

Single Motherhood and Multigenerational Coresidence in Europe

BRAM HOGENDOORN  AND JUHO HÄRKÖNEN 

Single motherhood has increased throughout Europe. Single mothers assume the dual role of provider and caregiver and often need external support from public policies or kin to meet their needs. Research has focused primarily on public policies, disregarding the role of kin support—and of multigenerational coresidence in particular. This study provides the first detailed description of single mothers' multigenerational coresidence in Europe. To do so, we combine census and survey microdata from 31 European countries. The data reveal large geographic variation in single mothers' coresidence. Whereas coresidence is a rare and temporary living arrangement in Northern and Western Europe, it is common and more permanent in Southern, Central, and especially Eastern Europe. At the same time, coresidence has declined in almost all countries with data from the past half-century. These findings suggest large and persistent variation in kin support for single mothers and thus question the assumption of its marginal role in Europe.

Introduction

Single mothers are a growing population in Europe, currently representing around 10 percent of mothers in Southern Europe and over 20 percent in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding cross-national variation, single motherhood has increased across the continent and is likely to remain at high levels (Fokkema and Liefbroer 2008; Härkönen 2017; Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado 2018). The lack of financial and time resources from a coresident partner means that single mothers combine the dual roles of provider and caregiver, which can lead to work–family conflict, elevated levels of poverty, and compromised health (Brady and Burroway 2012; Ferrari, Bonnet, and Solaz 2019; Meier et al. 2016; Misra et al. 2012; Williams, Sassler, and Nicholson 2008).

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To cope with these responsibilities, many single mothers rely on external support from public policies or kin (Esping-Andersen 1999; Hao and Brinton 1997; Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado 2018). A large literature has established that generous public policies improve the welfare of single mothers (Brady and Burroway 2012; Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis 2015; Misra et al. 2012; Misra, Budig, and Moller 2007). Less attention has been paid to the role of kin, even though kin support—particularly in the form of coresidence with one's own parents—is common in many parts of the world (Chen 2016; Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012; Pilkauskas and Cross 2018) and can promote single mothers' labor market participation (Hao and Brinton 1997) and reduce poverty in single-mother families (Shirahase and Raymo 2014).

Research on single mothers' coresidence with their parents is nearly absent in Europe, where estimates of its prevalence are limited to a handful of countries (Kiernan, Land, and Lewis 1998, 133; Reher 1998, 126). This is surprising, given the long tradition of research into multigenerational living arrangements in historical European populations (Bumpass and Raley 1995; Hajnal 1965, 1982; Laslett 1988). Moreover, contemporary research on the transition to adulthood has shown that coresidence in young adulthood remains common in parts of Europe (Albertini and Kohli 2013; Arundel and Lennartz 2017; Dykstra and Fokkema 2011; Esteve and Reher 2021; Gierveld, Dykstra, and Schenk 2012; Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008; Liu and Esteve 2021; Reher 1998; Saraceno and Keck 2010; Schwanitz and Mulder 2015) and that partnership dissolution remains an important reason for moving back to the parental home (Albertini, Gähler, and Härkönen 2018; Albertini and Kohli 2013; Stone, Berrington, and Falkingham 2014). Despite these findings, analyses of single mothers' multigenerational coresidence have remained all but absent. This is due in part to data limitations since surveys often do not record extended-family households or have too small samples to study single mothers (Esteve and Reher 2021, 696). It could also reflect the assumption that multigenerational living arrangements are rare in Europe compared to other parts of the world, because of less family-oriented values or more developed welfare states (Chen 2016; Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012, 715). This assumption, however, does not take into account the large European variation in cultural family orientation and in the importance of family for welfare provision (Esping-Andersen 1999).

The objective of this study is to describe the prevalence, stability, and trends in single mothers' coresidence with their own parents in Europe. To do so, we combined census and survey microdata from the European Social Survey (ESS), the Generations and Gender Survey (GGS), the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), and the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series International (IPUMS-I). These datasets cover up to 31 countries from a variety of demographic contexts,

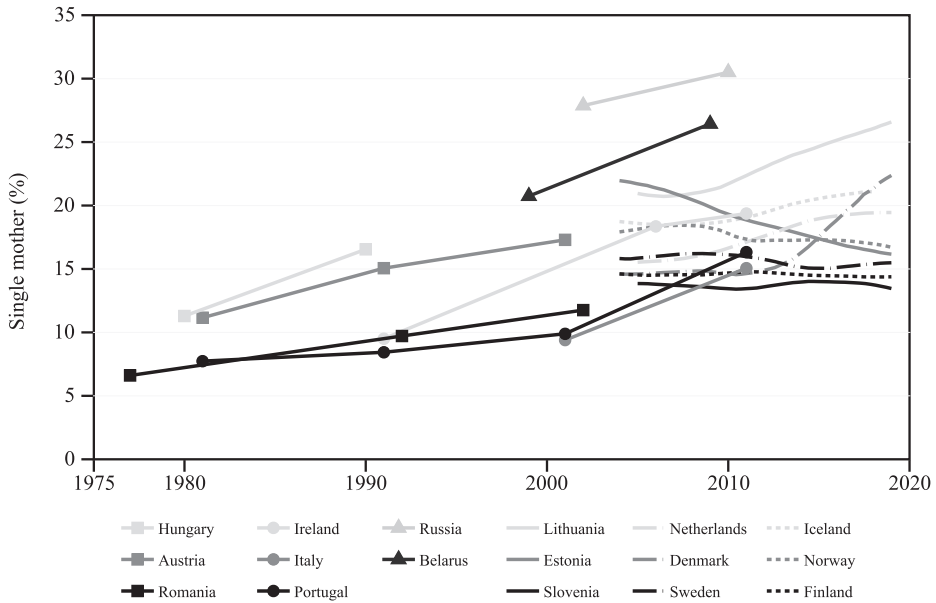
including several countries in Eastern Europe, which are often left out of comparative work. Each of these datasets has its advantages and disadvantages, and we aimed to leverage their full potential. First, we pooled cross-sectional data to obtain estimates of the prevalence of single mothers' multigenerational coresidence across 28 European countries. Then, we used longitudinal data to estimate the stability of coresidence arrangements in 20 countries, assessing whether coresidence is a temporary response to an acute need or a longer-term solution. Finally, we used historical data to describe trends in multigenerational coresidence for 11 countries over the past half-century.

Our findings show that, although intergenerational coresidence is rare among single mothers in Northern Europe, it is a widespread and stable living arrangement in many Southern, Central, and Eastern European countries, where its prevalence surpasses that of some East Asian countries. And in contrast to the rise in intergenerational coresidence that has been observed among single mothers in the United States (Pilkauskas, Amorim, and Dunifon 2020; Pilkauskas and Cross 2018) and young adults across the globe (Esteve and Reher 2021), coresidence among single mothers in Europe has mostly declined. We discuss our findings in light of European kinship patterns and welfare policies.

Multigenerational coresidence and its regional variation

Single motherhood in Europe is primarily associated with separation and divorce. While there have been countervailing trends, including a decline in childbearing to single women (Perelli-Harris et al. 2012), a decline in bereavement during the childrearing ages (Van Poppel, Schenk, and Van Gaalen 2013), and an increase in shared and father-only residence after union dissolution (Fransson et al. 2018; Kitterød and Wiik 2017; Poortman and van Gaalen 2017), these trends have not offset the rise of separation and divorce in most European countries. Around 85 percent of today's single-mother families result from partnership dissolution (Andersson, Thomson, and Duntava 2017, Table A-29b; Hübgen 2020, 6), and mothers typically remain the parent with the prime residential and care responsibility for children (Kalmijn 2015). Figure 1 illustrates the rise of single motherhood in Europe. Whereas only a small share of mothers lived without a coresident partner in the early 1980s, in most countries this share increased until the turn of the millennium and remained stable or increased further since.

The absence of a partner means that single mothers face the dual responsibility of provision and caregiving; a responsibility that many single mothers experience as challenging (Freeman and Dodson 2021; Richards and Schmiede 1993). Coresidence with kin—often one's own parents—can provide support and has been found to improve the well-being of single

FIGURE 1 Single motherhood among mothers aged 25–50, 1977–2019

NOTE: Mothers are defined as women aged 25–50 with at least one child under 21. Singlehood is defined as the absence of a coresident partner, regardless of marital status. Results adjusted for survey year and data source. SOURCE: IPUMS-I (AT 1981–1981, BY 1999–2009, HU 1980–1990, IE 1991–2011, IT 2001–2011, PT 1981–2011, RO 1977–2002, RU 2002–2010) and EU-SILC (DK 2004–2019, EE 2004–2019, FI 2004–2019, IS 2004–2018, LT 2005–2019, NL 2005–2019, NO 2004–2019, SE 2004–2019, SI 2005–2019).

mothers and their children (Amorim 2019; Mutchler and Baker 2009; Raymo and Zhou 2012; Shirahase and Raymo 2014). In line with this idea, single mothers have relatively high rates of multigenerational coresidence in many parts of the world. In Latin America, in fact, the majority of single mothers coreside with their parents (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012). In East Asia, around 30 percent of Japanese (Shirahase and Raymo 2014), 20 percent of Taiwanese (Chen 2016), and 10 percent of Korean (Park, Choi, and Jo 2016) single mothers coreside with their parents. In the United States, 20 percent of the children of unmarried and 10 percent of the children of divorced, separated, or widowed mothers live in multigenerational households (Pilkaukas and Cross 2018).

A high prevalence of kin coresidence among single mothers is typically interpreted as stemming from a combination of a strong-family system, which offers and expects multigenerational coresidence as a form of support, and weak welfare state support to single mothers, which constrains the ability to live independently (Esping-Andersen 1999; Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012; Park, Choi, and Jo 2016; Shirahase and Raymo 2014). Therefore, coresidence is generally believed to be rare among single mothers in Europe, where conjugal families are assumed to prevail and where welfare state provision is more generous than in

many other parts of the world. This belief is reinforced by low shares of multigenerational households in Europe from a global perspective (Liu and Esteve 2021). Possibly reflecting these beliefs—as well as the related scarcity of data—multigenerational coresidence among single mothers in Europe has attracted very little attention. Instead, scholarship on support for single mothers has focused on the role played by the welfare state (Esping-Andersen 1999; Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado 2018).

Although the assumptions of a “weak family” and a “strong welfare state” characterize Northwestern Europe, they neglect the diversity of family systems and welfare states found on this continent. Family systems have been thoroughly addressed in classic (Hajnal 1965; 1982; Laslett 1983; Le Play 1871; Smith 1984) and more recent work (Albertini and Kohli 2013; Reher 1998, 2021), which recognize historically rooted differences along both a North–South and an East–West axis. Northwestern European societies emphasize residential autonomy, which is expressed in early home leaving and few returns to the parental home (Buchmann and Kriesi 2011; Fernández Cordón 1997; Iacovou 2010; Iacovou and Skew 2011; Van den Berg, Kalmijn, and Leopold 2021), even among those who cannot provide for themselves, such as “deserted wives” (Laslett 1988, 154; Smith 1984). This need not mean that single mothers do not receive financial or child-care support from their parents or other relatives, but that such support is preferred to take place across independent households rather than through coresidence under the same roof (Albertini and Kohli 2013). Residential independence is further promoted by the “defamilizing” welfare states of Northern Europe which, through income transfers, public childcare services, and regulated housing markets, reduce single mothers’ necessity to rely on parents or other kin (Esping-Andersen 1999).

Southern European societies, on the other hand, emphasize familial obligation over generational autonomy (Reher 2021), and coresidence there is a normative form of intergenerational support (Esping-Andersen 1999). Indeed, Southern Europe is seen as exemplary of the strong-family system (Reher 1998) of which multigenerational coresidence is a central feature. Evidence for this idea is mostly based on the living arrangements of young adults and the elderly (Albertini and Kohli 2013; Arundel and Lennartz 2017; Esteve and Reher 2021; Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008; Schwanitz and Mulder 2015), though it has been recognized that divorce, widowhood, and single parenthood are additional situations that may prompt support through multigenerational coresidence (Albertini and Kohli 2013; Reher 1998).

Household structures also vary between Western and Eastern Europe, reflecting historical patterns of household formation (Hajnal 1965, 1982; Laslett 1983). Countries like Czechia, Estonia, and Slovenia have long shared characteristics, including neolocality, with Western societies, and continue to be more “western” in terms of values and public support

(Jappens and Van Bavel 2012; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). Countries further to the East have a more distinct history of joint household systems. These historical patterns are reinforced by the welfare state, which is characterized by underfunded social insurance and housing privatization without functional housing markets, forcing many into family coresidence (Aidukaite 2011; Hantrais 2004; Stephens, Lux, and Sunega 2015).

These geographic differences are reflected in the overall prevalence of multigenerational households. Multigenerational households make up around 1 percent of all households in Northern and Western Europe, 3 percent in Southern Europe, 7 percent in Central Europe and the Baltic countries, and 14 percent in Eastern Europe (own calculations of Iacovou and Skew 2011; see also Glaser et al. 2018; Liu and Esteve 2021; Murphy 2008; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). The few existing estimates for single-mother families suggest similar variation (Schwanitz and Mulder 2015), yet also suggest that single mothers much more often engage in multigenerational living. For example, it has been reported that 10 percent of British single mothers lived with their own mother in the 1990s (Kiernan, Land, and Lewis 1998, 133), compared to nearly 30 percent of Spanish single mothers (Reher 1998, 216).

The stability of coresidence

Most existing estimates of multigenerational coresidence are cross-sectional. However, multigenerational coresidence has a longitudinal component as well: the prevalence of coresidence is a product of the incidence of single mothers entering into coresidence and the duration of each coresidence episode. To understand how this longitudinal component varies across societies, we draw attention to the idea of “latent kinship” (Bengtson 2001; Riley and Riley 1993). According to this idea, beyond demographic variation in cross-generational survivorship (Leopold and Skopek 2015), societies differ little in the availability of kin ties. Rather, societies differ in the conditions under which kin ties remain latent or are activated. In Northern and Western Europe, kin ties are believed to be activated only in times of crisis, including the transition into single motherhood (Albertini, Gähler, and Härkönen 2018), making kin support available until the crisis is resolved. In Southern Europe, kin ties are used more permanently, due to limited public support and a cultural preference for togetherness (Iacovou 2010), whereas in Eastern Europe they can additionally arise in response to chronic institutional inadequacy (Sobotka 2008a).

The notion of latent kinship could help to understand previously observed patterns of intergenerational support. On the one hand, returns to the parental home spike in the aftermath of partnership dissolution, even in societies where multigenerational living is otherwise marginal (Albertini, Gähler, and Härkönen 2018; Arundel and Lennartz 2017; Das, de Valk, and

Merz 2017; Guzzo 2016; Pilkauskas 2012; Stone, Berrington, and Falkingham 2014; Van den Berg, Kalmijn, and Leopold 2019). On the other hand, the few available estimates suggest that multigenerational living is a temporary arrangement in the Northwestern world. For instance, studies from the Netherlands and Sweden have shown that roughly half of all mothers who moved in with their own parents following a family dissolution had moved out a year later and that the great majority had moved out within three years (Albertini, Gähler, and Härkönen 2018, Table 2; Das, de Valk, and Merz 2017, 7). In the United States, a fifth of all women who lived with their parents upon the birth of a child had moved out a year later (Piontak 2016, Table 1).

What is missing is a comparative view on the duration of multigenerational living. Contrasting the duration of multigenerational arrangements in Northern and Western Europe to that in Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe will inform about the nature of these arrangements. If multigenerational households in the latter regions are a longer-term solution, it indicates that such arrangements enable intergenerational support in the context of a strong family system or a weak welfare state. Hence, we conduct an analysis of the stability of multigenerational coresidence among single mothers.

Trends in coresidence

In the final part of our analysis, we investigate how single mothers' multigenerational coresidence in Europe has developed over historical time. The 20th-century trend in Western countries has been toward fewer multigenerational households (Ruggles 2007; Ruggles and Heggeness 2008, 256), in association with the decline in employment on family farms (Ruggles 2009) and a stronger preference for autonomy that accompanies the Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe 2010, 2020). At the same time, data of young adults have shown a resurgence in intergenerational coresidence with between 2000 and 2016 (Esteve and Reher 2021), a trend that has been attributed to longer education, the postponement of family formation, housing shortages, and better opportunities for realizing a preference for multigenerational living (Albuquerque 2011; Easthope et al. 2017; Esteve and Reher 2021; Kye and Choi 2021; Ruggles and Heggeness 2008).

Would this trend also hold for single mothers? To an extent, single mothers differ from the general young-adult population. They have completed an important marker in the transition to adulthood—parenthood—and are economically better established, especially in recent cohorts where childbearing has been postponed (Billari, Liefbroer, and Philipov 2006; Neels et al. 2017). Furthermore, single-mother families have probably witnessed similar decreases in the number of children as other families (Frejka 2008). These compositional shifts all suggest a reduced necessity for

kin support. At the same time, although educational expansion also applies to single mothers so that their average educational levels have increased, single motherhood today is more concentrated among the less educated (Härkönen 2017).

Beside compositional changes, single mothers have been subject to cultural and structural change. The Second Demographic Transition (Lesthaeghe 2010; Van de Kaa and Lesthaeghe 1986) has induced a greater preference for privacy and stricter norms of self-reliance, which may reduce the willingness of single mothers and their parents to coreside (Benson and Furstenberg 2006; Bianchi et al. 2006). Moreover, the need for coresidence may have decreased with the rise in female labor force participation and the expansion of early childhood education and care (Maldonado and Nieuwenhuis 2015; Misra et al. 2012; Zagel and Van Lancker 2022). Residential independence has also become more attainable during much of the 20th century, as general levels of wealth increased. Nonetheless, from the late 1980s onward, financialization has led to a reduction of affordable housing in countries with little price regulation or housing allowances (Dewilde 2022; Kohl 2018). Around the same time, the collapse of state socialism resulted in a reduction of public childcare, housing shortages, and widespread poverty (Castiglioni et al. 2016), leading many to double up with family members (Soaita and Dewilde 2021)—a process particularly pronounced in Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia and to a lesser extent also in Romania and Bulgaria (World Bank 2022).

All in all, these developments suggest a decline in single mothers' multigenerational coresidence, albeit with heterogeneous trends following the 1990s. This expectation is in line with a study of eight European countries, in which the share of young-adult women who were 'single mother in an extended-family household' generally declined between 1980 and 2000 (Schwanitz and Mulder 2015). Still, it is unclear whether those results generalize to the overall single-mother population, and direct evidence of single mothers only exists for regions outside of Europe. For instance, multigenerational coresidence has remained stable between the 1970s and 2010s among single mothers in Japan (Shirahase and Raymo 2014) and Latin America (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012) and has witnessed a revival in the United States (Pilkauskas, Amorim, and Dunifon 2020).

Data and measures

Research on single motherhood and multigenerational coresidence in Europe has been hampered by the availability of microdata, especially as case numbers are low in many countries. To overcome this issue, we drew on four data sources: the ESS, GGS, EU-SILC, and IPUMS-I. These datasets have their respective strengths and limitations, allowing us to cover a wide range of European countries in the cross-sectional analyses on the one

hand, and enabling longitudinal analysis at the individual and country levels in select countries on the other.

The ESS is a biennial survey of social conditions and attitudes in the noninstitutional population aged 15 and over collected across Europe. We used the nine rounds collected between 2002 and 2019. The GGS is a survey of household composition and family dynamics in the noninstitutional population aged 15–79 fielded in several countries. We used the two cross-sectional rounds collected between 2002 and 2017. The EU-SILC is an annual survey with a four-year rotating panel design of incomes and living conditions in the noninstitutional population aged 16 and over in the European Union member states and associated countries. We used all cross-sectional and longitudinal rounds collected between 2004 and 2019. The IPUMS-I provides ex post harmonized samples of national census microdata that cover entire resident populations. We used censuses collected between 1977 and 2011. Data collected during the Covid-19 pandemic were excluded because of disruptions in the fieldwork and nonresponse. Information about the sampling methods is available in the online Appendix (Table A1).

We defined single mothers as women aged 25–50 with at least one resident child under 21 and without a coresidential partner, regardless of marital status. The lower age limit reflected the age at which most women had finished education and were capable of having left the parental home and having entered the labor force. The upper age limit was chosen to minimize potential effects of differential mortality across countries. Our outcome of interest was multigenerational coresidence, measured as the presence of at least one of the single mothers' parents (or parents-in-law) in the same household.

The identification of single mothers and their coresident parents was a complex task due to the pooling of different survey designs. The designs of the ESS and GGS were the most straightforward because they surveyed persons rather than households. Each (randomly selected) respondent listed all household members and indicated their own relationships to them, enabling direct identification of the respondents' children and parents. The design of the EU-SILC was less straightforward because the surveyed relationships varied between countries. The IPUMS-I, too, relied on source data that varied in quality (Sobek and Kennedy 2009). A concise overview of the available family relationship is provided in the online Appendix (Table A2). The ESS, GGS, EU-SILC, and IPUMS-I all included biological, step, adoptive, and foster relationships. It was unclear whether the "parent" category of the EU-SILC data included parents-in-law (Eurostat 2019), but these will be rare in single-mother families.

The resulting identification should work well in all nuclear-family, all stem-family, and nearly all joint-family households. The exception would be joint families where (middle-generation) siblings coreside and one of

their partners or children is the household head. In such families, the children of the other sibling could not be identified in EU-SILC samples relying on relationships to the household head. Some single mothers might then be misclassified as single women without children, thus underestimating multigenerational coresidence. However, joint families are uncommon throughout Europe today (Ruggles 2010), and it is unlikely that an in-law or grandchild acts as household head because EU-SILC rules assign this role to the person responsible for accommodation. More information about the identification of family relationships as well as a list of samples suitable for analysis are available in the online Appendix (Tables A3 and A4). The analysis code is available on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/j4zev/>).

Analytic strategy

We analyzed three aspects of multigenerational coresidence: its prevalence, its stability, and its trends over time. The cross-sectional analysis, first, relied on pooled data from the ESS, GGS, and EU-SILC cross-sectional component. To ensure representativeness at the individual level, we selected countries and rounds that drew a probability sample of persons; samples of households were included only if reliable design weights were available. We restricted the analysis to countries with at least 100 single mothers of which at least 10 had a coresident parent. We excluded observations with missing values on the adjustment variables (see further down). This resulted in a dataset of 40,920 single mothers in 28 European countries between 2002 and 2019 (see online Appendix Table A5). Using these data, we estimated the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence among single mothers across countries. For reference, we compared this prevalence to the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence among partnered mothers and single women without children. We also broke down the prevalence by several individual characteristics: age, marital status, educational attainment, number of children, and age of the youngest child. This yielded more insight into the conditions of single mothers who rely on multigenerational living. Because doing so resulted in small cell sizes, these tables were shown by region instead of by country.

The panel analysis, next, relied on data from the EU-SILC longitudinal component. Because the unit of analysis here was the household, we included not only countries that drew a sample of persons but also countries that drew a sample of households. We restricted the analysis to countries with at least 100 single-mother years in a multigenerational household and at least 10 of those households that dissolved. We excluded observations with missing values on the adjustment variables (see further down). This resulted in a dataset of 14,005 single-mother household-years in 20 European countries between 2005 and 2019 (see online Appendix Table A6). Using these data, we estimated the stability of multigenerational coresidence

among single mothers; we did not repeat the comparison to other groups, as the cross-national differences—our main focus—were very similar.

Ideally, we would have followed individual single mothers as they transitioned through living arrangements. Unfortunately, this was not possible for household formation, because the longitudinal component of the EU-SILC rarely traces people who change their address between waves (Iacovou and Lynn 2013). Nevertheless, we were able to study household dissolution by observing the household roster of a given address between waves. We considered a multigenerational household dissolved when the single mother left or when her parents left. We right-censored household-years in which the single mother left the population of interest—when a partner moved in, the youngest child turned 21, all children under 21 moved out, or the entire household was lost—and we assumed that transitions took place at midyear. From this, we estimated annual rates of multigenerational household dissolution. To facilitate the interpretation of these dissolution rates, we converted them into the expected duration of a multigenerational household. Assuming that the dissolution rate λ is constant over time, the duration is exponentially distributed with median $\ln(2)/\lambda$. No design weights were applied because these were not available in the longitudinal EU-SILC.

The trend analysis, lastly, relied on census data provided by IPUMS-I. We restricted the analysis to countries with census data from at least two time points. We supplemented the census data with the EU-SILC cross-sectional component, selecting countries that drew a sample of persons or a sample of households with design weights and that covered at least 100 single mothers of which at least 10 had a coresident parent in each year. We excluded observations with missing values on the adjustment variables (see further down). This resulted in a dataset of single-mother populations in 11 European countries between 1977 and 2019 (see online Appendix Table A7). Using these data, we estimated the historical trend in multigenerational coresidence. That is, we reported the share of single mothers in multigenerational coresidence in each country-year.

A potential issue throughout the analyses was that the data came from different surveys at different points in time. To deal with this issue, we undertook several measures. First, we rescaled the design weights so that each country received an equal total weight. This ensured that regional estimates and the adjustment procedure were not dominated by countries with large samples. Second, we adjusted our outcomes for dataset characteristics. This was done using logistic regression models that included the survey year and data source (ESS, GGS, EU-SILC, IPUMS-I). Third, we adjusted for compositional differences between countries and shifts over time. The logistic regression models included not only the survey year and data source but also age (grouped as 25–30, 31–35, 36–40, 41–45, 46–50), marital status (married, divorced, widowed, never married), educational

attainment (upper secondary education or less, postsecondary education or more), number of resident children (1, 2, 3, or more) and age of the youngest child (0–5, 6–11, 12–17, 18–20), and their effects were allowed to vary by region (North, West, South, Central/Baltic, East). We used these models to predict the coresidence prevalence, duration, and trends with the adjustment variables set to their 2010 grand means. Finally, we corrected the standard errors for the uncertainty caused by the variation in samples (i.e., country-source-years). This was done by clustering the standard errors at the sample level (Abadie et al. 2017).

Results

Single motherhood in Europe

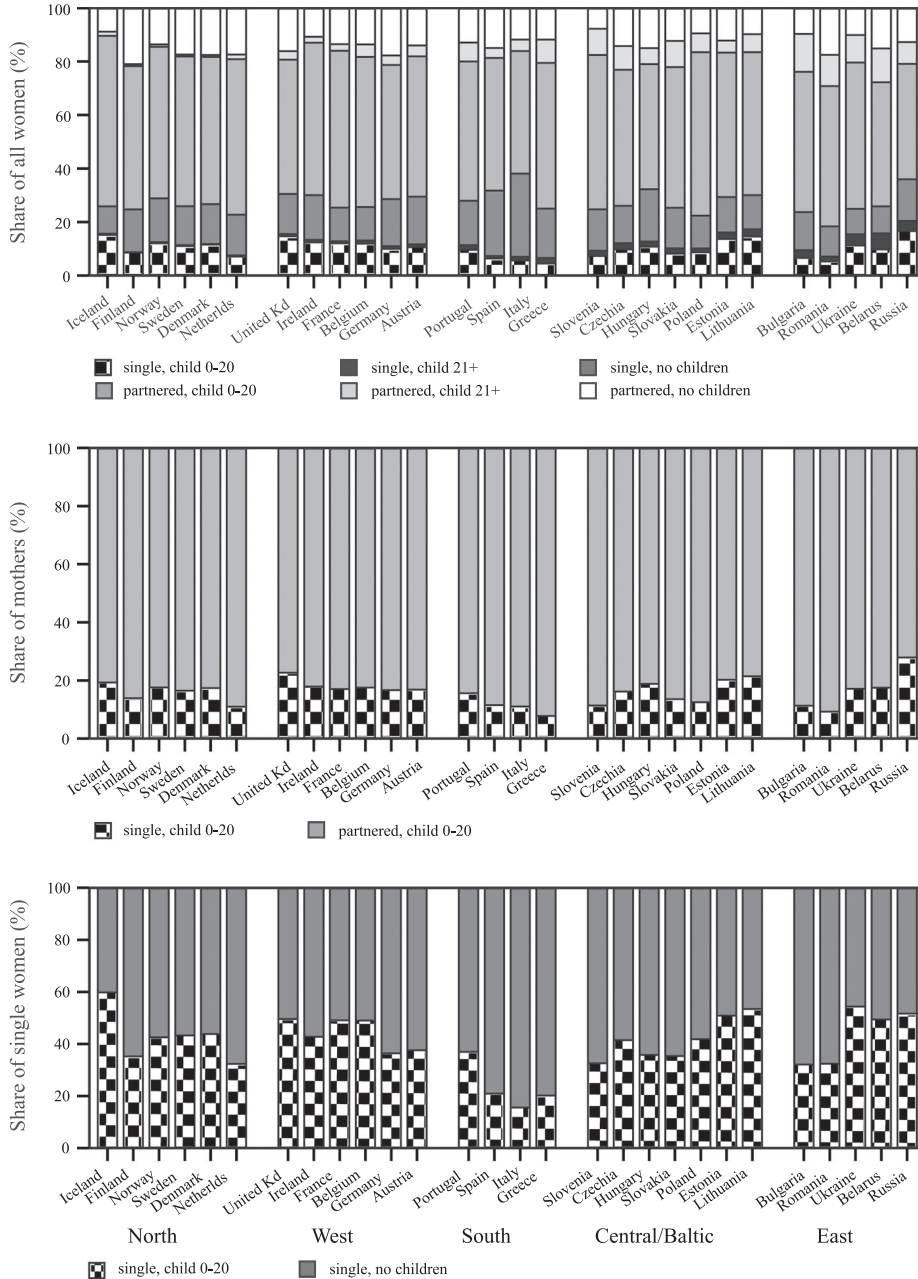
Figure 2 displays the share of single mothers among the female, mother, and single-women populations aged 25–50. Between 5 percent and 17 percent of European women are single mothers (upper panel), and a substantial share of European mothers raise their children without a coresidential partner (middle panel). For instance, in Estonia, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Russia, and the United Kingdom, over a fifth of all mothers are single. A focus on single women reveals a similar picture (lower panel). In other words, the prevalence of single motherhood varies considerably across countries, though it is generally lower in Southern Europe than in the other regions.

How do single mothers fare? On the one hand, single mothers are fairly highly educated and are often in paid work. On the other hand, many have low income and are in poor health, especially in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the majority of single mothers are divorced. Few are still legally married, except in Italy, where divorce mandates a period of legal separation, and few are widowed, though percentages are somewhat higher in the Central and Eastern European countries with higher mortality rates. The age distribution is relatively uniform across countries. Most single mothers have one minor child and some have two; having three children is slightly more common in Northern and Western Europe and especially Ireland. Children are usually under 18, but the share of single mothers whose youngest child is between 18 and 21 is higher in countries where children leave the parental home later. A detailed overview of these characteristics is available in the online Appendix (Table A8). All in all, the varied characteristics of single mothers underscore the importance of adjusting for compositional differences across countries.

Prevalence of multigenerational coresidence

Figure 3 presents the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence among single mothers (and comparison groups, to which we will turn later). The

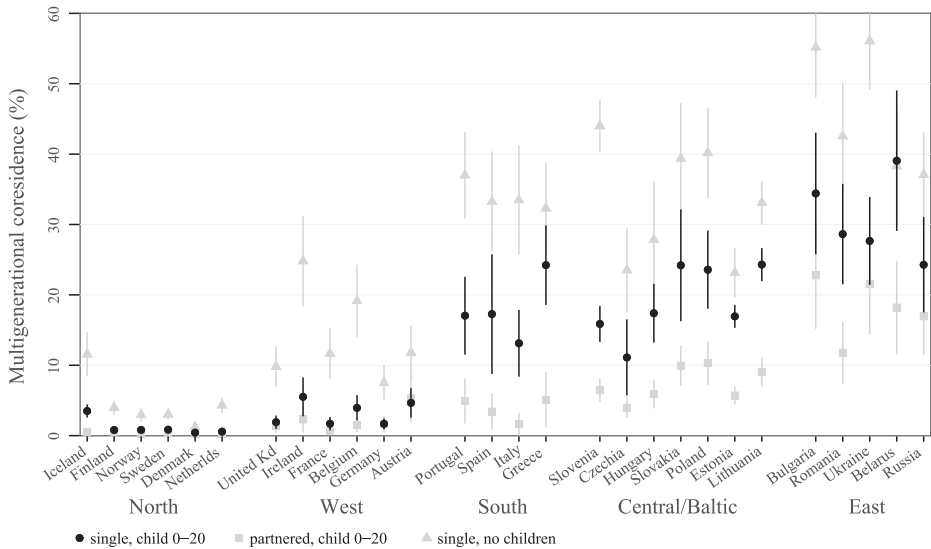
FIGURE 2 Motherhood and partnership status in Europe, women aged 25–50, 2002–2019



NOTE: Results adjusted by region for survey year and data source as well as for age, marital status, educational attainment, number of resident children, and age of the youngest child.

SOURCE: Own calculations of ESS, GGS, and EU-SILC, 2002–2019. A detailed overview of the underlying samples is provided in the online Appendix (Table A4).

FIGURE 3 Prevalence of multigenerational coresidence, women aged 25–50, 2002–2019



NOTE: Results adjusted by region for survey year and data source as well as for age, marital status, educational attainment, number of resident children, and age of the youngest child. Points indicate point estimates, lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. The confidence interval of Bulgaria stretches to 62 percent and that of Ukraine to 63 percent (not displayed).

SOURCE: Own calculations of ESS, GGS, and EU-SILC, 2002–2019. A detailed overview of the underlying samples is provided in Table A4 of the online Appendix.

figure shows major regional variation. In Northern Europe, the prevalence ranges from virtually 0 percent to 4 percent and in Western Europe from 2 percent to 6 percent. The prevalence is higher in Southern Europe, where it ranges from 13 percent to 24 percent, as well as in Central Europe and the Baltic countries, where it ranges from 11 percent to 24 percent. However, by far the highest prevalence is recorded in Eastern Europe. About 24 percent of single mothers in Russia coreside with their parents, and this figure reaches 28 percent in Romania and Ukraine, 34 percent in Bulgaria, and 39 percent in Belarus. This means that single mothers in Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe are more likely to coreside with their parents than single mothers in Taiwan (Chen 2016) and South Korea (Park, Choi, and Jo 2016). The figures for Bulgaria and Belarus also surpass those of Japan (Shirahase and Raymo 2014) and come close to those of some Latin American countries (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012).

There is also variation within each region. In Northern Europe, the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence among single mothers is higher in Iceland than in the other countries. This may relate to Iceland's insular character, with a more fluid family system and a history of household complexity (Jónsson 2021; Moring 2003). In Western Europe, Ireland appears

as the country with a higher prevalence of coresidence, resonating previous work on the presence of the Catholic church and its orientation toward family-provided welfare (Iacovou 2010; Reher 1998). In Southern Europe, the higher prevalence in Greece resembles that of Eastern Europe, an observation already made by Hajnal (1965). In Central Europe, single mothers are less likely to coreside with their parents in Czechia, a country where intergenerational and family norms are more “western” than in other countries of the region (Marckmann 2017; Sobotka 2008b). In Eastern Europe, coresidence appears less widespread in Russia than in the other countries (though the confidence intervals partly overlap). This difference was already visible in 19th-century samples and may reflect the diversity of Russian family systems, with less coresidence further to the east (Szołtysek et al. 2020). Notwithstanding these deviations, the variation across regions is evident.

Figure 3 also presents the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence for two comparison groups: partnered mothers and single women without children. Partnered mothers are a natural reference since partnership dissolution is the most common pathway into single motherhood; single women without children provide another informative reference since they also lack the resources of a coresidential partner. The figure shows that geographic patterns of coresidence are similar across the three groups. For single mothers, partnered mothers, and single women without children alike, the ascending order is Northern, Western, Southern, Central and Baltic, and finally Eastern Europe. This similarity probably reflects general institutional and cultural variation in the centrality of family ties. At the same time, the figure shows a clear ranking of the three groups. Across all countries, partnered mothers are least likely to coreside with their parents, single women without children most often coreside with their parents, and single mothers are in between. This ranking probably reflects both (cultural) preferences as well as (economic) needs. Compared to partnered mothers, single mothers are more often in need of family support. Compared to single childless women, single mothers have completed one more step in the transition to adulthood—parenthood—which may reduce both their and their own parents willingness to coreside.

Variation in coresidence could also be due to variation in the extent to which older-generation family members are alive (cf. Leopold and Skopek, 2015). We examined this idea using the GGS survey, in which respondents indicated whether their mother and father were “still alive,” “not alive anymore,” “did not know whether they were still alive,” or “did not know anything about them.” We re-ran the analysis for all single mothers with a valid response and for single mothers with at least one parent still alive (Table A9 of the online Appendix). This, of course, showed that single mothers with a living parent were more likely to coreside. However, the difference was small or statistically insignificant in most countries. Moreover, the availability of grandparents could not explain the variation in

TABLE 1 Prevalence of multigenerational coresidence by demographic group, single mothers aged 25–50, 2002–2019

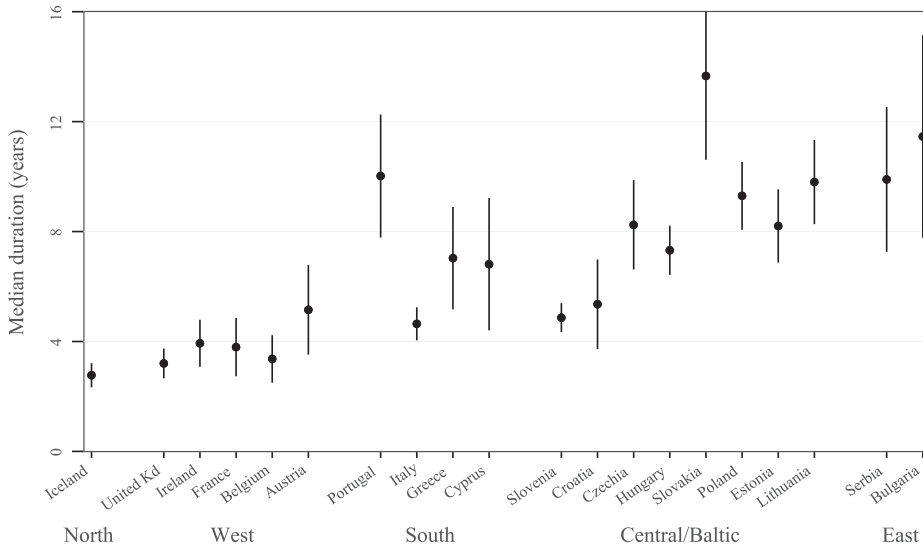
	North	West	South	Central/Baltic	East
Age group					
25–30	2	10	44	37	48
31–35	1	5	25	24	41
36–40	1	3	17	19	30
41–45	1	2	13	13	26
46–50	1	3	9	15	20
Marital status					
Married	2	4	18	30	36
Divorced	1	3	15	17	29
Widowed	1	4	3	11	20
Never married	1	3	32	24	36
Educational attainment					
Upper secondary or less	1	3	19	20	31
Postsecondary or more	1	4	16	17	30
Resident children					
1	2	5	21	25	38
2	1	3	14	15	19
3 or more	1	1	18	11	13
Age youngest child					
0–5	2	4	16	23	35
6–11	1	3	17	19	32
12–17	1	4	22	18	28
18–20	1	2	15	14	28

NOTE: Results adjusted by region for survey year, data source, and country as well as for age, marital status, educational attainment, number of resident children, and age of the youngest child (except when the primary variable of interest).

SOURCE: Own calculations of ESS, GGS, and EU-SILC, 2002–2019. A detailed overview of the underlying samples is provided in the online Appendix (Table A4).

multigenerational coresidence: the prevalence for all single mothers and for only single mothers with living parents followed the same pattern (Pearson's correlation $r = 0.99$).

To gain further insight into the conditions of single mothers who coreside with their parents, we broke down the analysis by demographic characteristics. Table 1 shows the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence by age, marital status, educational attainment, number of resident children, and age of the youngest child. The analyses are adjusted for the other sociodemographic variables, with their effects allowed to vary by region. The prevalence of coresidence is patterned more by age than by education. Indeed, educational differences are small or absent in all regions, whereas an age gradient is apparent particularly in Southern Europe. This finding is in line with the above interpretation of coresidence being more strongly related to life-course stage and economic resources (Iacovou 2010). Such interpretation is further supported by the higher

FIGURE 4 Duration of multigenerational households, single mothers aged 25–50, 2005–2019

NOTE: Results adjusted by region for survey year and data source as well as for age, marital status, educational attainment, number of resident children, and age of the youngest child. Points indicate point estimates, lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. The confidence interval of Slovakia stretches to 16.7 years (not displayed).

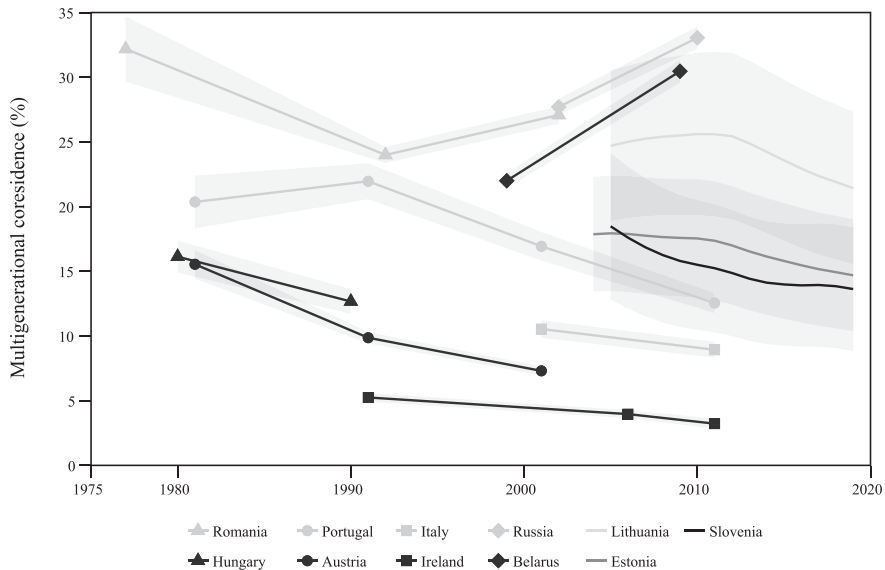
SOURCE: Own calculations of EU-SILC, 2005–2019. A detailed overview of the underlying samples is provided in the online Appendix (Table A4).

prevalence of coresidence among divorced than never-married single mothers and the lowest prevalence among widowed single mothers. The very low prevalence of coresidence among widowed single mothers in Southern Europe, compared to Central and Eastern Europe, can reflect the finding that widowed women in Southern Europe are more likely to receive coresidential support from their children than from their parents (Grundy and Murphy 2018). The small group of (still) married single mothers has a higher coresidence prevalence than divorced single mothers, also in Northern Europe, which may reflect coresidence as a temporary solution during the divorce process (cf. Albertini, Gähler, and Härkönen 2018). The number of children is negatively related to coresidence, but there is no clear relation with the age of the youngest child.

Stability of multigenerational coresidence

We next turn to the stability of multigenerational coresidence. Figure 4 shows the median duration of single-mother multigenerational households, assuming a constant dissolution rate. The figure shows a striking variation across regions. Coresidence is a transient arrangement for single mothers in Northern and Western Europe. For instance, in the United

FIGURE 5 Multigenerational coresidence over historical time, single mothers aged 25–50



NOTE: Results adjusted by region for data source as well as for age, marital status, educational attainment, number of resident children, age of the youngest child, and their interactions with time period (1977–1990, 1991–2000, 2001–2004, 2005–2010, 2011–2019). Shaded areas indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. SOURCE: Own calculations of EU-SILC and IPUMS-I, 1977–2019. A detailed overview of the underlying samples is provided in Table A4 of the online Appendix.

Kingdom, the median time spent in a multigenerational household is four years (corresponding to 22 dissolutions per 100 household-years). The duration in Austria is somewhat longer—five years—but still considerably shorter than that in other regions. In Southern Europe, coresidence is a longer-term solution. The duration there ranges from five years in Italy to 10 years in Portugal (but note the large confidence interval). A similar situation can be seen in Central Europe and the Baltic countries. The longest durations, however, are observed in Slovakia and in countries farther to the East. A single mother living in a multigenerational household typically spends 10 years in that household in Serbia, 12 years in Bulgaria, and 14 years in Slovakia. Hence, in Central and especially Eastern Europe, coresidence is not a short-term form of support for solving a crisis. Rather, single motherhood triggers prolonged changes in living arrangements. While we cannot observe entry into coresidence, these findings suggest that geographic variation in the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence is at least partly driven by variation in its stability.

Trends in multigenerational coresidence

Finally, we address changes in coresidence over historical time. Figure 5 shows the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence of single mothers

by calendar year. Although the time series cover a limited number of countries and periods, a clear trend emerges: multigenerational coresidence has declined everywhere during the past half century, except after the end of state socialism. For instance, in Austria, the percentage of single mothers who coreside with their parents decreased from 15 percent in 1981 to 10 percent in 1991 and 6 percent in 2001. In Portugal, the percentage slightly increased from 20 percent in 1981 to 22 percent in 1992, but then decreased to 16 percent in 2001 and to 13 percent in 2011. In Romania, too, the percentage initially decreased. However, there as well as in Belarus and Russia, multigenerational coresidence revived in the decades following the collapse of state socialism. This revival was particularly pronounced in Belarus, where the percentage of single mothers who coreside with their parents increased from 22 percent in 1999 to 30 percent in 2009.

It remains unknown whether this increase is still ongoing. Nonetheless, multigenerational coresidence in Estonia, Lithuania, and Slovenia—where the economic aftermath of the regime transition was less adverse—seems to have declined in recent years. These findings show that cross-country differences persist, but also that single mothers coreside less with their parents today than in the past.

Discussion

Single motherhood has increased throughout Europe during the past decades. To meet the dual responsibilities of provider and caregiver, single mothers often resort to external support. Research on European single mothers has mainly focused on support by the welfare state, disregarding the role played by kin. This disregard may reflect the assumption that multigenerational coresidence plays a marginal role in Europe, where welfare state policies are considered more supportive and the role of the family less central than in other parts of the world. Likewise, data limitations have restricted the possibility to provide estimates of multigenerational living.

We pooled data of single mothers to describe an intense form of kin support—coresidence with one's own parents—in 31 European countries. We find that the assumption of a low prevalence and short duration of multigenerational coresidence holds for single mothers in Northern and Western Europe but does not characterize other regions of the continent. Indeed, the prevalence of multigenerational coresidence in Eastern Europe exceeds that found in the United States (Pilkauskas and Cross 2018) and parts of East Asia (Chen 2016; Park, Choi, and Jo 2016; Shirahase and Raymo 2014) and comes close to that of some countries in Latin America (Esteve, García-Román, and Lesthaeghe 2012). Furthermore, multigenerational coresidence in Central and Eastern Europe is a stable living arrangement that may last for many years. These regions continue to receive less attention than their Western Europe, leading to an

underestimation of European heterogeneity and an underappreciation of the centrality of kin in the lives of European single mothers.

What do these findings tell us about intergenerational solidarity in Europe? A broad interpretation would hold that, in Northern and Western Europe, intergenerational bonds are strong in childhood but fade during the transition to adulthood (Marckmann 2017; Reher 2021). Support in adulthood there is mainly provided through public policy, supplemented with financial transfers and occasional help by the older generation (Albertini and Kohli 2013; Brandt and Deindl 2013; Laslett 1988). Only in times of crisis, adults may temporarily draw on their kin until the crisis is resolved (Albertini, Gähler, and Härkönen 2018; Bengtson 2001). This contrasts with the situation in Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe, where intergenerational bonds remain strong throughout the life course. Inadequate public support, as well as the cultural celebration of family in the South (Iacovou 2010), make kin coresidence a normative strategy for dealing with longer-term needs (Esping-Andersen 1999; Saraceno and Keck 2010; Sobotka 2008b). Financial and practical help take place mostly within the household, perhaps because of limited resources (Isengard, König, and Szydlik 2018) or because of stricter parental authority (Todd 1985). And while the diffusion of growth-oriented values and public support for working mothers may reduce the willingness and the necessity to engage in multigenerational living arrangements also there (Lesthaeghe 2010; Sobotka 2008b), long-standing cultural and institutional differences make it unlikely that these family systems will converge (Reher 2021).

Even though multigenerational coresidence is widespread in parts of Europe, our historical analysis shows that its prevalence has generally declined. From the 11 countries with available data, coresidence declined everywhere and in all periods before the 1990s and after the 2010s. Long-term declines are witnessed also in Portugal, where coresidence remains comparatively common. Exceptions regard the period from 1990 to 2010, when countries that underwent an economically dramatic regime change—Romania, Belarus, and Russia—witnessed an increase in the prevalence of coresidence. The overall decline in single mothers' coresidence concurs with the long-term decline of multigenerational living in the West (Ruggles 2007) but deviates from recent reports of an increase among the young-adult population (Esteve and Reher 2021). This presents a puzzle: the resurgence of coresidence among young adults has been ascribed to financial and housing needs (Albuquerque 2011; Easthope et al. 2017; Esteve and Reher 2021), yet single mothers—who certainly face these needs—have become less likely to coreside with their parents. Further analysis of differential group trends is beyond the scope of this paper, but a starting point may lie in the norms surrounding the transition to adulthood (Billari and Liefbroer 2010; Settersten 2007). Parenthood today requires greater self-reliance (Benson and Furstenberg 2006; Bianchi et al. 2006), such that

women who become parents may be economically better established and culturally less permitted and willing to return to the parental home. This interpretation received support from other parts of the analysis, which highlighted how single mothers are in most countries more akin to partnered mothers than to single childless women in terms of coresidence, and how single mothers' coresidence declines with age but not with higher educational attainment.

Of course, our focus on multigenerational coresidence does not tell the whole story. Throughout the article, we have treated coresidence as an arrangement that enables downward support from grandparents to mothers. Empirical evidence confirms that support flows downward in the majority of cases (Dunifon, Ziol-Guest, and Kopko 2014; Harvey, Dunifon, and Pilkauskas 2021; Mutchler and Baker 2009; Ruggles and Heggeness 2008; Smits, Van Gaalen, and Mulder 2010; Verbist, Diris, and Vandenbroucke 2020), but in a substantial minority grandparents themselves are disadvantaged and coresidence is mutually beneficial (Shirahase and Raymo 2014; Verbist, Diris, and Vandenbroucke 2020). In addition, grandparents may support single-mother families through residential proximity rather than coresidence. Residential proximity is the norm throughout Europe (Isengard 2013), though family members live slightly closer in countries where coresidence is more widespread (Hank 2007; Mönkediek, Rotering, and Bras 2017). Furthermore, support may be provided by other kin than parents. Societies vary in their orientation toward kin categories, and there is some evidence of substitution between kin members (Mulder and Van der Meer 2009; Murphy 2008). Our data did not allow us to examine the role of other kin due to low case numbers, but the increasing availability of population-register data can open new avenues (Kolk 2017).

Beside the absence of nonparent kin, there were several limitations to our data. The combination of different surveys and different years entailed challenges regarding the identification of family relationships, the longitudinal tracing of individuals, the harmonization of control variables, and varying degrees of geographic and temporal coverage. Although we addressed these challenges as well as possible, the prevalence and duration of multigenerational coresidence in Eastern Europe might have been slightly underestimated (Ruggles 2010). The confidence intervals may also be wider than necessary, as we corrected for clustering at the sample (i.e., country-source-year) level while sample sizes were fairly large (Abadie et al. 2017, 13–15). A related issue is that some data sources—most of the GGS surveys and all of the IPUMS-I censuses—did not cover the years after 2011. Fortunately, all the sources that we relied on are preparing a new round of data collection, and it should soon be possible to study how recent societal changes have affected single mothers' living arrangements.

How will societies accommodate future population trends? Single motherhood has increased in most countries and will have consequences

for family relations if public policy does not keep up. For example, while multigenerational coresidence can provide a sense of purpose and fulfillment to the older generation, it also costs money, strains relationships, and at times compromises health (Kaschowitz and Brandt 2017; Verbakel et al. 2017; Verbist, Diris, and Vandenbroucke 2020; White and Rogers 1997). Indeed, kin support is often granted out of obligation rather than joy (Brandt 2013), and many believe that the state should financially support caregiving, even in societies where kin support is normative (Albertini and Kohli 2013; Kalmijn and Saraceno 2008). This presents a challenge for public policy, as recent reductions in welfare generosity (Nelson 2013) and the financialization of housing (Dewilde 2022) reduce the scope for residential independence. By combining microdata from various sources, researchers may gain more insight into these processes and how they affect multigenerational coresidence among single mothers in Europe.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the NORFACE Joint Research Programme on the Dynamics of Inequality Across the Life-course, which was co-funded by the European Commission through Horizon 2020 under Grant Number 724363.

Data Availability Statement

The ESS (<https://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>) is available for all non-commercial purposes after registration. The GGS (<https://www.ggp-i.org/>) and IPUMS-I (<https://international.ipums.org/international/>) are available for scientific purposes after approval of an application form. The EU-SILC (<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/microdata/european-union-statistics-on-income-and-living-conditions>) is available for scientific purposes to recognized research entities after approval of a research proposal. The replication code is available on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/j4zev/>).

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