b>
Sweden	65.5	48.1	-	9.1	16.4	18.8
Denmark	53.5	46.9	40.7	18	23	-
Finland	47.6	39.2	36.2	20.7	24.1	31.9

Notes: (-) Less than 30 cases. <sup>1</sup> The respondents say they would primarily ask their families for help in at least three out of four emergency situations (help around the house in the event of illness, advice about a serious personal or family matter, someone to talk to in a moment of depression, urgent need to raise a large sum of money). <sup>2</sup> The respondents say that their potential source of support in at least three out of four emergency situations would be friends, neighbours or workmates.

Source: EQLS 2003.

Almost in a mirror image of this latter result, the recourse to support from friends, neighbours or workmates in emergency situations decreases when a person's financial situation becomes precarious (Malta, Portugal, Greece and Italy). In some northern European countries, by contrast, extra-familial support rises in importance for low-income earners and deprived people (Sweden, the Netherlands and Finland). This also applies to Ireland and UK, and Slovenia and Cyprus. But several countries show no significant differences between prosperous and poor population groups as regards recourse to help from friends.

Summing up, the generally high value attributed to family support stands out. The Mediterranean countries – where family solidarity is traditionally highly important and is also institutionalised in subsidiarity regulations under the social welfare system (Saraceno 2004) – are more family centred when it comes to actual assistance and social support. The same applies to some post-communist countries, which have also implemented social welfare systems that incorporate family-based means tests (Deacon 2000: 154). The Scandinavian countries with their universal social security systems rank amongst the countries in which support from friends is valued relatively highly. Increased recourse by poor people to assistance from within the family circle in order to overcome emergencies is confirmed by this data only for the Mediterranean countries. In numerous European countries, poor people count less on the family than other groups of the population. Support from friends counters this trend only in some cases (Sweden, Finland, United Kingdom, Slovenia and Cyprus). The lower the standard of living, the more often the respondents report that they have nobody to ask for help.

Which factors lead people to turn first to their families for support in precarious material circumstances? Is it individual characteristics such as age or illness, the size of the household, family status or parenthood? Or do country-specific value orientations and welfare-state characteristics also have an influence on the degree of focus on the family in emergency situations? Just a few characteristics that mainly reflect opportunity structures help to explain the family orientation of poor people irrespective of differences between countries (Table 6). As could be expected, the type of household and type of family, especially, prove to be decisive. Compared to people who live alone, all other population groups turn more often to their families for support, and this is particularly true for couples with children and people who live in multi-generation households – especially in the southern European and post-communist countries. Generally speaking, the fact that there are children in a family, whether they live in the family home or not, increases individuals' recourse to family members in emergency situations. Being of retirement age or being older in general also increases the family orientation of the support culture in precarious supply situations. The model also shows that it tends to be the middle and low education strata that are more family centred. When other relevant variables are kept constant, it emerges that the highly educated, especially, are the least family oriented when they are poor.

Table 6: Individual and context features that explain family support for the poor (deprived and/or lowest income quartile) (logistic regression / random intercept logit models)

Individual level			Context effects (semi-standardised)			
	B coeff.	Sig.			B coeff.	Sig.
Age	.006	.037	Model 1	Poverty risk	.050	.530
Female (Male)	-.019	.755	Model 2	Importance of religion	.132	.001
Living together/married; divorced/separated	-.334	.012	Model 3	No confidence in social welfare system	.131	.019
Widowed	.496	.000	Model 4	Amount of social expenditure	-.133	.008
Single			Model 5	Welfare state type (socialdemocratic)		
Single parent	.289	.005		continental	.304	.217
Couple	1.049	.000		liberal	.110	.768
Couple with children	1.236	.000		Mediterranean	.602	.037
Three generations	1.027	.000		post-communist	.275	.047
Chronically ill	-.040	.868				
With children	.395	.000				
Employed						
Unemployed	-.065	.458				
Retired	.286	.003				
Still studying	-.095	.669				
Mean educational level						
Lower level	.075	.273				
Higher level	-.270	.001				

Notes: The sample consists of poor people and low-income earners from 23 EU member states (N = 7121); Cyprus and Malta are excluded because data on specific context features were not available here. The dependent variable is support expected from the family in three or more out of the four emergency situations described (yes/no) (see Table 5). The context features were examined one by one in the different models together with the individual variables.

Source: EQLS 2003.

The examination of different context features in multi-level models confirms the impression gained in Table 5. Even after controlling for individual socio-demographic characteristics, family solidarity is still more prevalent in the Mediterranean and post-communist countries than in the other types of welfare state (Table 6). It also emerges that seeking support from family members is more the norm in countries where there is little confidence in the social security system and where social benefits are at a low level in general. The interaction between the welfare state and private assistance can be clearly

illustrated on the basis of these results, too: When little help is provided by the state, then people compensate by seeking and receiving informal help. But once again religion also plays a role. As the importance of religious values increases, so does family solidarity with the poor, and social support is provided first and foremost by family members.

## Discussion

Being poor in Europe does not only mean having little money or a standard of living that is considerably below the average for the population. It also means having to do without social contacts, having little recourse to emotional support, feeling no longer integrated, and not being able to count on support to the extent that would really be necessary in a precarious situation. In every country in the enlarged EU, people in a materially precarious situation are affected more by social disintegration than the privileged classes of the population. However, the degree of accumulation varies from one country to the next.

First of all, household composition is decisive. Poor people living in shared households, with large families, or having children have better chances to be socially integrated. Household composition varies from country to country and is closely interrelated with welfare state characteristics and social policy design: Large family contexts are especially common in the southern European and post-communist countries, which is strongly related to restrictive and less generous social benefit systems. It is more frequent to provide help and social support to poor people in these countries.

Moreover, the degree to which poverty and disintegration are related is determined by the degree of diffusion of precarious situations within a population. The less relative income poverty defines a society and the smaller the group of people whose standard of living is only inadequately guaranteed at the basic level, the more difficult it is for these people to maintain social relations and avail of supportive social contacts. Stigmatisation, shame and individual blame are the psychological mechanisms that can plausibly explain this effect. In countries with a large share of poor people, the polarisation between the affluent and the needy is not so pronounced. While social networks are still more difficult to access for those in precarious material circumstances, the difference with respect to the privileged groups of the population is not as great because social disintegration already affects broad classes of the population.

But other context effects also influence the interplay between poverty and social disintegration. Social policy and inter-related general attitudes to religion, the family, and how to combat poverty all shape the support culture and influence the willingness of the population of a country to feel solidarity with the poor. Religiosity – and Catholicism, in

particular, as the dominant form of religion in a country – increases the social integration amongst the poor. The more significance is given to religious values by the population of a country, and the more family centred the prevailing view of solidarity, the more seldom people in precarious circumstances are left without social support. Poverty is not as widespread in the prosperous Scandinavian and continental European countries of the old EU, but it is associated to a greater extent with the loss of social integration. Being poor in the richest countries of the EU, which have the highest level of social protection, also translates to a large extent into social exclusion. This indicates the possible existence of a crowding-out effect, at least with respect to solidarity with the poor.

These results only refer to the strength of the link between poverty and social disintegration in a country. It is important to remember that behind this view there are also different levels of social integration amongst the general population in each case. The number of disintegrated persons in prosperous countries is generally much lower than in poorer countries. And even if poor people are highly socially disintegrated in some Scandinavian countries compared to the non-poor, they are still in most cases more integrated than poor people in the post-communist countries, where the overall population is both poorer and less integrated to begin with. In the Mediterranean countries, where the high significance of religion and the family is associated with relatively rudimentary levels of social welfare, we find willingness to provide solidarity and a culture of support to be considered the norm in the overall population, but also amongst people in precarious circumstances. The Baltic states represent the antithesis to the latter situation: Widespread poverty and a very low standard of living for the overall population go hand in hand with social disintegration for broad classes of the population.

Family support is highly important for poor people in the Mediterranean countries, especially, but also in some of the post-communist countries. This fits in with the institutional organisation of the social security systems in these countries, which are substantially characterised by subsidiarity regulations and family-based means tests. The Scandinavian countries with their universal social security systems rank amongst the countries in which support from friends is also relatively large. This shows again the close interplay between socio-political institutional logic and private readiness to help. It was not possible to confirm the assumption that poverty is generally accompanied by recourse to the family for support. Instead, poor people more often must do without support altogether.

The results underline the urgent need to pay more attention to cumulative disadvantages, and they prove that an exclusively monetary perspective is not sufficient in any attempt to comprehend the question of exclusionary risks. The aspects of social relations and social support play a major role in social exclusion as a companion to material poverty. The interaction evidenced here between the material standard of living of the individual, her or his social integration potential and the country-specific contexts clearly illustrates the complexity of the conditions under which solidarity is provided and accepted. The socio-political, cultural and economic characteristics of the country in which poverty is

experienced decisively determine whether poor people can rely on social support or not, and what role social support plays with respect to quality of life in general and especially with respect to precarious supply situations.

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