

Research Update

Karen Winchester, Information Officer, Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE)

European Research Funded Under the Fifth Framework Programme

The European Union is responsible for administering a number of different funding programmes of relevance to social care. This third edition of Research Update focuses on projects funded under the Fifth Framework Programme (1998-2002), *Key Action: Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base*. This is a continuation and expansion of the Targeted Socio-Economic Research Programme (TSER Programme), which was created as part of the 4th RTD Framework Programme (1994-1998). Areas of research covered by *Key Action: Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base* include: quality of life; welfare and exclusion; social cohesion and welfare systems; migrants, ethnic minorities and social exclusion; and social trends and structural changes. Brief details of projects funded under this initiative, arranged by theme, can be found on the website of the European Commission at <http://improving-ser.sti.jrc.it/default/>.

SOCCARE: New Kinds of Families

The first project, SOCCARE – ‘New Kinds of Families, New Kinds of Social Care: Shaping Multi-dimensional European Policies for Informal and Formal Care’, is a comparative research project coordinated by the Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of Tampere, Finland <http://www.uta.fi/english/index.html>. The project began in March 2000 and is due for completion in March 2003. The research examines informal and formal social care arrangements for children and older people across the five partner countries involved in the project: Finland, France, Italy, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The project aims to add to existing knowledge in comparative social care research by covering, not only publicly provided care services, but by also including informal care and services provided by the private sector. The views of local policy makers, care workers, care users and family members are also included in the research, something the partners in the project felt was previously lacking in comparative social care research.

The project is in three phases. The first phase focuses on four family types felt to be most at risk

from current socio-economic changes in Europe: single parent families; multi-career families; migrant families and multi-generation families. Country specific reports and comparative consolidation reports have been produced for each individual family type and are currently available on the SOCCARE website: <http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sospol/soccare/reports.htm>. Research methods used in this phase include qualitative interviewing from samples of users of social care services, social care providers and policy makers. The second phase of the project will test these initial findings with local groups of service users, service providers, and policy makers, resulting in recommendations for policy development and future research. The final phase of the project will involve consultation with an international group of experts to examine whether findings from the case-studies can be transferred to other European contexts, despite cultural, economic and institutional differences. The final report is expected in Autumn 2003, and conclusions will be also presented at a final conference. Check the SOCCARE website for further updates on the project and details of the partners involved in the research <http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sospol/soccare/index.htm>.

Care Work in Europe

Another project looking at the influence of socio-economic change on care services is ‘Care Work in Europe: Current Understandings and Future Directions’. The study is financed within the *Key Action: Improving the Socio-Economic Knowledge Base*, under the employment and unemployment theme. The project began in September 2001 and will finish in December 2004. For the purposes of the project, ‘care work’ covers: child care and out of school care; child and youth residential and foster care; care for adults living in residential care; and older people living in the community. The main focus is on care work in the six partner countries: Denmark, Hungary, Spain, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, although information will be incorporated from other countries including France, Italy and Germany. The project aims to assist in the development of good quality employment practices in the caring services. In order to achieve this, the project also looks at how care work is structured in the partner

countries and identifies innovative developments in improving care work.

The project is in three stages. The first stage aims to map and review the existing care workforce and is composed of three separate elements: i) mapping of care services and the care workforce (data sources used include the European Labour Force Survey, New Cronos Eurostat Database); ii) demand, supply and use of care iii) review of literature on quality, job satisfaction and gender issues. Reports for i) and ii) are currently available from the Care Work in Europe website <http://144.82.35.228/carework/uk/reports/index.htm>. Stage Two, 'Understanding of Caring Work in Theory and Practice', will include four small-scale, qualitative case studies examining care practice in different settings and in different countries. The first three studies will be interview-based. The fourth study aims to develop and use a new methodology for the cross-national examination of care work, which will include observation and reflection from practice from different perspectives. The final stage of the project, 'What does the Future hold for Caring Work?', will highlight examples of innovative practice and look at ways of promoting the cross-national exchange of findings. Areas covered in the project to date include: the concept and definition of 'care work'; the supply of care services; structural factors affecting delivery of care work; factors influencing the supply of care services (demographic and economic changes; changes in attitudes; changes in alternative sources of care; and policy); and supply and demand in the care workforce. As with the other projects featured in this edition of Research Update, the difficulties of making cross-national comparisons are also discussed. Limitations in the coverage and classification of occupational groups in the cross-national data made accurate cross-national comparisons difficult. The level and detail of the national sources of information also varied greatly. Data sets of the occupational groups and national profiles of economic activity extracted for the project are available on the Care Work in Europe website, but the research team urge caution when using the data. A number of reports are also available on the Care Work in Europe website, which provides news on the progress of the project <http://144.82.35.228/carework/uk/index.htm>. An additional summary of the project is also available

on the website of the Thomas Coram Research Unit, the UK partner in the project http://ioewebsserver.ioe.ac.uk/ioe/cms/get.asp?cid=470&470_0=1688.

IPOSEC – Improving Policy Responses and Outcomes

The final study featured is IPOSEC, 'Improving Policy Responses and Outcomes to Socio-Economic Challenges: Changing Family Structures, Policy and Practice'. The project aims to examine socio-economic trends in Europe in order to develop a greater understanding of socio-economic change and policy responses and assess whether policy solutions formulated are transferable. Discussion of the importance of policy among the factors influencing decisions about family-life, such as the availability of social benefits and public support services like child care and care for older people, and the family-friendliness of educational and working environments, is also included in the project. The research also examines the methodological challenges involved in the cross-national comparative research process.

Reports outlining these challenges can be obtained from the IPOSEC website <http://www.iprosec.org.uk/xnat.html>. The reports cover issues such as: the methodological choices made and their implications for the projects findings; national differences in the key concepts used in the project; categories used and their dependence on the definitions of national statistics; difficulties in measuring and comparing socio-demographic change across countries; data availability and consistency over time; and the difficulties of accurate comparative analysis of socio-demographic indicators. Partners involved in the project are France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, United Kingdom, Greece, Spain, Sweden, and the EU applicant states of Estonia, Hungary, and Poland. The project is being co-ordinated at the Department of European and International Studies, University of Loughborough <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/eu/>. Further details of the project partners and additional material related to the project can be found on the IPOSEC website <http://www.iprosec.org.uk/index.html>

