

Report for the 2021 IUSSP General Assembly
by the Panel on Family Demography and Family Law

Over the last four years, the panel organised two seminars and two thematic sessions within the congresses of scientific associations other than the IUSSP. The first seminar, whose main organiser was Laura Bernardi, was held in Lausanne in December 2017 on “Family Dynamics and the Changing Landscape of Shared Custody in Europe”. The seminar led to a book edited by Laura and Dimitri Mortelmans published by Springer in July 2021. The second seminar was scheduled to be held in Montreal in late March 2020. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it had to be turned into a series of web seminars spread over the autumn of 2020. The seminar was originally entitled “International Seminar on Family Demography and Family Law around the World”. For reasons that anyone who has been involved in international web seminars over the last year and a half will understand easily, the series was renamed “International Seminar on Family Demography and Family Law all around the Clock”... The organisers are currently working on a special journal issue based on the contributions to the seminar. Some members of the panel organised thematic sessions within the congresses of regional associations they belong to. The first session, on “Family law, public policy, and family behaviour” was part of the 4th Asian Population Association Conference in July 2018. The second, on “Families, the Law, and Public Policy”, took place at the 2018 meeting of Population Association of America in Denver. A third session, again entitled “Families, the Law, and Public Policy”, is scheduled for the upcoming 2022 meeting of the PAA.

Originally, the theme of the panel was motivated by the intertwining between family dynamics and family law in Western societies, with a focus on the bidirectional relationships between changes in family dynamics such as the rise of separation and divorce, the spread of unmarried cohabitation and the increase in the proportion of children who live in step families. Contributions from all around the world made clear that changes in family dynamics and family law and the links between them are not limited to those. For instance, in Asian societies, the move away from the traditional multigenerational family lead to new public discussion about solutions as opposed as a larger involvement of the state in the provision of welfare to the elderly or more stringent provisions in family law to impose on children traditional duties they may escape. In some African societies, customary law and their institutions that maintain traditional power structure within the family may clash with formal law and their institutions that are supposed to favour or impose a more egalitarian power structure.

The pandemic impaired the dynamics of the work of the panel. Whether the members of the panel will propose a new series of activities for the next four-year period remains to be seen.