



WORLD  
FAMILY  
MAP *2017*

MAPPING FAMILY CHANGE AND  
CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

ESSAY

THE COHABITATION-GO-ROUND:  
COHABITATION AND FAMILY  
INSTABILITY ACROSS THE GLOBE

*An International Report from*

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# WORLD FAMILY MAP 2017

## MAPPING FAMILY CHANGE AND CHILD WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

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# Executive Summary

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Laurie DeRose and W. Bradford Wilcox

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The *World Family Map Project* monitors the global health of the family by tracking 16 indicators of family structure, family socioeconomics, family processes, and family culture in multiple countries around the world. Each annual report of the project shares the latest data on these indicators, as well as an original essay focusing on one important aspect of contemporary family life. In both the indicators and the essay, we share the highest-quality data available for countries that are representative of each region of the world. Scholars around the globe serve as advisors and analysts for the project, stimulating a large community of researchers to gather new data and conduct innovative studies on families and children.

This fourth edition of the *World Family Map*, which is sponsored by the Social Trends Institute and a range of international educational and nongovernmental institutions, provides updated indicators of family structure worldwide. We also summarize patterns of family socioeconomics, family processes, and family culture across regions from recent data. The *World Family Map* indicators show that there are distinct family patterns across regions, as well as variation within regions. Families are changing around the world. Marriage is becoming less common. Severe economic hardships, including extreme poverty and undernutrition, are diminishing, yet remain real struggles for a significant minority of the world's population. There are many other patterns to discover in the report. Each country and region has unique strengths to offer as an example for others to follow, and each also has areas of life where families face ongoing challenges.

This year's essay addresses whether the rise in childbearing within cohabiting unions is contributing to instability in children's lives. We examine individual-level data from the United States and 16 European countries, and find that children born into cohabiting families are more likely to see their parents split by age 12 than children born into married families in almost every country. This is also generally true across countries regardless of the mother's education level. Children born to cohabiting couples do, however, experience far fewer family transitions than children born to single women everywhere: While cohabitation is less stable than marriage even when couples have children together, it offers children a distinct stability advantage compared with being born outside of a union.

These findings are echoed in our country-level analysis that used data from across the globe. Although we did not have the data to relate partnership context at birth with subsequent family transitions for individual children outside the United States and Europe, we nonetheless show that a rise in the proportion of all births to cohabiting couples is associated with a later rise in the proportion of children living apart from at least one of their biological parents across 68 countries. Proportions born to single mothers are more strongly associated with later living arrangements than proportions born to cohabiting couples. Thus the retreat from marriage seems to decrease family stability for children in a wide variety of social contexts.

A child's silhouette is seen from behind, looking towards a brightly lit carousel at night. The carousel features ornate, colorful horses and is surrounded by numerous warm-toned lights, creating a bokeh effect in the background. The child is positioned in the lower center of the frame, looking out over the carousel.

# THE COHABITATION-GO-ROUND: COHABITATION AND FAMILY INSTABILITY ACROSS THE GLOBE

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## Executive Summary

In recent decades, much of the globe has witnessed a retreat from marriage. This means more children are being born outside of marriage, either to single parents or cohabiting couples, in countries around the world. This social change raises two questions:

1. Are such children less likely to enjoy stable family lives?
2. Is the growth of nonmarital childbearing, including the growth of childbearing within a cohabiting union, associated with more family instability for children at the national level?

In Europe and the United States, this study finds that children born to cohabiting and especially single parents experience higher levels of family instability in the first 12 years of their lives, relying on data from the Harmonized Histories database. Using data from 100 countries around the globe, this study also finds that family instability is higher in countries where more children are born to single mothers and cohabiting couples. Finally, national-level data from 68 countries shows that the growth of cohabitation is associated with increases in family instability in countries around the world. In other words, marriage seems to be associated with more family stability for children across much of the globe, whereas cohabitation is typically associated with more instability.

## Introduction

Scholars disagree about the importance of marriage when it comes to the welfare of children. Some argue that marriage per se does not play an important role in the welfare of children, at least in some countries, whereas others contend that marriage continues to play a central role in the welfare of children.<sup>1</sup> However, there is a growing consensus that the number of parental union transitions matters for children above and beyond family structure, with children being more likely to thrive in stable families and more likely to flounder in unstable ones.<sup>2</sup> As sociologist Andrew Cherlin noted in *The Marriage-Go-Round*, family instability is cause for concern “because it may increase children’s behavioral and emotional problems. Simply put, some children seem to have difficulty adjusting to a series of parents and parents’ partners moving in and out of their home.”<sup>3</sup>

But if the institution of marriage—and the norms, customs, and laws associated with it—confers stability on family life, then marriage may matter, at least indirectly, when it comes to providing a stable family context for the rearing of children. On the other hand, if cohabitation is as stable as marriage in some countries, then the marital context of childrearing may not matter, at least in those countries. Accordingly, this essay takes up two central sets of questions:

1. Do individual children born outside of marriage experience more family instability in countries across Europe and North America, regardless of parents’ educational attainment? Do children born to cohabiting parents experience more family instability than their peers born to married parents in Western countries?

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: J. Stacey, “Good Riddance to ‘The Family’: A Response to David Popenoe” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 55, no. 3 (1993), on the one hand; and, on the other hand, see S. McLanahan and I. Sawhill, “Marriage and Child Wellbeing Revisited: Introducing the Issue,” *The Future of Children* 25, no. 2: (Fall 2015).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., W. D. Manning, “Cohabitation and Child Wellbeing,” *The Future of Children* 25, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Andrew Cherlin, *The Marriage-go-round: The State of Marriage and the Family in America Today* (New York: Random House LLC, 2010): p. 5.

## 2. Are the societal levels of lone childbearing, as well as levels of childbearing in cohabiting unions, associated with more family instability for children in countries across the globe? And are increases in societal levels of childbearing outside of marriage, including childbearing among cohabiting couples, associated with increases in family instability in countries around the world?

These questions are particularly salient because the share of births taking place outside of marriage is on the rise in many countries across the globe. Likewise, cohabitation is an increasingly common context for the bearing and rearing of children in many countries. Yet not much is known about the relationships between marriage, cohabitation, and childbearing among unpartnered mothers, and family stability for children and families outside the West, including Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia.

In this essay, we document the association between partnership context at birth—single, cohabiting, or married—and stability in children’s lives across a wide variety of countries. We focus on stability because it matters in children’s lives. Family instability is associated with a host of negative outcomes for children<sup>4</sup> even among children in higher-income households.<sup>5</sup> For example, recent research from the United States revealed that maternal abuse increased when unions were dissolved, as well as when cohabiting relationships with stepfathers were formed.<sup>6</sup> Union instability is also associated with childhood mortality risk in every region of the Global South.<sup>7</sup>

It is easy to think of lone parenthood as disadvantageous for children because lone parents frequently have less income than coupled parents, and they always have less time. Nonetheless, part of the disadvantage associated with being born to a single mother may be the heightened risk of subsequent union transitions faced by children of single mothers.<sup>8</sup> That’s because union transitions appear to present children with more challenges than merely being reared by a lone parent.<sup>9</sup> Research from the United States shows that most children born to single parents are drawn into cohabiting or marital relationships while they are growing up, and relationships formed after the birth of a child are less stable—even if the biological parents partner.<sup>10</sup> This is in part because couples who commit to one another before

<sup>4</sup> S. L. Brown, “Marriage and Child Well-being: Research and Policy Perspectives,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 5 (2010); R. Crosnoe and S. E. Cavanagh, “Families with Children and Adolescents: A Review, Critique, and Future Agenda,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72, no. 3 (2010); S. E. Cavanagh and A. C. Huston, “The Timing of Family Instability and Children’s Social Development,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70, no. 5 (2008); C. Osborne and S. McLanahan, “Partnership Instability and Child Well-being,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 4 (2007); P. Fomby and A. J. Cherlin, “Family Instability and Child Well-being,” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 2 (2007); J. A. Goodnight, et al., “Effects of Multiple Maternal Relationship Transitions on Offspring Antisocial Behavior in Childhood and Adolescence: A Cousin-Comparison Analysis,” *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 41, no. 2 (2013); S. L. Hofferth and F. Goldscheider, “Family Structure and the Transition to Early Parenthood,” *Demography* 47, no. 2 (2010); L. L. Wu, “Effects of Family Instability, Income, and Income Instability on the Risk of a Premarital Birth,” *American Sociological Review* 72, no. 2 (1996).

<sup>5</sup> M. Hout and T. A. DiPrete, “What We Have Learned: RC28’s Contributions to Knowledge About Social Stratification,” *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 24, no. 1 (2006); W. Sigle-Rushton, J. Hobcraft, and K. Kiernan, “Parental Divorce and Subsequent Disadvantage: A Cross-Cohort Comparison,” *Demography* 42, no. 3 (2005); F. Steele, W. Sigle-Rushton, and Ø. Kravdal, “Consequences of Family Disruption on Children’s Educational Outcomes in Norway,” *Demography* 46, no. 3 (2009).

<sup>6</sup> W. Schneider, “Relationship Transitions and the Risk for Child Maltreatment,” *Demography* 53, no. 6 (2016): 1771-1800.

<sup>7</sup> L. DeRose, et al. “Maternal Union Instability and Childhood Mortality Risk in the Global South, 2010-2014.” *Population Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> S. McLanahan, “Income Instability and Complexity After Nonmarital Birth: Outcomes for Children in Fragile Families,” In M. J. Carlson & P. England (eds.), *Social Class and Changing Families in an Unequal America* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); S. McLanahan and A. N. Beck, “Parental Relationships in Fragile Families,” *The Future of Children* 20, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>9</sup> For instance, daughters of stably single mothers are less likely to have premarital births than children of divorced mothers, L. L. Wu (1996), and more union transitions generally mean more behavior problems, regardless of parents’ current union status [see for example: J. M. Najman et al., “Impact of Family Type and Family Quality on Child Behavior Problems: A Longitudinal Study,” *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 36, no. 10 (1997); P. Fomby and C. Osborne, “Family Instability, Multi-partner Fertility, and Behavior in Middle Childhood,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, September (2016).] Mothers entering new unions has, however, been associated with improvement in educational outcomes among children of single mothers with higher socioeconomic status: [see for example: R. L. Wagmiller, E. Gershoff, P. Veliz, and M. Clements, “Does Children’s Academic Achievement Improve When Single Mothers Marry?” *Sociology of Education* 83, no. 2 (2010).]

<sup>10</sup> C. Gibson-Davis, “Magic moment? Maternal Marriage for Children Born Out of Wedlock,” *Demography* 51, no. 4 (2014).

having a biological child usually have a deeper commitment than those who partner in the wake of getting pregnant.<sup>11</sup> As Daniel Lichter and his colleagues put it, “moving in together following a pregnancy—especially an unintended one—is unlikely to lead to marital success or union stability.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, we evaluate whether children born to unpartnered mothers in countries besides the United States share this higher risk of family instability.

Research from the United States further shows that children born to cohabiting parents also face an elevated risk of family instability relative to children born to married parents because cohabitation is less stable than marriage,<sup>13</sup> even when children are present.<sup>14</sup> Research suggests that the most stable cohabitations are converted to marriage around the time of childbirth, and that the riskier unions remain as cohabitations: those cohabiting at the time of childbirth are thus a mixed set of those who will soon marry (with similar dissolution risks to those with marital births<sup>15</sup>), and of more dissolution-prone couples.<sup>16</sup>

Children who start out living with both their biological parents might still have more stable family lives than children born to single mothers because initial transitions among lone parents might be motivated by a desire to be in union. Nevertheless, children born to cohabiting unions in the United States used to experience even more transitions than children born to single mothers,<sup>17</sup> and recent data show only a modest stability advantage if unmarried parents were living together at the time the child was born.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the amount of instability in children’s lives associated with the parents’ union status at birth has varied across time in the United States, and we investigate how much it varies across countries.

Our central question about how much partnership context at childbirth matters for subsequent stability in children’s lives cannot be addressed without attention to social class. Greater instability associated with nonmarital births can be caused by partnership context, but instability can also *result* from the same kinds of conditions that make marital births less likely: low resources, poor job prospects, and little reason to delay childbearing in hope of more prosperous times.<sup>19</sup> How much cohabiting births are concentrated among women with low socioeconomic status varies between countries, but the data for European countries nonetheless support the generalization that childbearing during cohabitation is more characteristic of women with lower educational attainment.<sup>20</sup> We structured our analysis to remove some of the effects of social class.

<sup>11</sup> S. Stanley, “Marriage and Positive Child Outcomes: Commitment, Signaling, and Sequence,” Institute for Family Studies (2014).

<sup>12</sup> D. T. Lichter, K. Michelmore, R. N. Turner, and S. Sassler, “Pathways to a Stable Union? Pregnancy and Childbearing Among Cohabiting and Married Couples,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 35, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>13</sup> K. B. Guzzo, “Trends in Cohabitation Outcomes: Compositional Changes and Engagement Among Never-Married Young Adults,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 76, no. 4 (2014); R. K. Raley and E. Wildsmith, “Cohabitation and Children’s Family Instability,” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 66, no. 1 (2004); S. L. Brown, J. B. Stykes, and W. D. Manning, “Trends in Children’s Family Instability, 1995–2010,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78, no. 5 (2016); D. R. Graefe and D. T. Lichter, “Life Course Transitions of American Children: Parental Cohabitation, Marriage, and Single Motherhood,” *Demography* 36, no. 2 (1999).

<sup>14</sup> W. D. Manning, P. J. Smock, and D. Majumdar, “The Relative Stability of Cohabiting and Marital Unions for Children,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 23, no. 2 (2004); C. Osborne, W. D. Manning, and P. J. Smock, “Married and Cohabiting Parents’ Relationship Stability: A Focus on Race and Ethnicity,” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69, no. 5 (2007); K. Musick and K. Michelmore, “Cross-National Comparisons of Union Stability in Cohabiting and Married Families with Children,” Paper presented at the Population Association of America: Annual Meeting in Washington, DC (2016); Jennifer Manlove et al., “Union Transitions Following the Birth of a Child to Cohabiting Parents,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 31, no. 3 (2012): 361–86; S. Kennedy and L. Bumpass, “Cohabitation and Children’s Living Arrangements: New Estimates from the United States,” *Demographic Research* 19, no. 47 (2008).

<sup>15</sup> K. Musick and K. Michelmore, “Change in the Stability of Marital and Cohabiting Unions Following the Birth of a Child,” *Demography* 52, no. 5 (2015).

<sup>16</sup> D. T. Lichter, K. Michelmore, R. N. Turner, and S. Sassler, “Pathways to a Stable Union? Pregnancy and Childbearing Among Cohabiting and Married couples,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 35, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Raley and Wildsmith, (2004).

<sup>18</sup> Brown, Stykes, and Manning, (2016).

<sup>19</sup> S. McLanahan, “Diverging Destinies: How Children are Faring Under the Second Demographic Transition,” *Demography* 41, no. 4 (2004); K. Edin and T. J. Nelson, *Doing the Best I Can*, (University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> B. Perelli-Harris, et al., “The Educational Gradient of Childbearing within Cohabitation in Europe,” *Population and Development Review* 36, no. 4 (2010), see especially Figure 2.

In summary, the research from the United States leads us to believe that partnership context at birth typically matters for children because that context is related to the stability of the parental union. Among adults, the overall well-being advantage associated with being married rather than cohabiting is narrower in countries where cohabitation is more common.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, we also test to see if cohabitation is more stable for children in countries where cohabiting births are more common.

## Analysis based on children's life histories

### *Approach: analysis of individual children*

We evaluate the relationship between parental union status at birth and subsequent union transitions for individual children using data from 17 countries. The data for Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Georgia, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, and Russia come from the Generations and Gender Surveys (GGS), which interviewed nationally representative samples of the resident population in each country. The Dutch data come from the 2003 Fertility and Family Survey (FFS). The data for the United Kingdom are from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS).<sup>22</sup> The Spanish data come from the Survey of Fertility and Values conducted in 2006; the Polish data are from the Employment, Family, and Education survey conducted in 2006; and the United States data are from the National Survey of Family Growth 2006-10.

These surveys all asked retrospective questions about when children were born, as well as the timing of entries and exits from cohabiting and marital unions; they have been standardized into a dataset called the Harmonized Histories.<sup>23</sup> The surveys that comprise the Harmonized Histories have been frequently used in other studies and are generally considered high quality. In particular, fertility and marriage trends from most of the Generations and Gender Surveys reflect trends found in vital registration statistics.<sup>24</sup> We were not able to include Germany here, however, due to severe mismatches between vital registration and GGS birth estimates.<sup>25</sup>

Men were interviewed in some countries, but not all, so we used women's reports of union status at the time of the child's birth (single, cohabiting, or married).<sup>26</sup> We then counted union transitions occurring before the child's twelfth birthday among children born in 1985 or later. We counted both union formation and dissolution as transitions, but we did not count it as a transition when cohabiting couples married since there was no change in their child's living arrangements.

Any association between union status at birth and transitions in the first 12 years of a child's lifetime might reflect class differences in probability of marriage. That is, in the countries included in the Harmonized Histories,

<sup>21</sup> J. P. M. Soons and M. Kalmijn, "Is Marriage More than Cohabitation? Well-being Differences in 30 European Countries," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 71, no. 5 (2009).

<sup>22</sup> To date, the Harmonized Histories include the BHPS but not the later UK Longitudinal Survey (Understanding Society) that includes part of the BHPS sample. We utilized the Understanding Society data for the individual country analyses, but only data available in the Harmonized Histories for the pooled analyses.

<sup>23</sup> B. Perelli-Harris, M. Kreyenfeld, and K. Kubisch, "Technical Manual for the Harmonized Histories Database," MPIDR Working Paper (Rostock, Germany: Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, 2010-2011); also see [www.nonmarital.org](http://www.nonmarital.org). Despite slightly different survey designs, the union histories are relatively comparable. Questions about cohabitation generally refer to co-resident relationships with an intimate partner that last more than three months. In the Italian and Austrian surveys, however, there is no minimum duration. Registered unions, or PACS, are recorded in the French GGS, but we include them with marriages because they are officially registered. Fewer than 1 percent of relationships in the French GGS are recorded as PACS. All sampling designs are accounted for using the provided individual level weights where relevant. Where no individual level weights were provided, surveys were assumed to be self-weighting. Italian data within the Harmonized Histories are missing birth months, and these dates are imputed via a random draw from a uniform distribution to ensure no systematic error.

<sup>24</sup> J. Vergauwen, et al., "Quality of Demographic Data in GGS Wave 1," *Demographic Research* 32, no. 24 (2015).

<sup>25</sup> B. Perelli-Harris and M. Lyons-Amos, "Changes in Partnership Patterns Across the Life Course: An Examination of 14 Countries in Europe and the United States," *Demographic Research* 33, no. 6 (2015); B. Perelli-Harris and M. Lyons-Amos, "Partnership Patterns in the United States and across Europe: The Role of Education and Country Context," *Social Forces* 95, no. 1 (2016).

<sup>26</sup> See also the justification for analyzing maternal union transitions in Brown et al. (2016).



marriage is more common among the more highly educated than among those with less education.<sup>27</sup> Thus, a greater number of transitions among children born to cohabitation may reflect the effects of lower socioeconomic status rather than partnership context at birth.

We address this issue by controlling for maternal education<sup>28</sup> when predicting the probability of children experiencing at least one union transition in a logistic regression model with data pooled across all countries. Our first pooled regression controls only for maternal education at the time of first childbirth and country of residence; the second adds controls for maternal age (because stability is associated with both age and marriage) and grandmother's education (as a further control for socioeconomic status).

In addition, we compile transition histories by both maternal education and partnership context at birth—single, cohabiting, or married—for each country. Thus, we are able to answer two related but different questions: 1) does parental union status at birth affect children's experience of family stability regardless of maternal education level? and 2) is the relationship between union status at birth and subsequent stability the same across maternal education levels?

## *Results: analysis of individual children*

### Comparing children born during cohabitation and marriage

We first estimated the stability gap between cohabitation and marriage across all 17 countries. Children born to cohabiting couples were over twice as likely to experience at least one maternal union transition by age 12 than children born to married couples (**Model 1, Table 1**). This gap is larger than the gap associated with maternal education, as children were 19 percent more likely to experience a transition if their mother has moderate education (compared to high), and 30 percent more likely to experience a transition if their mother has low education.

We then added controls for maternal age and grandmother's education, but the stability gap between marriage and cohabitation is not affected much by these controls (**Model 2, Table 1**). The risk of experiencing a union disruption before age 12 was still almost twice as great among children born to cohabiting parents as among children born to married parents in the second model.

When we estimated the stability gap between marriage and cohabitation separately by country, we found a stability advantage for children born to cohabiting unions in the United Kingdom that was inconsistent with previous work that had analyzed earlier births from the British Household Panel Survey than the ones we included (1985-96).<sup>29</sup> Because we did not know whether our finding greater stability among children born to cohabiting couples than married couples accurately reflected change over time, we re-analyzed births from 1985-96 in the United Kingdom using data from the Understanding Society survey.<sup>30</sup> We then found a stability advantage to marriage that was consistent with both earlier research on the United Kingdom and almost all other countries in the Harmonized History data. We therefore show results obtained from the Understanding Society survey when presenting individual country results (**Table 2 and Figure 1**).

The probability of a child experiencing at least one maternal union transition by age 12 is shown separately by country and maternal education level in **Figure 1**. We focus first on children whose mothers had moderate education

<sup>27</sup> B. Perelli-Harris and M. Lyons-Amos (2016).

<sup>28</sup> We use the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 1997 levels and divide them into low (ISCED 1 & 2; completed basic secondary), moderate [ISCED 3 & 4; beyond secondary education but less than completed college (including vocational and technical schools)], and high (ISCED 5 & 6; university degree and higher). These categories are standardized, but still have different meaning across countries. Within countries, as we use them, they still provide a means of controlling for socioeconomic background. Some mothers will attain higher levels of education after childbirth.

<sup>29</sup> K. Kiernan, "The Rise of Cohabitation and Childbearing Outside Marriage in Western Europe," *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 15, no.1 (2001).

<sup>30</sup> The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) officially ended in 2008, but all remaining participants were eligible to be interviewed in wave 2 of the Understanding Society survey (beginning in January 2010), as found at: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/about/bhps-in-understanding-society>. Thus, the Understanding Society data includes more observations for the 1985-96 birth cohort: many from the original BHPS sample, plus births reported for the same time period from the Understanding Society wave 1 sample.

**Table 1** Odds ratios for experiencing at least one maternal union transition by age 12, data from Harmonized Histories pooled across countries

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
Partnership context at birth (ref=married)		
Single	205.02***	195.70***
Cohabiting	2.05***	1.96***
Maternal education (ref=high)		
Medium	1.19 ***	1.06
Low	1.30 ***	1.03
Maternal age at first birth (mean centered)		0.88***
Grandmother's education (ref=medium/high)		
Low		0.94***
Country (ref=Austria)		
Belgium	0.78 *	0.82
Bulgaria	0.58 ***	0.49***
Estonia	2.11 ***	1.81***
France	1.18	1.25*
Georgia	0.70 ***	0.59***
Hungary	1.72 ***	1.54***
Italy	0.10 ***	0.11***
Lithuania	2.67 ***	2.42***
Netherlands	0.74 **	0.91
Norway	1.26 **	1.28**
Poland	0.78 *	0.73**
Romania	0.66 ***	0.62***
Russia	2.55 ***	2.18***
Spain	0.54 ***	0.55***
United Kingdom	1.87 ***	1.80***
United States	3.50 ***	3.02***
Constant	0.08 ***	0.10***

N=52,902

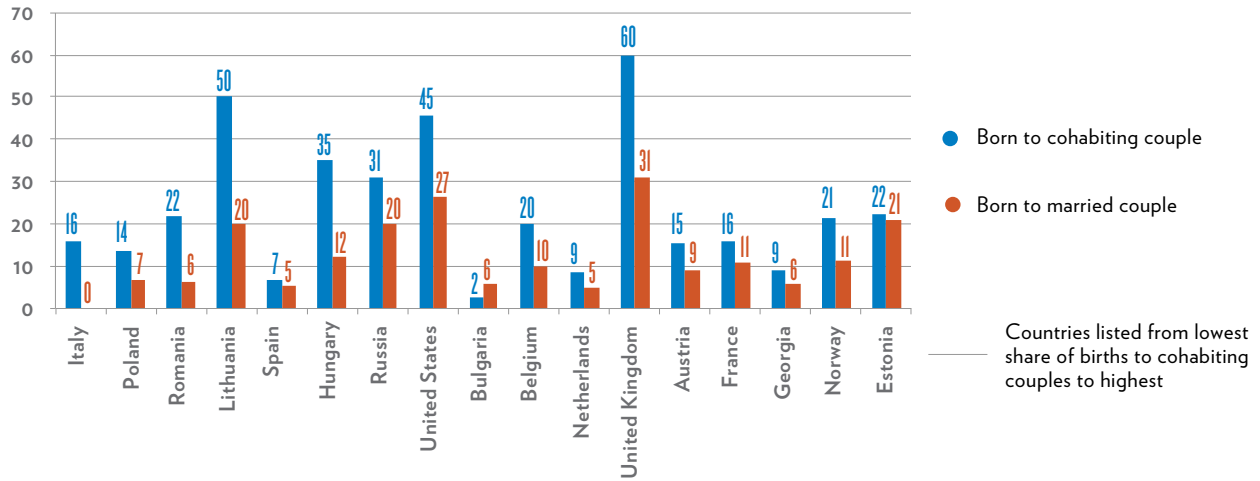
levels (**Panel A**) because it is the only education category with adequate sample size for cohabiting births in every country. Cohabiting births are rare among women with high education in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania, while they are rare among women with low education in Lithuania and Russia. Shaded bars in **Panels B and C** of **Figure 1** are based on fewer than 30 children's experiences.<sup>31</sup> We note that the levels of instability shown for the United Kingdom are not fully comparable to the levels in other countries because the data do not come from the Harmonized Histories.

It is immediately obvious from **Panel A** of **Figure 1** that the stability advantage that children born to married couples enjoy over those born to cohabiting couples is quite sizable in some countries (e.g., in Romania, 22 percent

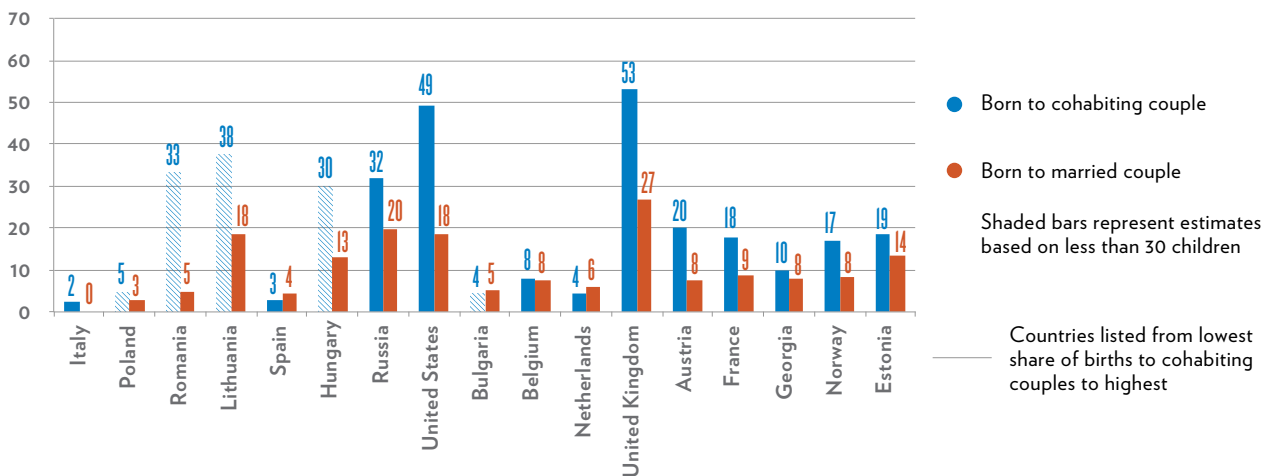
<sup>31</sup> Table 2 shows the underlying data for all three panels of Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Union status at birth and subsequent stability**

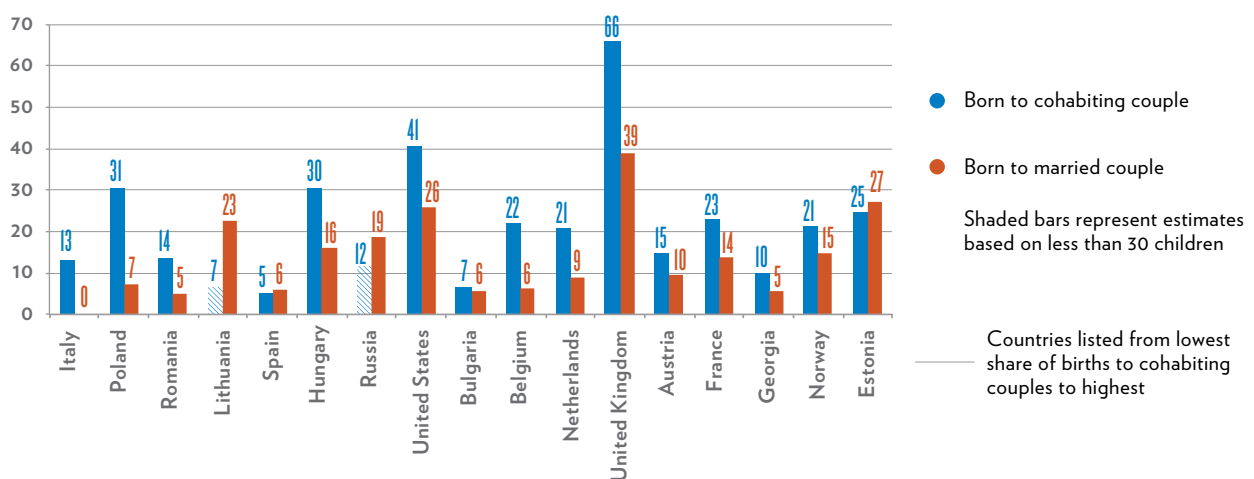
**Panel A: Percent experiencing at least one transition by age 12 among children of mothers with moderate education**



**Panel B: Percent experiencing at least one transition by age 12 among children of mothers with high education**



**Panel C: Percent experiencing at least one transition by age 12 among children of mothers with low education**



of children born to cohabiting couples see their parents split by age 12, compared to 6 percent of children born to married couples) and very modest in others (e.g., in Estonia, the percentages are 22 and 21, respectively). In Bulgaria, the stability gap actually favors children born to cohabiting couples with only 2.4 percent of cohabiting unions dissolved by age 12, compared to 5.9 percent of marriages.

The size of the stability advantage to marriage does not have a clear geographic pattern, as it is largest in percentage terms in Italy, Romania, Lithuania, and Belgium. It also seems unrelated to the share of births to cohabiting couples in the country: countries in [Figure 1](#) are arrayed from low levels of cohabiting births to high ones. Thus, the notion that when cohabitation becomes more common it also becomes more similar to marriage in terms of stability for children is not supported by these data.<sup>32</sup>

Results at other education levels are quite similar to what we see for children of moderately-educated mothers. Overall, children born to married couples are less likely to experience a transition than children born to cohabiting couples. The stability gap favors cohabiting couples at the highest education levels in Spain and the Netherlands (by 1-2 percentage points), and at the lowest education levels in Spain and Estonia (by 1-3 percentage points).

Despite these outliers, the stability gap does not vary much by maternal education level. Children of mothers with moderate education are more likely to experience the dissolution of a parental union by age 12 by an average of about 11 percentage points if their parents were cohabiting when they were born than if their parents were married. Among children of mothers with low and high educational attainment, the gap averages 8 and 10 percentage points, respectively. In 11 of the countries, the stability gap is either constant across education levels or slightly larger among the moderately educated as in the cross-country averages. In Estonia, Romania, and the United States, marriage is most strongly associated with stability among children of the most educated, but in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Poland, marriage is most strongly associated with stability among the least educated.

## Children born to lone mothers

Few children are raised by stably single mothers from birth to age 12 in any country: less than 10 percent everywhere besides the United Kingdom and Belgium, where about one-quarter of children born to single mothers enjoy family stability ([Table 2](#)). Spanish children of mothers with moderate education also have relative high rates of family stability. Children born to single mothers are also more likely to undergo two or more transitions before their twelfth birthday (the average across countries is 19 percent as compared to 7 percent of children born to cohabiting couples, and 6 percent of children born to married couples).

The variation across countries in the share of children experiencing two or more union transitions is shown in [Figure 2](#). Very different cultural contexts share similar levels of instability for children born to single mothers, e.g., Hungary and Norway, whereas such children in France experience markedly more instability than in Belgium. Again, the instability associated with being born to a single mother does not seem to vary with prevalence of cohabiting births.

## Analysis based on country-level data

### *Approach: country-level analysis*

Our individual-level data cover only Europe and the United States. While the wide variety of European countries affords a valuable comparative perspective, it leaves out most of the world. Most other countries do not have suitable data for relating union status at birth with the number of subsequent family transitions in children's lives. We can, nonetheless, relate normative contexts for childbirth with degree of family stability for a wide variety of countries

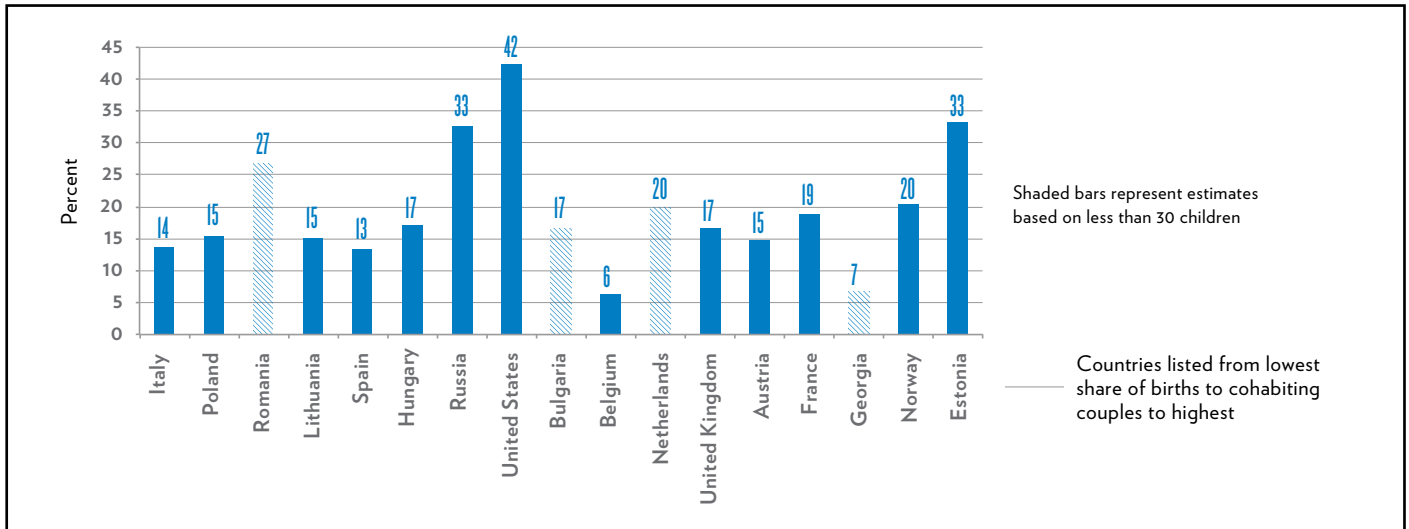
<sup>32</sup> We also tested this formally using multilevel regression analysis and came to the same conclusion.

**Table 2** Transitions by age 12 according to partnership context at birth and maternal education in countries with individual level data from the Harmonized Histories and the UK Understanding Society Survey

	Mother's Educational Attainment	Percent experiencing at least one transition			Mean number of transitions at age 12		
		SINGLE	COHABITING	MARRIED	SINGLE	COHABITING	MARRIED
Austria	HIGH	91	20	8	0.45	0.30	0.10
	MEDIUM	97	15	9	1.14	0.30	0.10
	LOW	93	15	10	1.07	0.30	0.10
Belgium	HIGH	79	8	8	1.03	0.12	0.12
	MEDIUM	74	20	10	0.81	0.22	0.12
	LOW	74	22	6	0.80	0.30	0.08
Bulgaria	HIGH	100	4	5	1.00	0.04	0.06
	MEDIUM	92	2	6	1.13	0.05	0.07
	LOW	96	7	6	1.43	0.09	0.07
Estonia	HIGH	100	19	14	1.19	0.24	0.18
	MEDIUM	100	22	21	1.40	0.32	0.28
	LOW	100	25	27	1.38	0.38	0.40
France	HIGH	90	18	9	1.13	0.19	0.11
	MEDIUM	91	16	11	1.14	0.19	0.15
	LOW	85	23	14	1.11	0.34	0.19
Georgia	HIGH	100	10	8	1.29	0.13	0.09
	MEDIUM	100	9	6	1.06	0.10	0.06
	LOW	-	10	5	-	0.10	0.06
Hungary	HIGH	100	30	13	1.31	0.30	0.15
	MEDIUM	98	35	12	1.19	0.43	0.15
	LOW	100	30	16	1.34	0.32	0.21
Italy	HIGH	100	2	0	1.00	0.02	0.00
	MEDIUM	98	16	0	1.11	0.16	0.00
	LOW	98	13	0	1.04	0.14	0.00
Lithuania	HIGH	100	38	18	1.11	0.38	0.20
	MEDIUM	95	50	20	1.11	0.53	0.23
	LOW	100	7	23	1.22	0.07	0.25
Netherlands	HIGH	100	4	6	1.00	0.04	0.09
	MEDIUM	100	9	5	1.30	0.10	0.07
	LOW	100	21	9	1.45	0.36	0.12
Norway	HIGH	89	17	8	1.13	0.21	0.11
	MEDIUM	92	21	11	1.14	0.32	0.12
	LOW	90	21	15	1.15	0.29	0.24
Poland	HIGH	92	5	3	1.00	0.05	0.03
	MEDIUM	100	14	7	1.15	0.13	0.08
	LOW	97	31	7	1.12	0.42	0.08
Romania	HIGH	100	33	5	1.00	0.33	0.06
	MEDIUM	96	22	6	1.34	0.27	0.08
	LOW	100	14	5	1.25	0.16	0.06
Russia	HIGH	97	32	20	1.37	0.38	0.25
	MEDIUM	97	31	20	1.38	0.37	0.26
	LOW	100	12	19	1.82	0.15	0.24
Spain	HIGH	100	3	4	1.75	0.03	0.06
	MEDIUM	78	7	5	0.92	0.09	0.06
	LOW	97	5	6	1.08	0.06	0.08
United Kingdom	HIGH	74	51	27			
	MEDIUM	73	60	30			
	LOW	71	66	39			
United States	HIGH	98	49	18	1.52	0.81	0.28
	MEDIUM	97	45	27	1.59	0.68	0.43
	LOW	97	41	26	1.66	0.64	0.43

Figures based on less than 30 children's experiences are shaded in grey. Cases where cohabiting unions are more stable than marital unions are highlighted in yellow.

**Figure 2** Share experiencing two or more union transitions by age 12 among children born to single mothers with moderate education



across the globe. This analysis is at the country level rather than the individual level. Instead of using maternal union status at birth as a predictor of subsequent union transitions, we use the proportion of births in each union status—single, cohabiting, or married—as a predictor of the proportion of children living with both biological parents at older ages.

### Cross-sectional analysis

Childbirth outside of a union obviously exposes children to the risk of parents never forming a union, but they still may. Nonetheless, we would expect that both because of unions not forming and because those formed tend to be more fragile than those established before childbirth,<sup>33</sup> greater shares of births to single parents would lead to greater shares of children reared apart from at least one of their biological parents. The proportion of births to cohabiting couples can be expected to condition later living arrangements to the extent that cohabiting unions are more fragile than marital unions.

Country-level analyses are notoriously subject to the ecological fallacy—making inferences about individuals from data groups. To illustrate, if marriages dissolved more frequently in countries where cohabitation was common, higher proportions born to cohabiting couples could be associated with fewer children living with both biological parents, even if cohabitation and marriage dissolved at equal rates. While acknowledging that national-level associations do not prove individual-level processes, we nonetheless believe that it is valuable to assess whether the normative context of births is related to aggregate family stability. Even if the processes do not operate on the individual level, it is still useful to know whether large proportions of births to single and/or cohabiting parents are related to family stability at the aggregate level.

We were able to compile national level data on the partnership context of births and children’s later living arrangements (proportion living with both biological parents) for 100 countries (see list and data sources in the E-ppendix). For example, in the Ukraine we know the distribution of union status among women having a child less than one year old<sup>34</sup> from the Reproductive Health Survey in 1999. We used the proportion of births to single,

<sup>33</sup> C. Gibson-Davis (2014).

<sup>34</sup> We tabulated union status at interview among women giving birth in the last year; some women will have entered or formalized unions since childbirth, and others will have dissolved them, but 1) these individual-level measurement errors are offsetting, and 2) our aim is to measure the normative context for births rather than to measure individual birth context precisely (since we do not follow individuals over time like in the individual-level analysis using the Harmonized Histories).



**Within countries, the growth of cohabitation is associated with a rise in family instability.**

cohabiting, and married women in 1999 as a predictor of the proportion of 8-year-old children living with both biological parents in the 2007 Demographic and Health Survey. Similarly, we used the distribution of births by union status in 2007 as a predictor of the proportion of 5-year-old children living with both biological parents in 2012 (from the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey). We include the child's age and age squared in our models to adjust for the fact that living arrangements were measured at various ages.

### Change over time analysis

Our first national-level analysis allows us to establish the correlation between proportions of children *born* to single, cohabiting, and married women, and proportions of children living with both biological parents *later on*. Even when controlling for many other country-level factors,<sup>35</sup> there still may be important cultural and political factors omitted. Therefore, we also sought to test how change over time in countries' partnership contexts at birth related to change over time in children's living arrangements. In other words, we tested whether *within countries* the growth in single and cohabiting childbearing predicted the growth in proportions of children living apart from at least one biological parent.

In order to analyze change over time within countries, we needed measurements of both partnership context of births and children's living arrangements at two different points in time. These data were available for 69 countries. We omitted the Democratic Republic of the Congo from our analysis because its 20 percentage-point decrease in births to single mothers from 2001 to 2007 probably reflects more about political instability than shifts in the normative context of childbearing in the country. We proceed with data from 68 countries.

The value of having more than one observation per country is enormous. If we simply documented an association between the proportion cohabiting near the time of childbirth and the proportion of children living with both biological parents later, it is quite possible that some cultural or other factor drives both—that birth context does not actually matter for subsequent stability. If, however, we use *the change* in the context of births as a predictor of the change in family stability (rather than using only the context of births as a predictor of family stability), a spurious relationship is far less likely. When analyzing change in levels rather than the levels themselves, everything that is time-invariant about the country (e.g., cultural factors, political systems) is controlled.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to partnership context at birth, both rates of parental mortality and prevalence of non-coresidential unions would affect the probability of children living with both biological parents. While we ideally include these as controls in our analysis, suitable data are only available for a subset of our countries. We minimized the effect of parental mortality on our analysis by omitting orphans and semi-orphans from both the numerator and the denominator when calculating the proportion living with both biological parents whenever possible. This information was available in the two most common data sources for low-income countries—the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and the Demographic and Health Surveys—and generally not available for higher-income countries. Parental death is, however, rare among children under 15 in higher-income countries, so our correction is least consequential where it is not possible.<sup>37</sup>

We also obtained an indication that non-coresidential unions did not substantially affect our results in an analysis restricted to the 48 (low-income) countries with available data. The proportion of reproductive-aged women in non-coresidential unions significantly affected the proportion of children living with both biological parents, but introducing that control did little to affect our estimates of partnership context at birth in either the cross-sectional or the change over time analysis.

<sup>35</sup> We added measures of socioeconomic development (e.g., the Human Development Index, Gross Domestic Product per capita, mean years of education in the adult population, percent urban), whether the country was a former communist regime, population size, and shares of the population under age 15 and over age 65 to our analysis (see Model 2, Table 3).

<sup>36</sup> In statistical terms, having two sets of observations per country allows us to control for country-level fixed effects when estimating the relationship between partnership context of births and children's later living arrangements.

<sup>37</sup> We also tested the effect of missing data on parental death by including a dummy variable for whether living arrangements calculated from all children or just those with two living parents. This variable was not significant in either our cross-sectional or our fixed effects model.

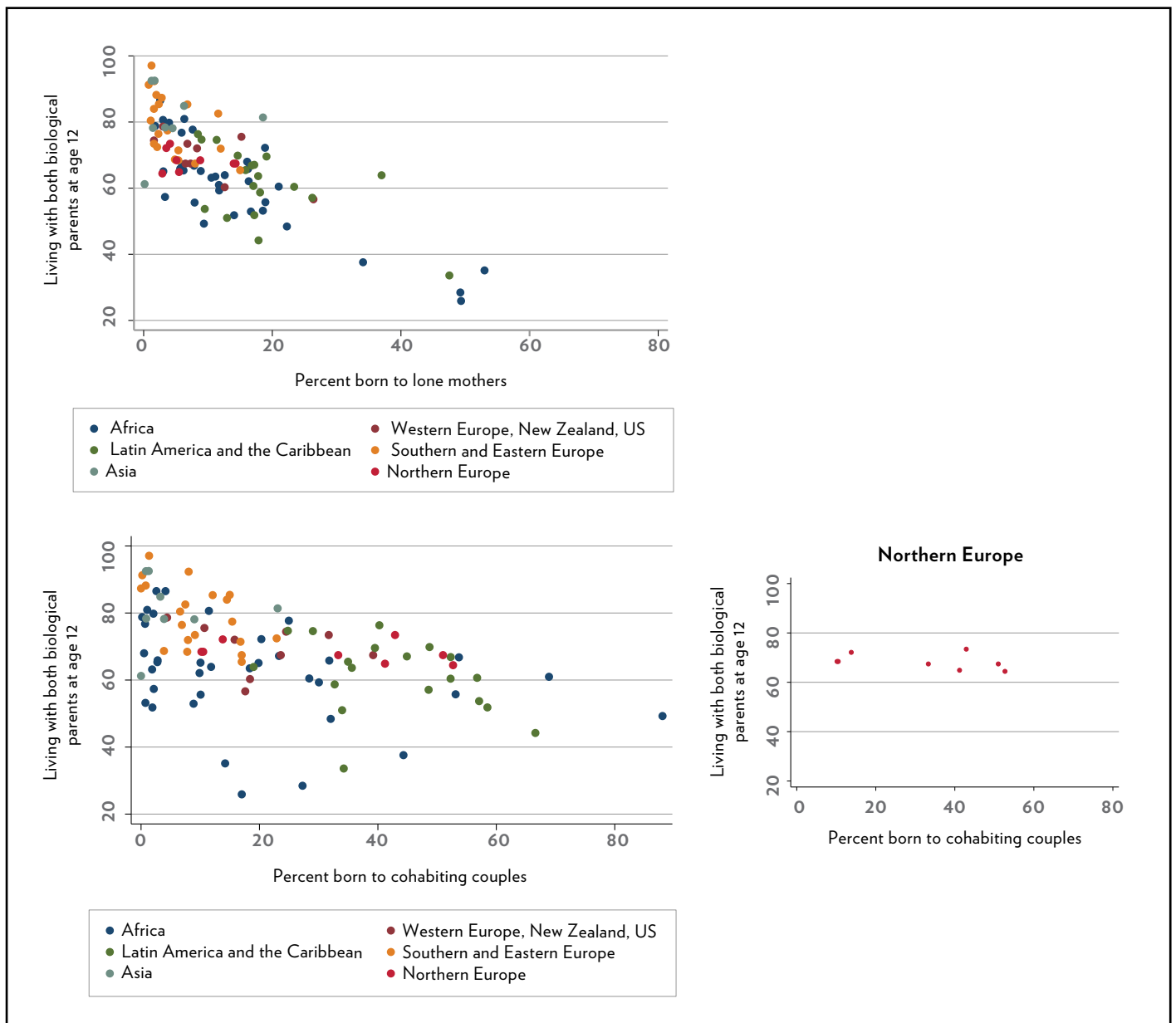


## Results: country-level analysis

### Cross-sectional results

Using the most recent data for each of 100 countries, we find that higher proportions of births to single women and to cohabiting couples are both significantly associated with lower proportions of children living with both biological parents. These relationships are also shown in [Figure 3](#).<sup>38</sup> The share of births to single mothers has a stronger relationship with children's later living arrangements than does the share of births to cohabiting couples. Where the

**Figure 3** Country-level relationship between partnership context at birth and children's later living arrangements



<sup>38</sup> The values for living with both biological parents at age 12 in figure 3 were estimated using the observed living arrangements at various ages and adjusting using the coefficients on age and age squared in the model.

share of births to single mothers is a percentage point higher, the share of children living with both biological parents is 0.90 percentage points lower. Where the share of births to cohabiting couples is a percentage point higher, the share of children living with both biological parents is 0.15 percentage points lower (Table 3, Model 1). Figure 3 also presents cohabiting births and children’s living arrangements separately for Northern Europe, as this is the one region where there is little relationship.

The overall significant relationships persist even when controlling for measures of: socioeconomic development;<sup>39</sup> whether the country was a former communist regime; population size; and shares of the population under age 15 and over age 65 (see Table 3 Model 2). The only one of these variables that was statistically significant was the Human Development Index: in countries with higher levels of human development, more children live with both biological parents. This is not surprising given the low levels of development in Africa and the high levels of child fosterage in (particularly West) Africa. With the controls, the estimated relationship between births to single parents and living arrangements is somewhat larger, and the relationship between births to cohabiting parents and living arrangements is about one-third smaller (-0.10).

### Change over time results

When we use two observations per country and can therefore control for country-specific fixed effects, we cannot incorporate any other country-level control variables.<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, our change over time models provide a more exacting test of the relationship between partnership context at birth and children’s later living arrangements because everything that is common to the two time points within each country is effectively controlled. Our analysis also

**Table 3** Estimated effect of partnership context at birth on percent living with both biological parents across 100 countries

	MODEL 1	MODEL 2
Percent born to single mother	-0.90 ***	-0.93 ***
Percent born to cohabiting couple	-0.15 **	-0.10 *
Child’s age	-3.44 *	-0.55
Child’s age squared	0.17	-0.04
Human Development Index		55.53 *
Gross National Product per capita		0.08
Mean years of education		-0.36
Percent urban		-0.14
Former communist regime		2.31
Population size		0.00
Population share < 15		-0.04
Population share > 65		-0.47
Constant	97.61 ***	67.10 ***

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < 0.001 N=100

<sup>39</sup> I.e., the Human Development Index, Gross Domestic Product per capita, mean years of education in the adult population, and percent urban.

<sup>40</sup> The set of dummy variables for country uses up all of the available degrees of freedom.

**Table 4** Estimated effect of change in partnership context at birth on change in percent living with both biological parents across 68 countries

Percent born to single mother	0.20		
Percent born to cohabiting couple	-0.27 *		
Child's age	-1.34		
Child's age squared	-0.01		
<b>Northern Europe</b>			
Estonia	-93.93 ***		
Great Britain	-99.77 ***		
Iceland	-63.62 ***		
Lithuania	-96.29 ***		
Norway	-92.03 ***		
<b>Western Europe</b>			
Austria	-90.82 ***		
Belgium	-95.48 ***		
France	-92.43 ***		
Netherlands	-89.72 ***		
<b>Eastern Europe</b>			
Bulgaria	-56.98 ***		
Hungary	-96.12 ***		
Moldova	-71.62 ***		
Poland	-89.67 ***		
Romania	-73.40 ***		
Russia	-74.42 ***		
Ukraine	-20.16 *		
<b>Southern Europe</b>			
Italy	-86.23 ***		
Portugal	18.25		
Serbia	60.91 ***		
Spain	-88.10 ***		
<b>United States</b>			
	-116.86 ***		
<b>Asia</b>			
Armenia (reference)			
Cambodia	37.34 ***		
Kazakhstan	24.81 **		
Kyrgyz Republic	-69.88 ***		
Mongolia	-67.17 ***		
Uzbekistan	68.53 ***		
<b>South America</b>			
Bolivia	6.64		
Colombia	-92.98 ***		
Ecuador	-65.48 ***		
Peru	-92.07 ***		
Uruguay	92.39 ***		
<b>Central America and the Caribbean</b>			
Cuba	5.66		
Dominican Republic	-106.60 ***		
Guatemala	-65.36 ***		
Haiti	-68.55 ***		
Honduras	-57.29 ***		
Mexico	-68.42 ***		
Panama	-91.11 ***		
<b>West Africa</b>			
Benin	-34.84 ***		
Burkina Faso	-46.59 ***		
Côte d'Ivoire	-74.73 ***		
Ghana	-112.70 ***		
Guinea	-69.01 ***		
Mali	-37.51 ***		
Niger	-44.66 ***		
Nigeria	-9.86		
Senegal	-102.10 ***		
Sierra Leone	-51.90 ***		
<b>East Africa</b>			
Burundi	-84.68 ***		
Ethiopia	-32.43 ***		
Kenya	-106.95 ***		
Malawi	-104.61 ***		
Mozambique	-70.45 ***		
Rwanda	12.60		
Tanzania	-86.42 ***		
Togo	-75.17 ***		
Uganda	-102.07 ***		
Zambia	-111.10 ***		
Zimbabwe	-87.39 ***		
<b>Middle Africa</b>			
Cameroon	-76.23 ***		
Central African Republic	15.16		
Chad	-31.62 ***		
Republic of the Congo	107.51 ***		
<b>Southern Africa</b>			
Lesotho	-43.89 **		
Madagascar	-22.60 *		
Namibia	-147.77 ***		
South Africa	-137.58 ***		
Constant	177.57 ***		

N=68

accounts for change over varying time periods (e.g., 11 years between observations of partnership context at birth and 8 years between observations of living arrangements) by standardizing them to represent 10-year change.

Here we find that a rise in the share of births to single women does not predict greater instability in children's lives, but when the share of births to cohabiting couples within a country increases by one percentage point, the percentage later living with both biological parents drops by 0.27 percentage points. In other words, growth in cohabitation predicts growth in family instability (Table 4) more strongly than levels of cohabitation predict family instability (Table 3).

## Conclusion

Using both individual-level and country-level data, we have shown that births to cohabiting unions contribute to instability in children's family lives. Individual children born in cohabiting unions experience more union transitions before age 12 than children born in marital unions regardless of the mother's educational attainment. There is much variation between countries in the amount of instability, but there are few exceptions to the pattern: children born to marital unions have the best chance of stability across various cultures, legal systems, welfare regimes, and levels of cohabitation.

The largest absolute stability gap between children born to cohabiting vs. marital unions is among children whose mothers have high levels of education in the United States: 49 percent of children born to cohabiting couples experience parental union dissolution as compared to 18 percent of children born to married couples. At other education levels, the United States is more similar to Europe in the size of the stability gap. Overall, the stability gap does not vary much by maternal education levels, and in the countries where it does, sometimes marriage matters more for children of the less educated, and sometimes it matters more for children of the more educated. There is considerable country-specific variation in the way that union type conditions stability, but marriage is associated with an advantage at all education levels in most countries. Only in Bulgaria did children of mothers with moderate education experience fewer transitions if they were born to cohabiting rather than married couples. There are no countries where marriage is not associated with a stability advantage for at least one of the maternal education levels.

Our country-level analysis showed that across the globe, there is a negative association between the share of all births that are to cohabiting couples and the proportion of 12-year-olds living with both biological parents. Further, a rising share of births to cohabitation predicted fewer children still being reared by both biological parents at age 12. Within countries, the growth of cohabitation is associated with a rise in family instability. The primary exception to this pattern is that the growth of cohabitation in Northern Europe is not related to more family instability.

We also confirmed, unsurprisingly, that children born to single mothers have the least stable family lives. At the individual level, children born to single mothers were about nine times as likely as children born to cohabiting couples to experience at least one maternal union transition by age 12. At the country level, the association between the share of births to single women and children's later living arrangements was also about nine times greater than the association between cohabiting births and children's living arrangements. Further, at the individual level where we were able to measure multiple union transitions, children born to single mothers were about four times as likely to undergo two or more transitions than children born to cohabiting couples. Even though nonmarital childbearing is generally associated with a stability disadvantage, the disadvantage is markedly attenuated if the child's parents were partnered at the time of childbirth.

Some of our findings are not unexpected. Work published over 15 years ago based on Fertility and Family Surveys from nine European countries also showed a cross-country stability advantage to marriage over cohabitation

<sup>41</sup> K. Kieman (2001).

(measured by whether the biological parents were still in union when the child turned five).<sup>42</sup> Other work using similar data and more countries in the West also found that rising proportions of cohabiting births shifted childrearing to single mothers because there were more union transitions following cohabiting births than marital ones.<sup>43</sup> Children born to marriages have also been shown to have more stable family lives in Chile.<sup>44</sup>

On the other hand, this is the first study to show across a broad range of countries that the stability advantage to marriage exists at all levels of maternal education. If children born within marriage were advantaged primarily because better-educated mothers are more likely to have children within marriage, overall contrasts associated with partnership context at birth should have been muted within education categories. Instead, the overall stability gap was fairly consistent across educational levels.

Further, we have established that cohabitation continues to confer a stability disadvantage on individual children even as cohabitation has become more normative. We find no evidence supporting the idea that in societies where cohabiting births are more common, marriage and cohabitation come to resemble each other in terms of stability for children. There is much cross-national variation in the size of the stability gap, but it is not conditioned by the prevalence of cohabitation. While growth in cohabitation tends to close the socioeconomic gap between cohabiting and married couples,<sup>45</sup> it does not close the stability gap for their children. In other words, marriage seems to be associated with more family stability for children across much of the globe.

*Marriage seems to be associated  
with more family stability for  
children across much of the globe.*

<sup>42</sup> P. Heuveline, J. M. Timberlake, and F. F. Furstenberg, "Shifting Childrearing to Single Mothers: Results from 17 Western Countries," *Population and Development Review* 29, no. 1 (2003); P. Heuveline and J. M. Timberlake, "Changes in Nonmarital Cohabitation and the Family Structure Experiences of Children Across 17 Countries," *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, Special International Volume 10 (2005).

<sup>43</sup> Viviana Salinas, "Changes in Cohabitation After the Birth of the First Child in Chile," *Population Research and Policy Review* 35, no. 3 (2016).

<sup>44</sup> J. P. M. Soons and M. Kalmijn (2009); see also: K. Musick and K. Micheltore (2016) who found only small socioeconomic differences according to union status in Austria, France, Norway, and Sweden.





## WORLD FAMILY INDICATORS

*Renee Ryberg, Laura H.  
Lippman, W. Bradford Wilcox,  
and Laurie DeRose*

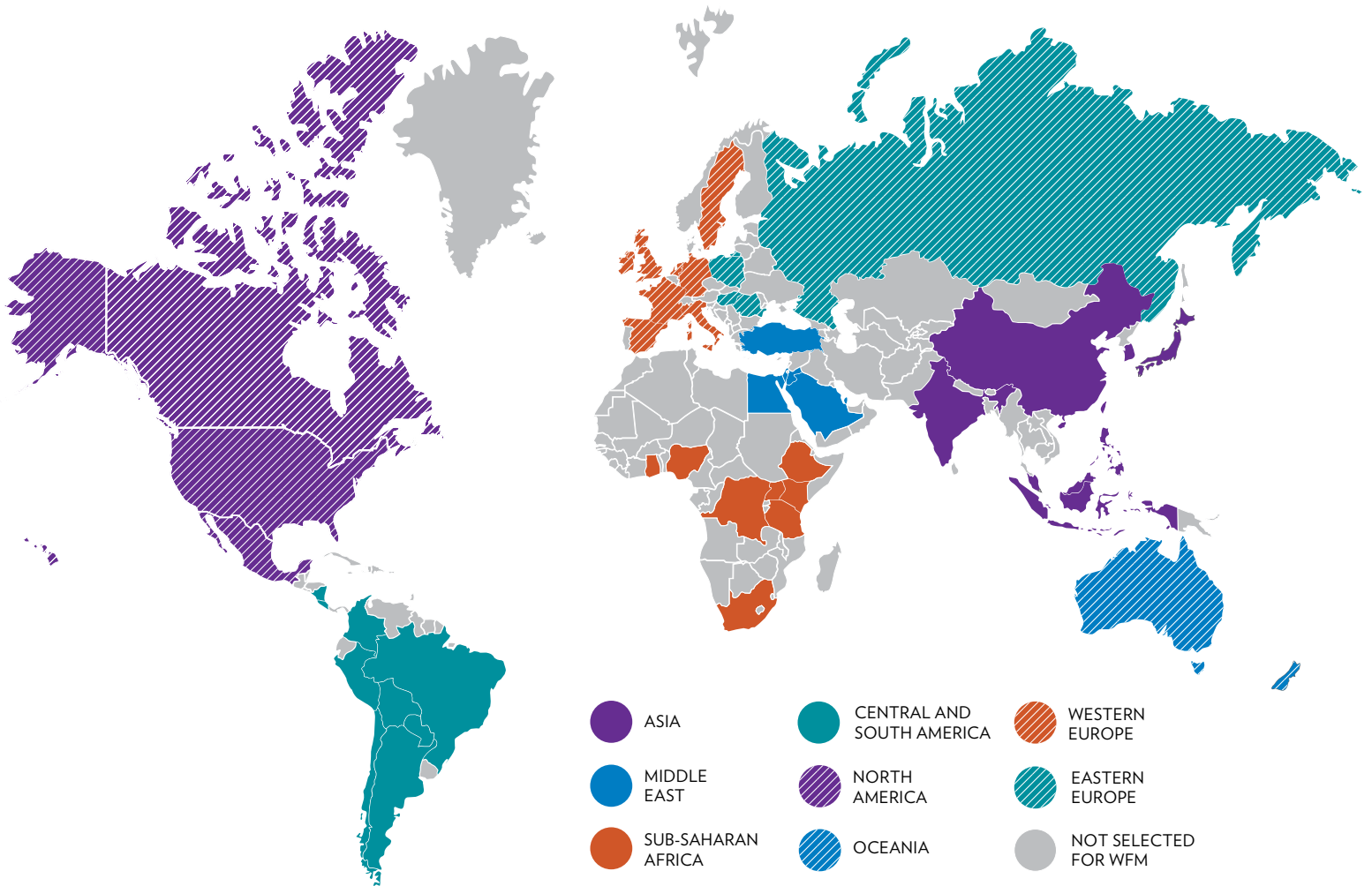
This section of the 2017 *World Family Map* report provides information on 16 indicators of family well-being in four areas—family structure, family socioeconomics, family process, and family culture—across 49 countries that are home to a majority of the world’s population.

The indicators for the *World Family Map* 2017 demonstrate the diversity of families and nations in which children are being raised. Every region of the world is home to distinct patterns of family structure, socioeconomics, family process, and culture, and there is often variation within regions. Major changes in families are taking place around the world. Marriage is becoming less common almost everywhere, while cohabitation is becoming more common in select regions. The world has made progress toward the Millennium Development Goal for reducing malnutrition; however, families continue to face stressors such as extreme poverty and parental unemployment. Parents and extended family members have limited control over some of these problems, but one avenue through which they can directly facilitate strong family relationships and positive child outcomes is parent-child communication, which takes daily efforts and participation.

This report is updated annually with new data, as available. Here we present the same indicators as we did in the 2015 report, with updated indicators for children’s living arrangements, marriage and cohabitation, fertility, and nonmarital childbearing.

# General Methods

**FIGURE A** Countries in the 2017 World Family Map



- ASIA
- CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
- WESTERN EUROPE
- MIDDLE EAST
- NORTH AMERICA
- EASTERN EUROPE
- SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
- OCEANIA
- NOT SELECTED FOR WFM

- ASIA**
- China
  - India
  - Indonesia
  - Japan
  - Malaysia
  - Philippines
  - Singapore
  - South Korea
  - Taiwan

- MIDDLE EAST**
- Egypt
  - Israel
  - Jordan
  - Qatar
  - Saudi Arabia
  - Turkey

- SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**
- Democratic Republic of the Congo
  - Ethiopia
  - Ghana
  - Kenya
  - Nigeria
  - South Africa
  - Tanzania
  - Uganda

- CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA**
- Argentina
  - Bolivia
  - Brazil
  - Chile
  - Colombia
  - Costa Rica
  - Nicaragua
  - Paraguay
  - Peru

- NORTH AMERICA**
- Canada
  - Mexico
  - United States

- OCEANIA**
- Australia
  - New Zealand

- WESTERN EUROPE**
- France
  - Germany
  - Ireland
  - Italy
  - Netherlands
  - Spain
  - Sweden
  - United Kingdom

- EASTERN EUROPE**
- Hungary
  - Poland
  - Romania
  - Russian Federation



**SELECTING INDICATORS:** Along with advisors representing every region of the world, the study team selected indicators using a research-based conceptual framework of family strengths. We generated indicators in the following four domains: family structure, family socioeconomics, family process, and family culture. Indicators were chosen for each domain based on their importance to family and child well-being and on data availability, as well as a concern for regional representation and balance in the number of indicators across domains.

**SELECTING COUNTRIES:** When designing this report, it was necessary to select a set of countries for which comparisons could be made. While it was not possible to include all of the approximately 200 countries in the world, countries were selected to ensure regional representation of high-, middle-, and low-income countries. Data availability for the desired time period was also considered. These factors resulted in focusing on 49 countries—an increase from 45 countries in the original 2013 report—that account for over 75 percent of the world’s population.<sup>1</sup> **Figure A** displays the countries by region. As more data become available on key indicators of family well-being, the *World Family Map* will be able to include more countries.

**DATA SOURCES:** Numerous data sources track indicators of family well-being. The sources presented here, which are listed below, were selected for their quality, their coverage of countries, and their indicators. These sources have a reputation for using rigorous data collection methodologies across countries, or in cases where they collected data from individual country sources, such as censuses, they harmonized the data to ensure comparability across countries. In addition, we chose data sources in which multiple countries were represented; however, data from the same source may not be available for all countries or for the same year across countries, so caution is needed in making comparisons. For each indicator a primary data source was chosen. When data for a particular country were not available from that source, other sources were used to supplement. When data are available from the same source for multiple years, we note changes in indicators that are five percentage points or larger.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2013). World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, DVD Edition.

## Data Sources

**Country-level sources:** When data were not available from an international survey, country-level data sources were sought. Examples include data from national statistics bureaus and country-level surveys.

**Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS):** DHS is a survey of more than 90 developing nations, focusing on population and health information. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, ranging from 2005 to 2014.

**Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO):** As part of the United Nations, FAO compiles statistics on food and agriculture-related indicators, including undernourishment. The most recent data are projected for 2014 to 2016 and were extracted from their statistical division’s online database FAOSTAT.

**Integrated Public Use Microdata Series-International (IPUMS):** IPUMS is a compilation of harmonized censuses from countries throughout the world. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, ranging from 2000 to 2011.

**International Social Survey Programme (ISSP):** ISSP is a collaboration between annual national surveys to ensure data comparability on social science questions. This report uses their 2012 collection on family and changing gender roles. These surveys were fielded around 2012, but not necessarily in the 2012 calendar year.

**LIS (formerly known as the Luxembourg Income Study):** LIS is a collection of harmonized data on the income and wealth of individuals in middle- and high-income countries. Data from LIS used in this report date from 2002 to 2013.

**Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD):** OECD’s Family Database provides cross-national statistics on the well-being of families and children throughout the member and partner countries of the OECD.

**Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):** PISA is an international tri-annual assessment of literacy in reading, mathematics, and science. PISA is administered in all OECD member countries as well as additional self-selected countries. This report uses data from the contextual part of the 2012 parent survey. Unfortunately, the items of interest were asked in a small group of countries in this iteration of the survey.

**World Bank:** The World Bank provides a wealth of information on their databank at [data.worldbank.org](http://data.worldbank.org). This report utilizes their data on absolute poverty.

**World Values Survey (WVS):** WVS is a survey of political and sociocultural values in more than 50 countries. This report uses the most recent data available for each country, from the fourth through sixth survey waves, which date from 2001 to 2014.

For more information on specific sources, see e-ppendix at [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix).

# Family Structure

## Key Findings

We have continued to update indicators of family structure across the globe. We focus here on children's living arrangements, adults' marital and cohabiting status, fertility, and nonmarital fertility.

- Two-parent families constitute a majority of families around the globe. Although children in Africa are the most likely to live apart from both parents, the proportions living with one parent in Africa are similar to other regions except for the regions where most children live in two-parent families: Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe.
- Adults are most likely to be partnered in sub-Saharan Africa, which has high proportions of married unions like Asia and the Middle East, but also has moderately high proportions of cohabiting unions. Other regions have similar but lower partnership rates, with cohabitation comprising a greater share of all unions in Central/South America than anywhere else.
- Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest fertility in the world. In the Middle East, Asia, and Central/South America, there are countries both below and above replacement fertility. Europe, Oceania, Canada, and the United States are all below replacement fertility, but levels are particularly low in Southern and Eastern Europe, and some East Asian countries.
- The lowest rates of nonmarital childbearing occur in Asia and the Middle East, where large proportions of adults are married and few are in cohabiting unions. Nonmarital childbearing occurs at higher rates in Eastern Europe, and still higher rates in North America, Oceania, the rest of Europe, and some countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Central/South America has the world's highest rates of nonmarital childbearing.

## Living Arrangements

In almost all countries across the globe, the majority of children under the age of 18 live with two parents (Figure 1). Most of our data specifically identifies biological parents, though for some countries stepparents are either sometimes included (IPUMS excludes probable stepparents) or explicitly included (data from OECD).

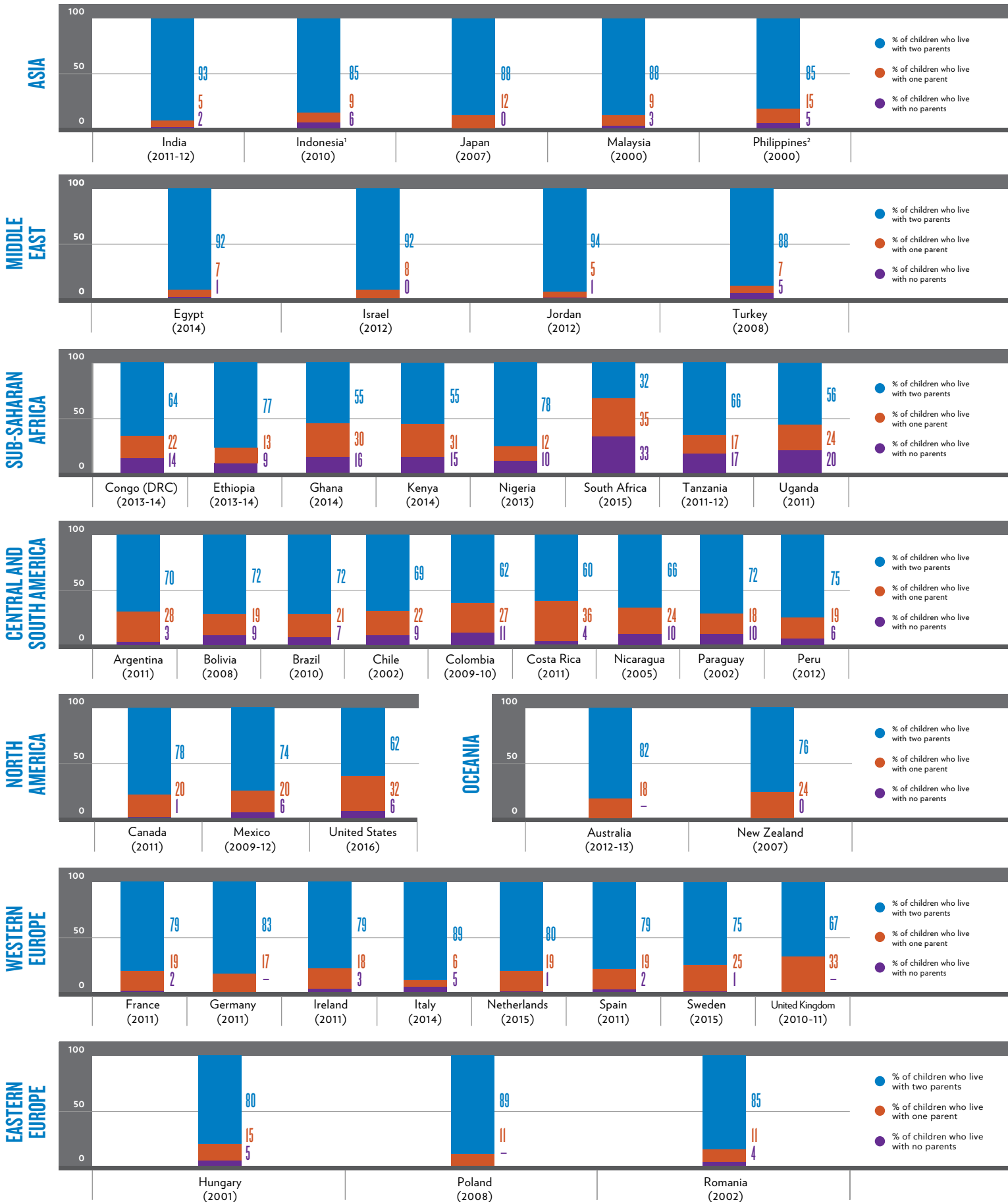
The generalization that most children live with two parents even holds across most of sub-Saharan Africa, even though the proportions living with both parents there are lower than elsewhere, primarily because of relatively high rates of teen marriage,<sup>1</sup> relatively high parental mortality, and widespread practice of child fostering. African children are often “fostered” to other relatives, either for their own good—e.g., fostered to an aunt who lives near a secondary school—or for the benefit of their host family, e.g., fostered to a household in need of domestic or farm labor.

In South Africa, with its long legacy of labor migration and union instability, only 32 percent of children under 18 live with both natural parents. An almost equal share of South African children (33 percent) live with *neither* parent. Both of these figures are outliers even by African standards. Across the other sub-Saharan African countries shown in Figure 1, between 55 (Ghana) and 78 percent (Nigeria) of children live with both natural parents, and between 9 (Ethiopia) and 20 percent (Uganda) live with neither parent.

<sup>2</sup> A. Mayyasi, “At What Age Do People Get Married Around the World?,” *Priceonomics* (2015), as found at: <https://priceonomics.com/at-what-age-do-people-get-married-around-the-world/>

# FIGURE 1 Living arrangements, 2000-2016

Percentage of children living with two, one, and no parents



- Means data on children living with no parents were not available

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix)

Central/South America also has small proportions of children being reared by two parents by world standards: between 60 (Costa Rica) and 75 percent (Peru). But here, the proportions living with only one parent are higher than in Africa, and living apart *from both parents* is less common (between 3 [Argentina] and 11 percent [Colombia] of children live apart from both parents).

Living apart from both parents is uncommon throughout the rest of the world. In no country outside of Africa and Central/South America does the proportion of children without a parent in the home exceed 6 percent. Therefore, the variation in children's living arrangements throughout the rest of the globe is driven by the prevalence of children living with one parent (this includes a combination of single parents, re-partnered parents, and children whose parents remain in union but do not live together).

The Middle Eastern countries for which we have data all have very high shares of children reared by two parents (between 88 [Turkey] and 94 percent [Jordan]). The shares are similarly high in Asia at 85 (Philippines and Indonesia) to 93 percent (India), and in Eastern Europe at 80 (Hungary) to 89 percent (Poland). Western countries have higher rates of children living with only one parent (and subsequently lower rates of children living with two), though there is a great deal of variation among them. Among European countries, the United Kingdom is the only one where fewer than 75 percent of children live with both natural parents. The proportion of children in two-parent homes also tops 75 percent in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, but is only 62 percent in the United States. The proportion of children living with both natural parents in the United States is more typical of sub-Saharan Africa than anywhere else because fully 32 percent of U.S. children live with only one natural parent (only 6 percent live with neither natural parent).

## Marriage and Cohabitation

In this 2017 *World Family Map* report, we present the first comparisons of union status among reproductive-aged adults across the globe that account for the various age structures in different populations (Figure 2). To illustrate why age structure is important, consider the case of Italy, a country where fertility fell below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman about four decades ago. Italy consequently has relatively few young adults compared to a country like Argentina, where the total fertility rate is currently down to 2.3 children per woman.

Cohabitation has been on the rise in Italy, particularly among younger Italians who are delaying (and perhaps foregoing) marriage more than their predecessors did.<sup>3</sup> Given that those aged 15 to 35 comprise only 47 percent of the Italian reproductive-age population, rising proportions of cohabiting younger adults do not translate as quickly into higher overall cohabitation rates as they would in a country like Argentina, where 62 percent of the reproductive-age population is under age 35.

To generate comparable rates across countries with varying age structures, we use the cohabitation rates in each 5-year age interval and apply them to the same reference population. We chose Argentina arbitrarily as it was the first in an alphabetical listing of our target countries. The choice of the reference population affects the calculated rates, but it does not affect comparisons between countries. Applying the same reference population to all countries produces rates that can be directly compared. Italy had 2 percent of reproductive-aged adults cohabiting in 2011, but it would have had 6 percent if its age distribution were the same as Argentina's. Even more strikingly, only 35 percent would be married if Italy's population were younger (as compared to 54 percent in the unstandardized figures), reflecting the late age at first marriage in Italy.

Our 2015 *World Family Map* report that used unstandardized marriage and cohabitation rates indicated that partnerships were generally most prevalent in Asia and the Middle East. Our age-standardized rates still reveal relatively high partnership rates in those regions, but not as high as in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa has not seen as much

<sup>3</sup> G. Gabrielli and J. M. Hoem, "Italy's Non-Negligible Cohabitational Unions: La Cohabitation Hors Mariage en Italie: Un Phénomène Non Négligeable," *European Journal of Population* 26, no. 1 (2010).

**FIGURE 2** Marriage and cohabitation, 2000-2014



- Means the data for cohabitation were not available

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix)

delay in union formation as have more developed regions where more women stay in school well past puberty. **Figure 2** shows marriage rates for sub-Saharan Africa that are generally similar to Asia and the Middle East (with South Africa again being a notable exception), but sub-Saharan Africa has more partnerships because of more cohabitation. Overall partnership rates do not vary much across Oceania, North America, and Europe—even Eastern Europe is similar to the rest of Europe.

In contrast, cohabitation rates vary greatly. Poland is the only one of our Eastern European countries where cohabitation occurs at similar rates to the rest of Europe, and the rate is more than twice as high as in the other Eastern European countries. Cohabitation is far more common in Central/South America than anywhere else on the globe: almost half of unions among reproductive-age adults are cohabitations, whereas in most of Europe, about one-third are. North American countries are similar to Europe in this regard, whereas Australia has a lower share of all unions that are cohabitations, and New Zealand has a higher share.

In sum, Africa is the region with the highest prevalence of unions because, like Asia and the Middle East, many marry and non-negligible proportions cohabit. Other regions have somewhat lower partnership rates, and they do not vary as much in the proportion in union as the type of union: cohabitation is relatively rare in Eastern Europe and quite commonplace in Central/South America.

## Childbearing

Sub-Saharan African women bear more children, on average, over their lifetimes than women in other regions by a large margin (**Table 1**). The range is quite substantial—from 6.5 children per woman in the Democratic Republic of the Congo down to 2.4 children per woman in South Africa. But even South Africa's rate is substantially above replacement fertility (2.1).

The region with the next highest total fertility rates is the Middle East. Only one of our Middle Eastern countries, Qatar, has a total fertility rate below replacement level at 2.0.

The countries of Central and South America, including Mexico, have a large range of fertility levels: from 3.0 in Bolivia down to 1.8 in Brazil, Chile, and Costa Rica. Asia has countries with relatively high fertility like India, Indonesia, and the Philippines (all above replacement but less than 3), but it also has countries with “lowest low” (under 1.3) fertility: Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan (all at 1.2).

In the remaining regions—North America, Europe, Oceania—all of our selected countries are below replacement fertility, but Southern and Eastern Europe have lower fertility rates than most of Western and Northern Europe. Oceania, the United States, and Canada are on the higher end of this divide.<sup>4</sup>

### *Nonmarital childbearing*

The lowest rates of nonmarital childbearing occur in Asia and the Middle East, where large proportions of adults are married and few are in cohabiting unions. The only country in either of these regions where more than 7 percent of births occur outside of marriage is the Philippines, where 43 percent do (**Figure 3**).

Nonmarital childbearing occurs at higher rates in Eastern Europe, where it ranges from 25 (Russian Federation) to 47 percent (Hungary). It occurs at even higher rates in North America (between 33 [Canada] and 65 percent [Mexico]), and Oceania (between 34 [Australia] and 47 percent [New Zealand]), as well as across the rest of Europe, where it varies widely between 29 percent in Italy and 57 percent in France. Rates of nonmarital childbearing are also

<sup>4</sup> R. R. Rindfuss, M. K. Choe, and S. R. Brauner-Otto, “The Emergence of Two Distinct Fertility Regimes in Economically Advanced Countries,” *Population Research and Policy Review* 35, no. 3 (2016): 287-304.

**TABLE 1 Total fertility rate, 2016**

*Number of children who would be born per woman if she lived to the end of her childbearing years and bore children at each age in accordance with prevailing age-specific fertility rates*

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China 1.6	Egypt 3.5	Democratic Republic of the Congo 6.5	Argentina 2.3
India 2.3	Israel 3.1	Ethiopia 4.2	Bolivia 3.0
Indonesia 2.5	Jordan 3.5	Ghana 4.2	Brazil 1.8
Japan 1.5	Qatar 2.0	Kenya 3.9	Chile 1.8
Malaysia 2.0	Saudi Arabia 2.8	Nigeria 5.5	Colombia 2.3
Philippines 2.8	Turkey 2.1	South Africa 2.4	Costa Rica 1.8
Singapore 1.2		Tanzania 5.2	Nicaragua 2.4
South Korea 1.2		Uganda 5.8	Paraguay 2.6
Taiwan 1.2			Peru 2.5
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada 1.6	Australia 1.8	France 1.9	Hungary 1.4
Mexico 2.2	New Zealand 2.0	Germany 1.5	Poland 1.3
United States 1.8		Ireland 1.9	Romania 1.2
		Italy 1.4	Russian Federation 1.8
		Netherlands 1.7	
		Spain 1.3	
		Sweden 1.8	
		United Kingdom 1.8	

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix)

high in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa (although Ethiopia and Nigeria have low rates, births occur outside of marriage 24 to 54 percent of the time in the other sub-Saharan African countries shown in [Figure 3](#)).

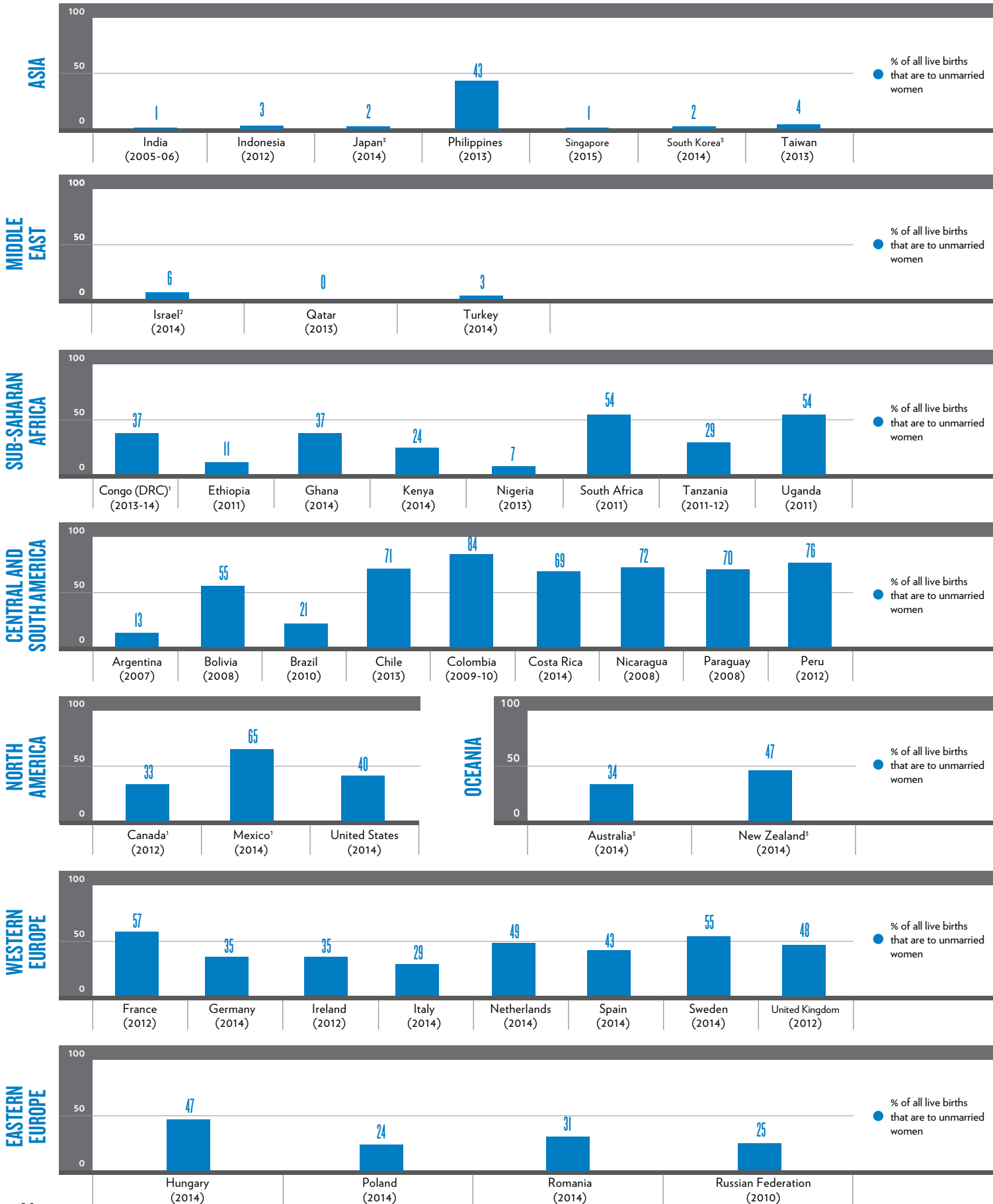
Central/South America has the world's highest rate of nonmarital childbearing. In all of our selected countries except for Argentina (the country with the oldest data), over half of children are born outside of marriage. In most Central/South American countries, more than two-thirds of children are born outside of marriage.

Nonmarital fertility can contribute to children living apart from at least one of their biological parents. Children born to single mothers may never live with their biological fathers, and those born to cohabiting couples are more likely to see their parents split ([see the essay in this report](#)). Further, both childbearing outside of unions and union dissolution contribute to the likelihood of children being fostered to others. Nonetheless, the correspondence between rates of nonmarital childbearing and children's living arrangements is far from perfect. While the regions with the lowest rates of nonmarital childbearing have the highest proportions of children reared by both biological parents, there are, however, notable exceptions.

First consider the contrast between Kenya and Uganda: Uganda has over twice the share of births occurring outside of marriage as neighboring Kenya (54 percent versus 24 percent), but the proportion of children reared by both biological parents is almost the same (56 percent versus 55 percent). Similarly, nonmarital childbearing is common in Eastern Europe, accounting for 23 to 47 percent of births, but relatively large shares of children still live with both parents.

Nonmarital childbearing occurs at somewhat higher rates in the rest of Europe, though Ireland, Italy, Germany, and Spain have rates similar to Eastern Europe, while France, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom have higher rates of nonmarital childbearing. Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States all

**FIGURE 3 Births outside marriage, 1998-2014**





fall into the same range as Eastern Europe.

Finally, there is less nonmarital childbearing in sub-Saharan Africa than in Central/South America, but fewer African children live with both biological parents. Thus, the high proportions of African children living apart from at least one of their natural parents do not correspond to the relatively moderate nonmarital childbearing rates. Nonmarital childbearing may shape children's living arrangements more in Central/South America, where parental mortality is lower, and both teen marriage and child fosterage are less common.

# Family Socioeconomics

## Key Findings

Socioeconomic indicators measure the material, human, and government resources that promote family and child well-being. To measure families' socioeconomic status, here we examine indicators related to poverty, undernourishment (as a marker of material deprivation), parental education and employment, and public family benefits.

- In this study, poverty is calculated as *absolute poverty* (the percentage of the population living on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars per day) and as *relative child poverty* (the percentage of children living in households earning less than half their country's median household income). The prevalence of absolute poverty in the countries in our study ranges from 0 in several countries to 88 percent in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The incidence of relative poverty for children is between 6 percent and 31 percent, with the lowest rates found in Europe and Oceania and the highest rates found in Central/South America.
- In the Middle East, North America, Oceania, and Europe, less than 5 percent of the population is undernourished. Families in Africa, Asia, and South America face the highest risk of undernourishment.
- Levels of parental education, as shown by completion of secondary education, vary widely around the world. The lowest levels are found in Africa, followed by Asia, the Middle East, and Central/South America, while Europe boasts the highest levels of parental education.
- Between 38 and 97 percent of parents are employed worldwide, with the highest parental employment rates found in Asia. The Middle East shows consistently high rates, and medium to high rates are found in the Americas and Europe.
- Public family benefits across countries represented in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) range from less than 1 percent up to 4 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). According to the limited available data, Europe and Oceania offer the most generous benefits.

## Poverty

The ongoing fallout from the Great Recession of 2008 and sluggish economic recovery have placed a stressful financial burden on families with children around the world. Poverty is a well-documented risk factor for many negative outcomes in childhood. Children growing up in poverty face a higher risk of social, emotional, behavioral, and physical health problems than children from wealthier backgrounds.<sup>5</sup> Children who are poor also score lower on cognitive tests and are less likely to be ready to enter school than their more affluent peers.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> J. D. Lempers, D. Clark-Lempers, and R. Simons, "Economic Hardship, Parenting, and Distress in Adolescence," *Child Development* 60, no. 1 (1989); D. Seith and E. Isakson, "Who Are America's Poor Children? Examining Health Disparities among Children in the United States" (New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> T. Halle et al., "Background for Community-Level Work on School Readiness: A Review of Definitions, Assessments, and Investment Strategies. Part II: Reviewing the Literature on Contributing Factors to School Readiness" (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2000); K. A. Moore et al., "Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options," in *Child Trends Research Brief* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2009).

Poverty affects children differently depending on the age at which they experience it. Developmental differences between children who are poor and those who are not can be detected by the time the children turn two.<sup>7</sup> In adolescence, poverty can lead parents to be less nurturing and provide more inconsistent discipline, leading young people to feel lonely and depressed.<sup>8</sup>

Prolonged poverty is especially detrimental to healthy child development. In the United States, for instance, spending half (or more) of childhood in poverty is linked with an increased risk for teenage pregnancy, school failure, and inconsistent employment in adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

In the United States and elsewhere, poverty is often related to family structure: Children living in single-parent households, especially those headed by a woman, are more likely to grow up in poverty.<sup>10</sup> This report considers two measures of poverty as indicators of family socioeconomics: absolute poverty and relative poverty.

## *Absolute poverty*

A measure of absolute poverty allows for a comparison of the living conditions of one country to those of others. Here we use the World Bank's international poverty line of living on 1.25 U.S. dollars a day in 2005 purchasing power, and we study the percentage of each country's population living below that line. One of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted in 2000, was to cut the global proportion of people who live on less than one U.S. dollar a day in half by 2015—a goal achieved in 2010.<sup>11</sup> But progress in reducing extreme poverty has been uneven. Sub-Saharan Africa, where the Millennium Development Goal is not expected to be met, continues to suffer from very high rates of extreme poverty.<sup>12</sup> Altogether, approximately 1 billion people, concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, still live in extreme poverty worldwide. Almost 60 percent of the people living in extreme poverty live in India, Nigeria, China, Bangladesh, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>13</sup> The United Nations' next set of proposed goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, includes eradicating extreme poverty entirely: ensuring that no person in the world subsists on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day.<sup>14</sup>

Data for this indicator come from the World Bank, which has compiled information from individual countries' government statistical agencies based on household surveys. Because individuals and countries themselves—not a more objective source—provide the information on poverty levels, it is possible that these numbers understate the true prevalence of absolute poverty.

Absolute poverty rates vary widely in Asia, but have decreased in recent years, ranging from 0 percent in Malaysia and Japan to 24 percent in India. The remaining Asian countries have absolute poverty rates between 6 percent and 19 percent, as shown in [Figure 4](#). China and India have achieved great progress on this indicator in recent years. In China, the rate of absolute poverty dropped from 23 percent in 2008 to 6 percent in 2011. In India, the proportion of people living on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day dropped from 33 percent in 2009 to 24 percent in 2011.

The selected Middle Eastern countries have relatively low levels of absolute poverty. Two percent of people at most live on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day in these countries.

<sup>7</sup> Moore et al., "Children in Poverty."

<sup>8</sup> Lempers et al., "Economic Hardship, Parenting, and Distress in Adolescence."

<sup>9</sup> C. E. Ratcliffe and S. McKernan, "Childhood Poverty Persistence: Facts and Consequences" (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, "America's Children in Brief: Key National Indicators of Well-Being, 2012" (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012).

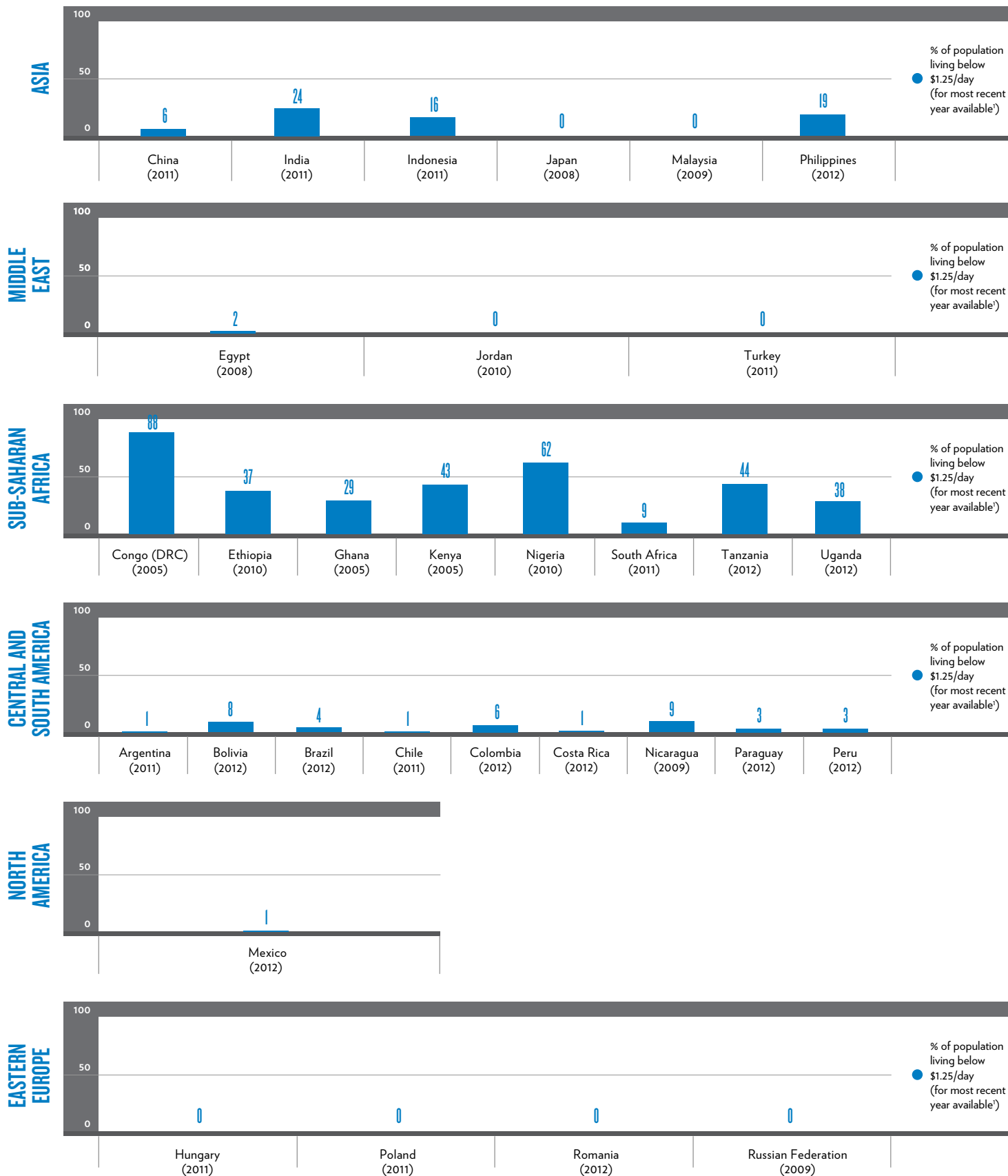
<sup>11</sup> United Nations, "The Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015" (United Nations, 2015).

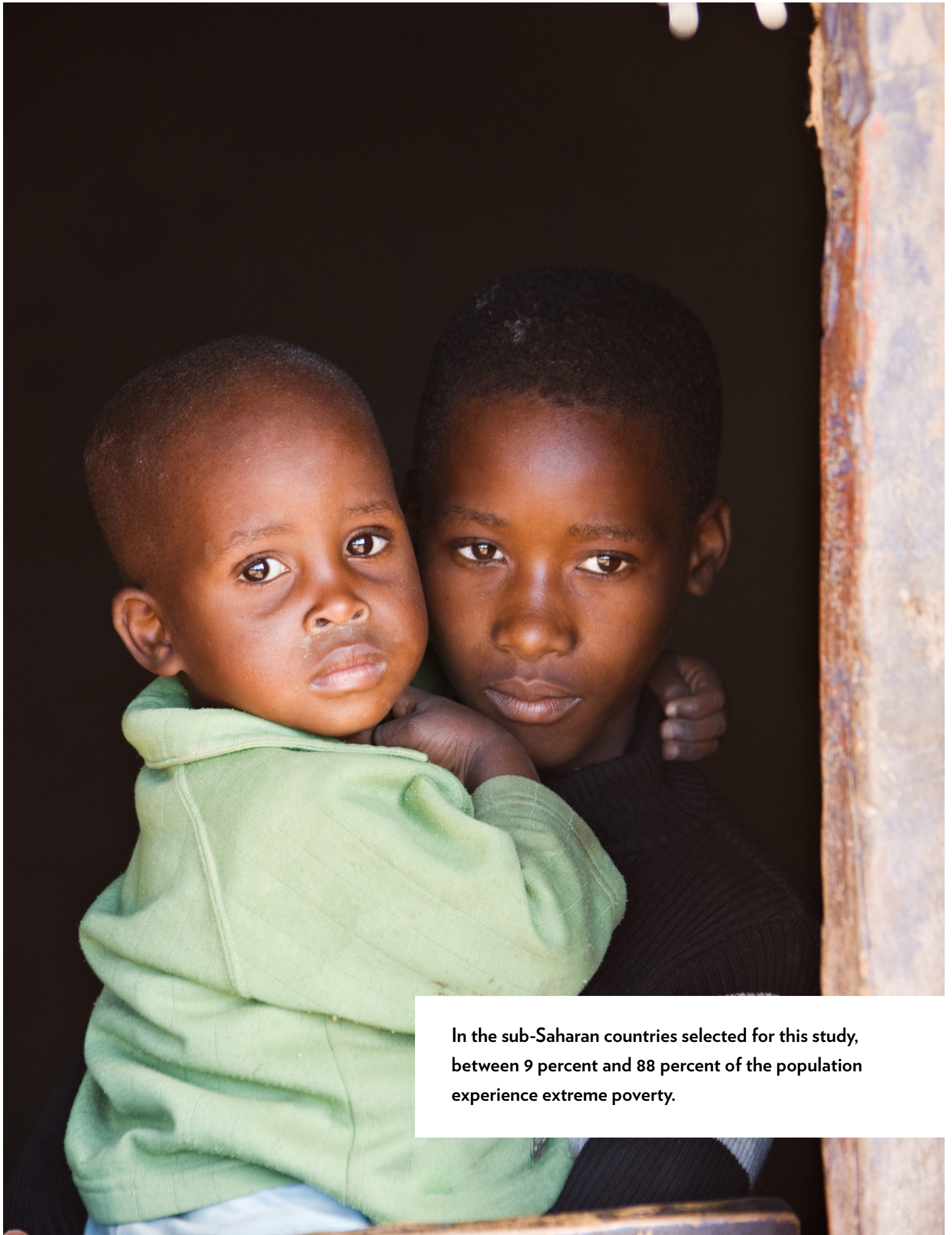
<sup>12</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015" (United Nations, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015."

<sup>14</sup> United Nations, "Sustainable Development Goals" (United Nations, 2015), <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

**FIGURE 4 Absolute poverty, 2005-2012**





**In the sub-Saharan countries selected for this study, between 9 percent and 88 percent of the population experience extreme poverty.**

The world's highest rates of absolute poverty are found in Africa. In the sub-Saharan countries selected for this study, between 9 percent and 88 percent of the population experience extreme poverty. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has the highest poverty rate: 88 percent of the population falls below the international poverty line. In Nigeria, 62 percent of the population does. Ethiopia, Kenya, and Tanzania have the next highest poverty rates, at approximately 40 percent. South Africa is home to the lowest absolute poverty rate in sub-Saharan Africa at 9 percent in 2011, down from 17 percent in 2006. Other sub-Saharan countries have also reduced the proportion of the population living in absolute poverty. In Tanzania, for instance, there has been a remarkable decline in absolute poverty from 68 percent of the population in 2006 to 43.5 percent (still a high rate) in 2012.

In Central and South America, two countries (Bolivia and Nicaragua) have poverty rates that, at 8 and 8.5 percent, respectively, exceed those of the rest of the region. Bolivia, however, has recently reduced this rate significantly; it stood at 16 percent in 2006. In Colombia, 6 percent of people live on less than 1.25 USD per day. In the remaining Central and South American countries, less than 5 percent of people live in poverty.

In most countries in the remaining regions of the world—North America, Oceania, and Europe—less than 2 percent of people live on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day. Spain is the exception: 2.3 percent of people there live in absolute poverty.

### **Relative child poverty**

The *World Family Map* also presents rates of relative poverty to measure the well-being of children in middle- and high-income countries. These rates speak to the poverty experienced by children whose families are poor relative to other families in that country, rather than families in other countries. Specifically, the relative poverty indicator describes the share of children who live in households with household incomes that are less than half of the country's median income.<sup>15</sup> The higher the relative poverty rate, the more children live in poverty in comparison with the average household with children in that country. This indicator also speaks to the income distribution within a country.

Data for this indicator, which date from between 2002 and 2013, come from household surveys, as reported by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre's Measuring Child Poverty report card and LIS.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the countries for which relative child poverty was measured, between 6 percent and 31 percent of children live in households with incomes that are below half of the national median income. There is wide regional variation on this indicator, as [Figure 5](#) depicts.

The selected Asian countries have moderate rates of relative child poverty. In Taiwan and South Korea, 10 percent of children live in households with incomes that are below 50 percent of the population's median income. The rate is slightly higher for Japan, at 15 percent. Meanwhile, relative child poverty rates are much higher for China and India, at 29 percent and 23 percent, respectively.

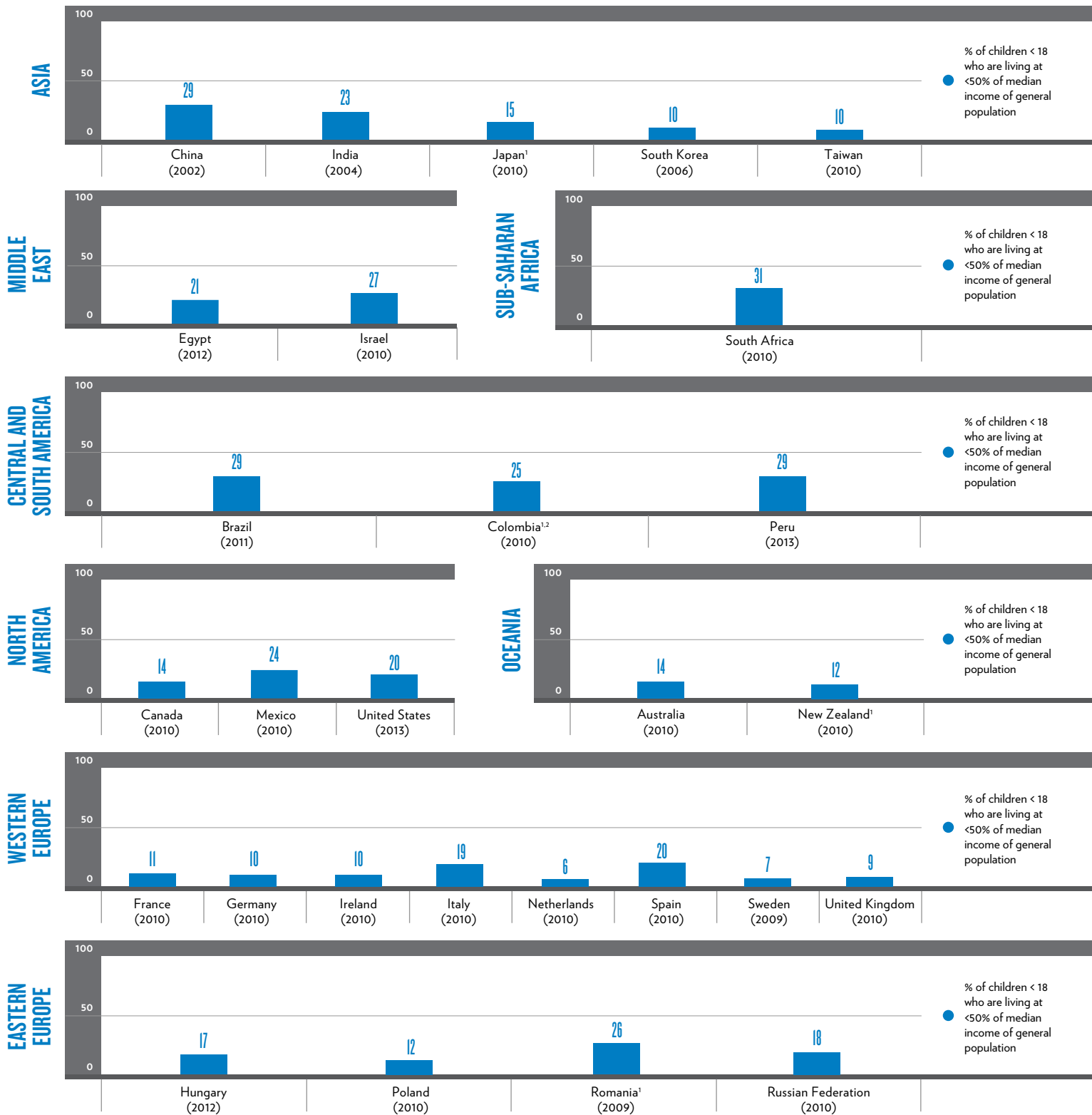
Israel, the sole representative of the Middle East on this indicator due to data limitations, has a relative child poverty rate of 27 percent.

Children in the three countries included in the study from South America have slightly higher relative poverty rates of 25 to 29 percent. The North American countries' relative child poverty rates fall between 14 percent and 24 percent. Canada has the lowest levels of relative child poverty in North America, with 14 percent of children living in households with incomes below half of the country's median income. The United States and Mexico have relative child poverty rates of 20 and 24 percent, respectively. In fact, the United States has one of the highest relative child poverty rates of the selected high-income nations.

<sup>15</sup> Income is adjusted according to household size and composition.

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, "Measuring Child Poverty: New League Tables of Child Poverty in the World's Rich Countries," in *Innocenti Report Card 10* (Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2012). Data come from EU-SILC 2009, HILDA 2009, PSID 2007, the Japanese Cabinet Office, Gender Equality Bureau (2011), and B. Perry, "Household Incomes in New Zealand: Trends in Indicators of Inequality and Hardship 1982 to 2010" (Wellington, NZ: Ministry of Social Development, 2011).

**FIGURE 5** Relative poverty, 2002-2013



Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix)

In Oceania, Australia has a relative child poverty rate of 14 percent, and New Zealand one of 12 percent.

Western Europe experiences the lowest rates of relative child poverty of any region, led by the Netherlands and Sweden at 6 percent and 7 percent, respectively, which are the lowest rates in the world. France, Germany, Ireland, and the United Kingdom all have rates of approximately 10 percent. Italy and Spain have higher rates, around 20 percent.

In Eastern Europe, between 12 percent and 26 percent of children live in households with incomes below 50 percent of the country's median income. Poland has the region's lowest relative poverty rate, at 12 percent, whereas Romania has the highest, at 26 percent. In Hungary, where the relative poverty rate had been the lowest in the region at 11 percent in 2007, the proportion of children living in relative poverty increased by six percentage points to 17 percent in 2012.

## Undernourishment

Another of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals was to cut the proportion of people who suffer from hunger in half between 1990 and 2015.<sup>17</sup> While this goal has not been achieved, the percentage of people who are undernourished in developing regions decreased from 23 percent in 1990 to 1992 to less than 13 percent projected for 2014 to 2016. More than half of the monitored developing countries met their goal of cutting hunger in half.<sup>18</sup> Regions not projected to reach that milestone in 2015 include sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, southern and western Asia, and Oceania.<sup>19</sup>

The percentage of the population of each country that is undernourished is an indicator of material deprivation, which disproportionately affects families with children. In an effort to protect their children, mothers tend to go hungry before their children in some cultures.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, this practice means that undernourishment is passed from generation to generation, because pregnant women and their babies are especially vulnerable to the effects of hunger. For example, undernourished mothers are more likely to give birth to undernourished babies.<sup>21</sup>

Not having enough to eat and being poor are related in a cyclical fashion. Children growing up in families that lack the means to provide adequate and nutritious food are more likely to suffer physical ailments, such as blindness, stunted growth, iron deficiencies, and overall poor health. Children who are undernourished are also more likely to experience delays in mental development, to show symptoms of depression, and to have behavior problems. Academically, undernourished youth have lower achievement and lower IQs. All of these problems make it harder for young people to work and escape poverty later in life. Undernourishment is a factor in one in three deaths of children under five throughout the world.<sup>22</sup> In addition to causing a great deal of human suffering, undernourishment among children gives rise to a loss of productivity that can cost a country up to 3 percent of its gross domestic product.<sup>23</sup>

The *World Family Map* presents information on undernourishment for countries' entire population rather than for families with children specifically because the available data are limited. As it is, the data on undernourishment come from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations and the World Bank.<sup>24</sup> The FAO defines undernourishment as "a state, lasting for at least one year, of inability to acquire enough food, defined as a level of food intake insufficient to meet dietary energy requirements."<sup>25,26</sup>

<sup>17</sup> United Nations, "United Nations Millennium Development Goals," United Nations, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

<sup>18</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), "The State of Food Insecurity in the World: Meeting the 2015 International Hunger Targets: Taking Stock of Uneven Progress" (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015."

<sup>20</sup> United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, "The Impact of High Food Prices on Maternal and Child Nutrition," in *SCN Side Event at the 34th Session of the Committee on World Food Security* (Rome: United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition, 2008).

<sup>21</sup> E. Munoz, "New Hope for Malnourished Mothers and Children," in *Briefing Paper 7* (Washington: Bread for the World Institution, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> M. Nord, "Food Insecurity in Households with Children: Prevalence, Severity, and Household Characteristics," in *Economic Information Bulletin* (Washington, DC: United States Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2009); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), "The State of the World's Children 2012" (New York, NY: UNICEF, 2012).

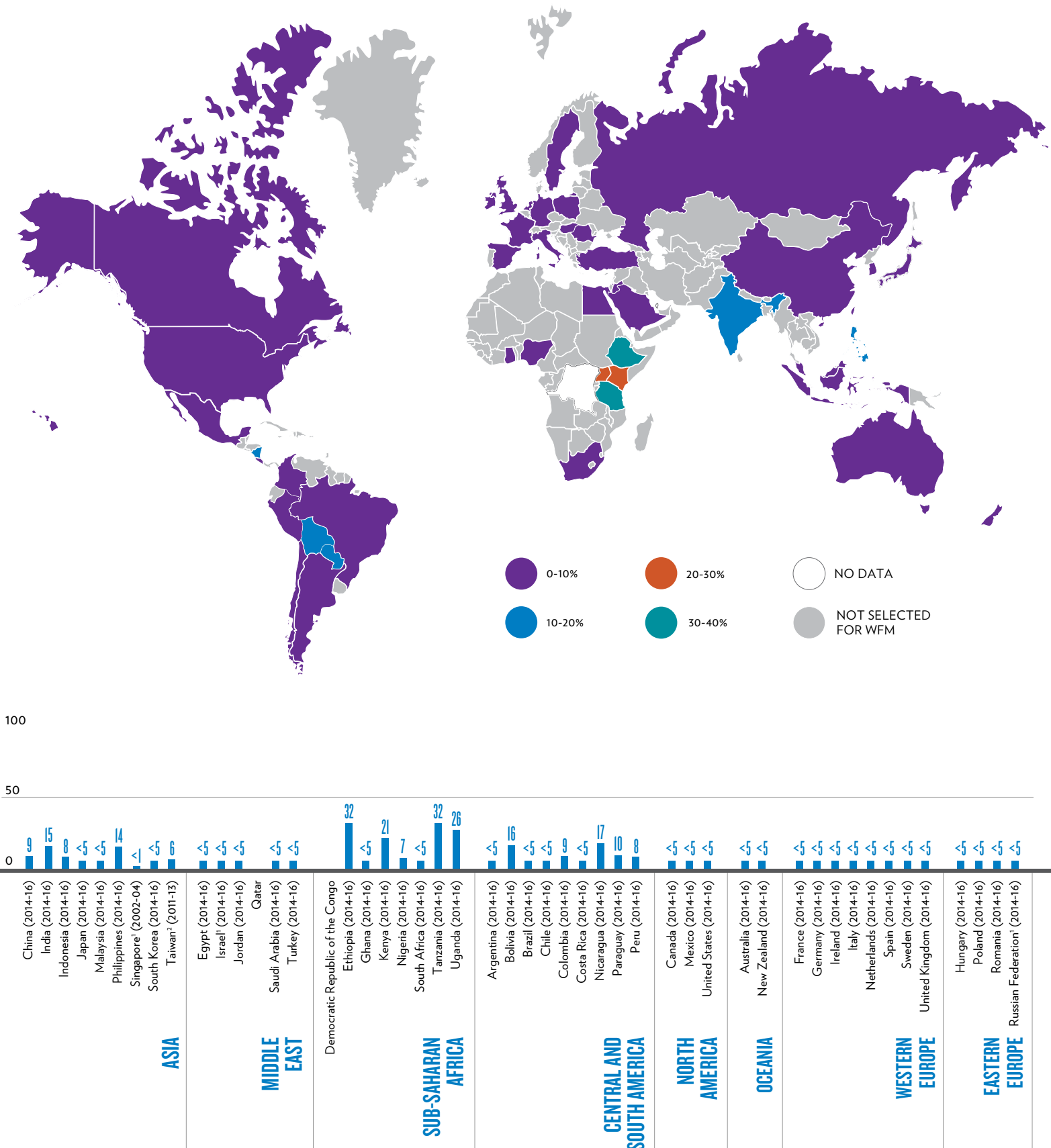
<sup>23</sup> Munoz, "New Hope for Malnourished Mothers and Children."

<sup>24</sup> Data for Taiwan come from C. Y. Yeh et al., "An Empirical Study of Taiwan's Food Security Index," *Public Health Nutrition* 13, no. 7.



**FIGURE 6** Undernourishment, circa 2015

*Percentage of total population who are undernourished*



Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix)

In the majority of countries throughout the world with available data, less than 5 percent of the population is undernourished. All countries in Europe, the Middle East, North America, and Oceania have undernourishment rates under 5 percent. Countries with higher levels of undernourishment are concentrated in Africa, Asia, and South America, as [Figure 6](#) illustrates.

Undernourishment rates vary significantly in Asia, from under 5 percent (Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, and South Korea) to 15 percent (India). Following India, the Asian countries with the highest levels of undernourishment are the Philippines and China, at 14 and 9 percent, respectively.

The countries in sub-Saharan Africa for which data are available suffer the world's highest levels of undernourishment. In Ethiopia and Tanzania, almost one in three people is undernourished; in Uganda, one out of four; and in Kenya, one out of five. Rates are much lower in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, where less than one in 10 people is undernourished. Despite decreases in the percentage of undernourished Africans, the number of undernourished people in sub-Saharan Africa has actually increased due to high population growth.<sup>27</sup>

In Central and South America, rates of undernourishment are also inconsistent. The highest rates of undernourishment are found in Nicaragua and Bolivia, where approximately 16 percent of people are undernourished. Paraguay also has a high undernourishment rate, at 10.4 percent. Colombia and Peru have more moderate rates, at around 8 percent of the population. In the remaining countries of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Costa Rica, less than 5 percent of people are undernourished.

As these numbers show, the percentage of the population that suffers from undernourishment varies widely throughout the world, and does not always follow the level of absolute poverty in a given country. Some countries manage to protect their populations from undernourishment despite relatively high levels of poverty. While the absolute poverty data predate the undernourishment data, the percentage of the population living in absolute poverty (on less than 1.25 U.S. dollars a day) is greater than the percentage of the population that is undernourished in almost all of the Asian and sub-Saharan African countries for which data are available: India, Indonesia, the Philippines, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda. Strikingly, in Nigeria 62 percent of people live on less than \$1.25 a day while only 7 percent are undernourished. A similar, though less extreme, story holds in Ghana, where 29 percent of people live in absolute poverty and less than 5 percent are undernourished. South America shows the opposite pattern: a larger proportion of the population is undernourished than living in absolute poverty. Why these differences? Some countries are able to make combating hunger a high priority among expenditures; in addition, private-sector programs, international food aid, food pricing differences, and a country's food distribution infrastructure may play a role.<sup>28</sup>

## Parental Education

Parents' level of education influences their parenting behaviors and their children's well-being. Better-educated parents are more likely to read to their children and provide them with extracurricular activities, books, cognitive stimulation, and high educational expectations. Such parents are also more likely to be active in their children's schools and are less likely to use negative discipline techniques.<sup>29</sup> Internationally, children of well-educated parents demonstrate

<sup>25</sup> FAO, "The State of Food Insecurity in the World."

<sup>26</sup> Note that dates are not comparable. See [Figure 8](#) for detail.

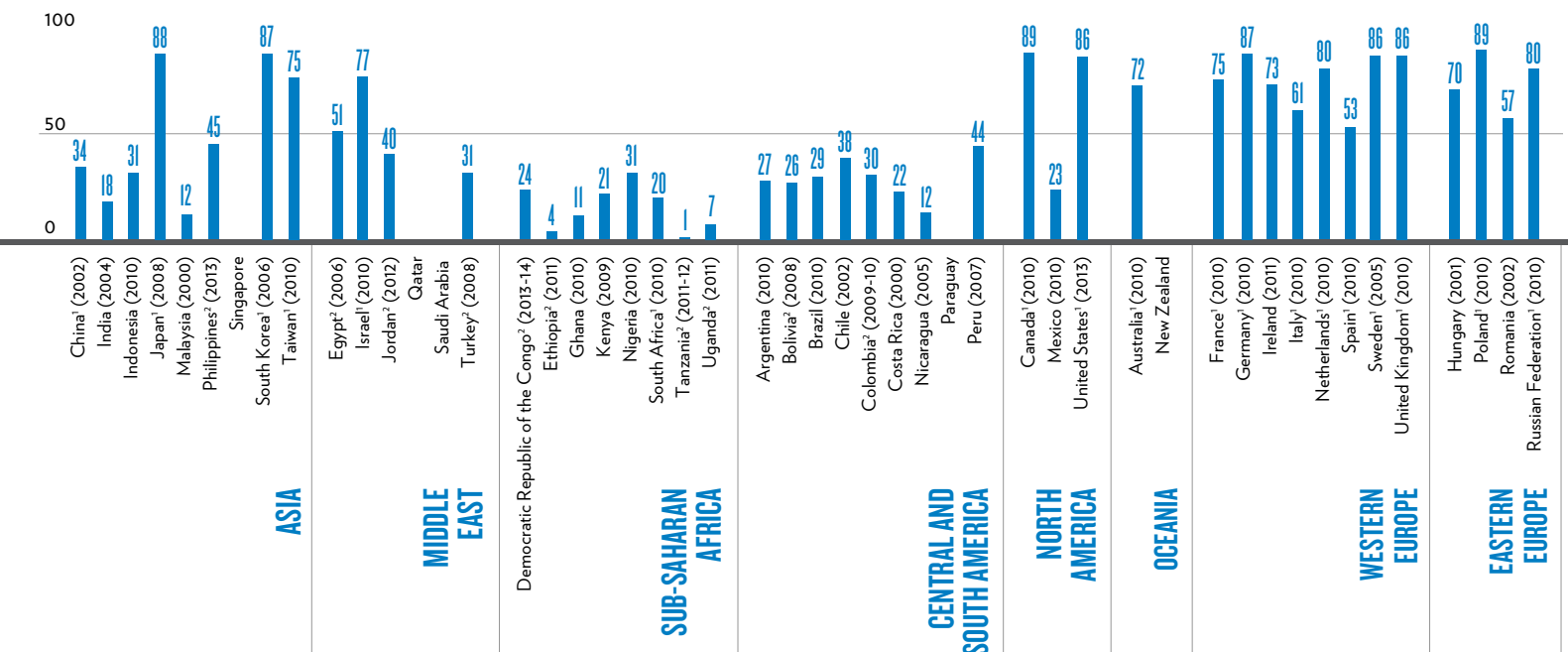
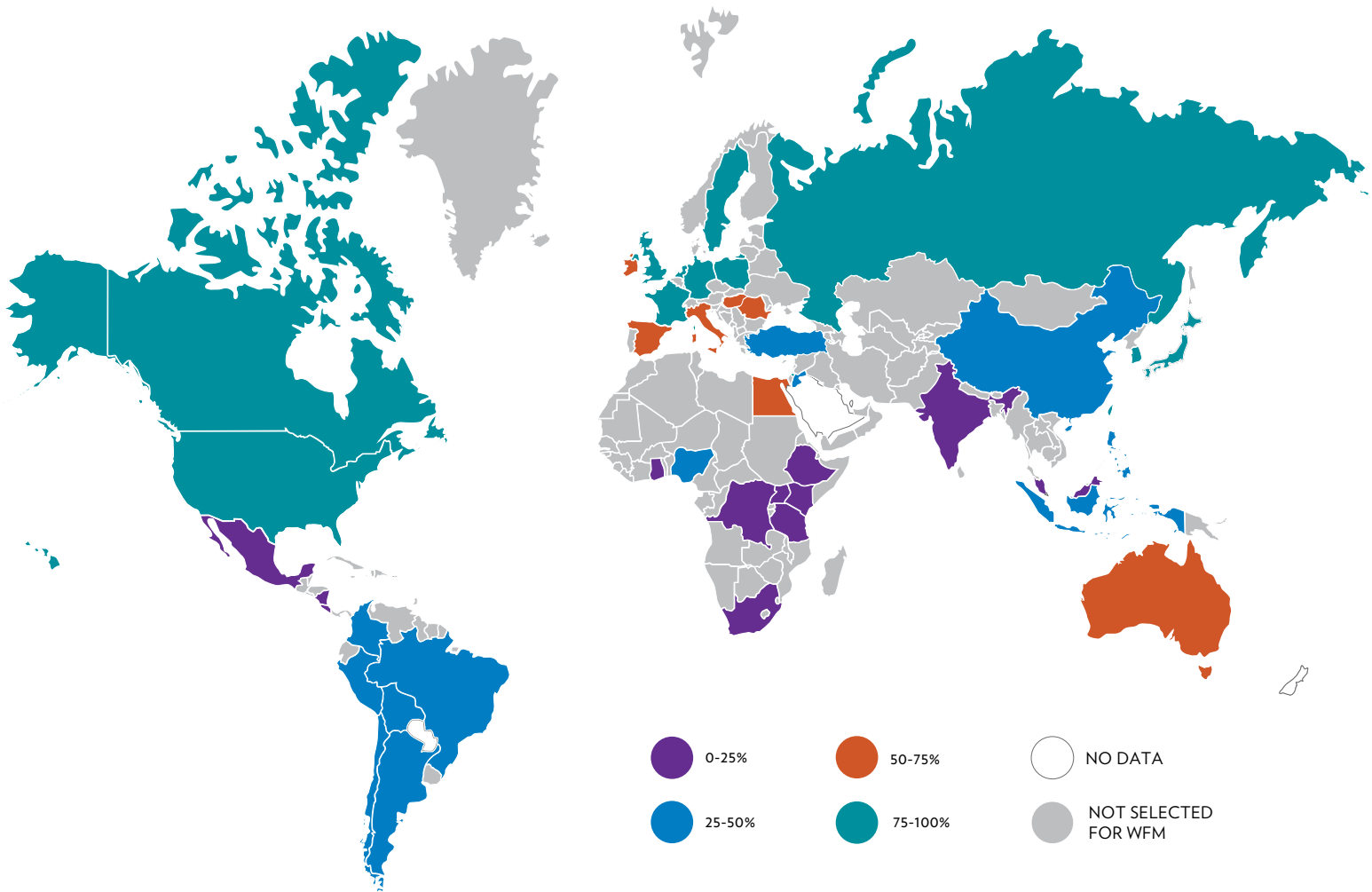
<sup>27</sup> United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals Report: 2015."

<sup>28</sup> FAO, WFP, and IFAD, "The State of Food Insecurity in the World 2012: Economic Growth Is Necessary but Not Sufficient to Accelerate Reduction of Hunger and Malnutrition" (Rome: FAO, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> P. Davis-Kean, "The Influence of Parent Education and Family Income on Child Achievement: The Indirect Role of Parental Expectations and the Home Environment," *Journal of Family Psychology* 19, no. 2 (2005); E. Hair et al., "Parents Matter: Parental Education, Parenting and Child Well-Being" (paper presented at the Society for Research in Child Development, 2007); S. L. Hofferth and J. F. Sandberg, "How American Children Spend Their Time," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63, no. 2 (2001); K. R. Phillips, "Parent Work and Child Well-Being in Low-Income Families" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2002).

**FIGURE 7** Parental education, 2000-2014

Percentage of children in households in which household head has a secondary education



higher academic achievement and literacy.<sup>30,31</sup> Parents transmit their education, knowledge, skills, and other aspects of human capital to their sons and daughters, and parents' levels of education directly influence their access to social networks and well-paying jobs with benefits. They confer these advantages, in turn, to their children.

Due to data limitations, we use a proxy measure to gauge parental education: the percentage of children who live in households in which the household head has completed secondary education. [Figure 7](#) displays the results. The household head could be one of the child's parents, or else a grandparent (the most common non-parental head of household), or another type of relation. In Russia, 20 percent of children live in a household headed by their grandparents. In South Africa, 36 percent do.

In the United States, completing secondary education equates to earning a high school diploma or GED. Data for this indicator come from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International (IPUMS), the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), and LIS.<sup>32</sup>

Asian countries exhibit a huge range of parental education levels. In 2000, 12 percent of Malaysian children lived with a household head who had completed secondary education. Eighteen percent of children did so in India in 2004. In China, Indonesia, and the Philippines, between 31 percent and 45 percent of children lived with household heads who had completed secondary education. Education rates are much higher in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, where 88 percent, 87 percent, and 75 percent of children, respectively, live with educated household heads. Children in Taiwan have grown more likely to live with educated household heads: the percentage of children living with household heads with secondary education increased from 67 percent in 2005 to 75 percent in 2010.

Of the Middle Eastern countries studied, Turkey has the lowest percentage of children living in a home with a household head who has completed secondary education, at 31 percent in 2008. In the remaining surveyed Middle Eastern countries, between 40 percent (Jordan in 2012) and 77 percent (Israel in 2010) of children live with a household head who has completed secondary education. The figure for Jordan increased by five percentage points between 2009 and 2012.

Parental education is lower in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions. In the sub-Saharan African countries studied, between 1 and 31 percent of children live in households in which the household head has completed secondary education. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Nigeria, at least one in five children lived in such households in 2007 to 2010.<sup>33</sup> In contrast, in Ethiopia, 4 percent of children lived in such households in 2011, and less than 1 percent of children did so in Tanzania in 2011 to 2012. The low education levels of household heads may reflect those of female household heads with little formal education, or, since living with extended family members is common in sub-Saharan Africa, the low education level of children's grandparents.

In Central and South America, there is great variation in the percentage of children living in a household in which the household head has completed secondary education, from 12 percent in Nicaragua to 44 percent in Peru. In many of the selected countries, between 26 and 30 percent of children lived with a household head with secondary education between 2008 and 2010. Notably, the percentage of Brazilian children who lived in a household in which the head of the household has completed secondary education increased almost 13 percentage points from 17 percent in 2000 to 29 percent in 2010.

North America also displays variation on this indicator. Twenty-three percent of Mexican children lived in a household in which the head of the household had completed secondary education in 2010, while 86 percent of American and 89 percent of Canadian children lived in such households in 2012.

Europe exhibits some of the highest rates of parental education. In Western Europe, between 53 percent (Spain) and 87 percent (Germany) of children live in a household in which the head of the household has completed secondary

<sup>30</sup> M. Lemke et al., "Outcomes of Learning: Results from the 2000 Program for International Student Assessment of 15-Year-Olds in Reading, Mathematics, and Science Literacy" (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

<sup>31</sup> I. V. S. Mullis et al., "TIMSS 1999 International Mathematics Report: Findings from IEA's Repeat of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study at the Eighth Grade" (Boston: International Study Center, Lynch School of Education, Boston College, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> In this report, we generally present data for the most recent year available, giving priority to use the same source as much as possible, which differs across countries. As with other indicators, we caution readers to refrain from making direct comparisons between countries that have data from different years.

<sup>33</sup> In South Africa, 19.7 percent of children lived in such households.

education. Spain and Italy have the lowest levels of parental education in Western Europe, at 53 percent and 61 percent, respectively. In contrast, over 85 percent of children live in such households in Germany, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

In Eastern Europe, between 57 percent (Romania) and 89 percent (Poland) of children live with household heads with a secondary education, while in Hungary and Russia, the figures stand at 70 percent and 80 percent, respectively.

## Parental Employment

Researchers agree that poverty has detrimental effects on child and adolescent outcomes. Employed parents are more likely to be able to provide for their children, to connect their families to important social networks, and to serve as important role models for productive engagement. Having an employed parent gives children greater access to goods and services that are especially valuable during childhood, such as health care. In fact, adolescents of unemployed parents report lower levels of health.<sup>34</sup>

Parental unemployment can create stress in a family. The financial and emotional strain associated with it can lead to depression and lower levels of satisfaction with a spouse or partner.<sup>35</sup> The family conflict this strain creates, whether in the setting of an intact family or one separated by divorce, is detrimental to children's flourishing.<sup>36</sup>

Parental employment is also related to the number of parents present in a household. Children living with two parents are less likely to live in a jobless household than children living with one parent.<sup>37</sup>

Data limitations restrict the measurement of parental employment to the percentage of children who live in households in which the household head has a job. This measure is limited in a number of ways. It does not describe whether the employment is full-time or year-round, paid or unpaid, or say how many hours a day the provider is working. Again, the household head is not necessarily a parent of the child, but could be a grandparent or other relative. In addition, the measure does not shed light on what the parent's work means in the context of the child's life. For example, the data about parental employment do not reveal whether one or multiple adults in the household are working, where and with whom the child spends time while the parent is working, how old the child is while the parent is working, or what hours of the day the parent is working, all of which can impact child well-being.

The data we use to calculate parental employment are drawn from LIS and Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, International (IPUMS) and date from 2000 to 2013. This indicator is very sensitive to country economic conditions and general economic climate, so comparisons across countries for different years should not be made.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the world, between 38 and 97 percent of children under the age of 18 live in households in which the head of the household is employed. See [Table 2](#) for more details.

As a region, Asia has the highest percentages of children living in households with an employed household head, ranging from 76 percent in Japan in 2008 to 97 percent in Taiwan in 2010.

Parental employment levels are slightly lower in the selected Middle Eastern countries. Israel, Jordan, and Turkey have parental employment rates of less than 80 percent. In Egypt, 85 percent of children lived in a household with an employed head of household in 2002.

The selected sub-Saharan African countries show the largest regional variation in parental employment rates. Thirty-eight percent of children live in a household with an employed household head in South Africa, whereas 87 percent do in Ghana and Tanzania. Reflecting the global recession, the percentage of children who live in a household with an employed household head decreased from 45 percent to 38 percent between 2008 and 2010 in South Africa.

<sup>34</sup> M. Sleskova et al., "Does Parental Unemployment Affect Adolescents' Health?," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 38, no. 5 (2006).

<sup>35</sup> A. D. Vinokur, R. H. Price, and R. D. Caplan, "Hard Times and Hurtful Partners: How Financial Strain Affects Depression and Relationship Satisfaction of Unemployed Persons and Their Spouses," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71, no. 1 (1996).

<sup>36</sup> G. D. Sandefur and A. Meier, "The Family Environment: Structure, Material Resources and Child Care," in *Key Indicators of Child and Youth Well-Being: Completing the Picture*, ed. B.V. Brown (New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> OECD, "Doing Better for Families."

<sup>38</sup> Note that dates are not comparable. See [Table 2](#) for detail.

**TABLE 2 Parental employment, 2000-2013***Percentage of children under 18 in households in which the household head is employed*

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China (2002) 92	Egypt (2012) 85	Democratic Republic of the Congo –	Argentina <sup>1</sup> (2010) 82
India (2004) 89	Israel (2010) 76	Ethiopia –	Bolivia <sup>1</sup> (2001) 71
Indonesia <sup>1</sup> (2010) 93	Jordan <sup>1</sup> (2004) 72	Ghana <sup>1</sup> (2000) 87	Brazil (2011) 78
Japan (2008) 76	Qatar –	Kenya <sup>1</sup> (2009) 85	Chile <sup>1</sup> (2002) 68
Malaysia <sup>1</sup> (2000) 88	Saudi Arabia –	Nigeria <sup>1</sup> (2010) 92	Colombia (2010) 82
Philippines –	Turkey <sup>1</sup> (2000) 77	South Africa (2010) 38	Costa Rica <sup>1</sup> (2000) 80
Singapore –		Tanzania <sup>1</sup> (2002) 87	Nicaragua <sup>1</sup> (2005) 76
South Korea (2006) 93		Uganda <sup>1</sup> (2002) 75	Paraguay –
Taiwan (2010) 97			Peru (2013) 90
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada (2010) 88	Australia (2010) 83	France (2010) 88	Hungary (2012) 74
Mexico <sup>1</sup> (2010) 82	New Zealand –	Germany (2010) 81	Poland (2010) 91
United States (2013) 74		Ireland (2010) 55	Romania <sup>1</sup> (2002) 63
		Italy (2010) 77	Russian Federation (2010) 73
		Netherlands (2010) 87	
		Spain (2010) 73	
		Sweden (2005) 90	
		United Kingdom (2010) 79	

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix)

Central and South America's parental employment rates exhibit a smaller range, from 68 percent in Chile to 90 percent in Peru. Notably, in Argentina the percentage of children who live with an employed household head increased from 68 percent in 2001 to 82 percent in 2010; however, these figures include those working even minimally in the informal sector.

In North America, parental employment rates range from 74 percent in the United States to 82 percent in Mexico and 88 percent in Canada. In Australia, the sole country for which we have data in Oceania, the parental employment rate was 83 percent in 2010.

In Western Europe, parental employment rates range from 55 percent in Ireland to 90 percent in Sweden.<sup>39</sup> In the majority of remaining selected countries in this region, approximately eight in 10 children live in a household in which the head of household is employed. In this region, between 2004 and 2010 the parental employment rate decreased by at least five percentage points in Ireland and Spain, while it actually increased in the Netherlands by five percentage points.

Eastern Europe's levels of parental employment, which fall between 73 and 91 percent, resemble those of Western Europe. Romania is an exception to these relatively high rates: 63 percent of children in the country lived in a household in which the head of the household was employed in 2002. In Russia, parental employment fell from 84 percent in 2000 to 73 percent in 2010, while in Hungary, parental employment rose between 2004 and 2010 from 85 to 91 percent and then fell back down to 74 percent in 2012.

## Public Spending on Family Benefits

Government spending on benefits for families provides them with many types of support. For instance, government benefits allow parents to take time off work to take care of a newborn, and help replace lost income during this time. As the children grow older, government-provided child care and education support parents' employment.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports family benefits, including child care supports, parental leave benefits, child allowances, and family tax breaks. Unfortunately, these data are only available for members of the OECD, which are middle- and high-income nations. These data are also limited because funding plans

<sup>39</sup> Interpret Sweden's rate with caution. More than 15 percent of data is missing.

differ between countries, and in certain places the measures may not include local expenditures.<sup>40</sup>

The level of public spending on family benefits serves as one potential measure of governmental spending priorities. Here, we focus on the percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) that a country allocates to family benefits. As presented in **Table 3**, governments spent between less than half of a percent and 3.9 percent of their GDP on benefits exclusively for families circa 2011. There were no changes in this indicator exceeding five percentage points between 2009 and 2012.

In Asia, Japan spent 1.4 percent of its GDP on family benefits and South Korea 1.2 percent. Israel spent 2.0 percent of its GDP on family benefits, despite a hefty military budget.

In North America, spending on family benefits hovers around 1 percent, ranging from 0.7 percent in the United States to 1.2 percent in Canada. Chile, the only South American country for which data are available, devotes slightly more government spending to families, at 1.4 percent of its GDP.

Oceanic countries place more monetary emphasis on family benefits: New Zealand spent 3.3 percent of its GDP in this area, and Australia spent 2.7 percent.

Western European countries are home to the highest levels of government spending on family benefits. Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom led the selected countries by spending approximately 4 percent of their GDP on family benefits. France and Germany also spent more than 2 percent of their GDP on family benefits, whereas the remaining European countries spent approximately 1.5 percent.

In Eastern Europe, Hungary spent more than 3 percent of its GDP on family benefits, whereas Poland and Romania spent 1.3 and 1.7 percent, respectively. Hungary's generous spending could help counteract the large rise in the rate of relative child poverty that it experienced between 2007 and 2012.

<sup>40</sup> OECD, "Public Spending on Family Benefits," [http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF1\\_1\\_Public\\_spending\\_on\\_family\\_benefits\\_Oct2013.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/els/soc/PF1_1_Public_spending_on_family_benefits_Oct2013.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Data reported for Romania are from 2007, as updated data were not available from the OECD.

**TABLE 3** Public spending on family benefits, circa 2011  
*Public spending on family benefits in cash, services, and tax measures, in percent of GDP*

#### ASIA

China	-
India	-
Indonesia	-
Japan	1.4
Malaysia	-
Philippines	-
Singapore	-
South Korea	1.2
Taiwan	-

#### MIDDLE EAST

Egypt	-
Israel <sup>1</sup>	2.0
Jordan	-
Qatar	-
Saudi Arabia	-
Turkey	0.0

#### SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Democratic Republic of the Congo	-
Ethiopia	-
Ghana	-
Kenya	-
Nigeria	-
South Africa	-
Tanzania	-
Uganda	-

#### CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA

Argentina	-
Bolivia	-
Brazil	-
Chile	1.4
Colombia	-
Costa Rica	-
Nicaragua	-
Paraguay	-
Peru	-

#### NORTH AMERICA

Canada	1.2
Mexico	1.1
United States	0.7

#### OCEANIA

Australia	2.7
New Zealand	3.3

#### WESTERN EUROPE

France	2.9
Germany	2.2
Ireland	3.9
Italy	1.5
Netherlands	1.6
Spain	1.4
Sweden	3.6
United Kingdom	4.0

#### EASTERN EUROPE

Hungary	3.3
Poland	1.3
Romania <sup>2</sup>	1.7
Russian Federation	-

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix)

# Family Processes

## Key Findings

Family process indicators describe the interactions between members of a family, including their relationships, views on the roles of family members, time spent together, and satisfaction with family life. It is challenging to obtain data on family processes that allow for international comparisons, but there has been some improvement in this situation with the release of new data.

Here we discuss several indicators of family process that can influence child and family well-being: self-reported family satisfaction; views on partners' contribution to household income; how regularly parents and children discuss school; how often families eat meals together; and how much time parents and teenagers spend talking. There is wide variation on these measures across the few countries that have data available.

- **Between 30 percent (South Korea) and 78 percent (Argentina) of adults around the world are completely or very satisfied with their family life (17 countries with information).**
- **More than half of adults agree that both men and women should contribute to household income, with agreement ranging from 54 percent (Australia) to 92 percent (Philippines) (18 countries).**
- **Across surveyed countries, between 44 percent and 92 percent of 15-year-olds spend time just talking to their parents every day or almost every day. The percentage of 15-year-olds who eat the main meal with their families varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 60 percent in South Korea to 94 percent in Italy (seven countries).**

## Family Satisfaction

Satisfaction with family life both influences and is influenced by family structure, economics, and culture. The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) recently released new data, collected circa 2012, so these figures update the 2002 data presented in earlier editions of the *World Family Map*.

As in previous years, the highest levels of family satisfaction are found in South America, where 78 percent of Argentines and 67.5 percent of Chileans report being completely or very satisfied with their family life, as seen in [Figure 8](#). Adults in Asia experience the lowest levels of family satisfaction, with only 30 percent of South Korean adults and 32 percent of Chinese adults expressing satisfaction with their family life. In India and the Philippines, however, adults report more family satisfaction, with 51.5 percent and 68 percent reporting satisfaction, respectively. The surveyed countries in North America and Eastern and Western Europe fall in the middle, with satisfaction rates between 34 and 66.5 percent.

There have been some notable changes in levels of satisfaction with family life in the past decade. The reasons for these changes in satisfaction are not immediately apparent, and the changes may simply be due to methodological differences between years of the study.<sup>42</sup> In 2002, Eastern Europe had the lowest levels of family satisfaction of any region. In the past decade, however, the proportion of adults reporting being satisfied with their families increased by 18 percentage points in Poland. Similarly, the proportion of adults reporting satisfaction increased by almost 11 percentage points in the Philippines. Conversely, rates of satisfaction decreased by more than five percentage points in Chile and Ireland.

<sup>42</sup> For example, in Poland, only citizens were surveyed in 2002, whereas in 2012 adults of any nationality in Poland were sampled.



## Views on Contributions to Household Income

Around the world, one-half of all working-age women work. The percentage of women working has actually decreased over the past couple years, and remains highly variable by country and region.<sup>43</sup> Here, for the first time, we are reporting the percentage of adults who agree or strongly agree that both the man and the woman should contribute to household income. Data come from the 2012 ISSP and are displayed in [Figure 8](#). In all countries with data available, more than half of adults agree that both partners should contribute financially, with rates of agreement ranging from a low of 54 percent in Australia to a high of 92 percent in the Philippines.

Regionally, the highest rates of support for dual-income families are in sub-Saharan Africa (represented by South Africa), South America (represented by Argentina and Chile), and non-English-speaking parts of Western Europe. In each of these regions, over 80 percent of adults say that both men and women should contribute to household income. Rates of agreement are similar in Eastern Europe, at 76 percent in Russia and Poland, and more varied in Asia, where they range from 67 percent in South Korea to 92 percent in the Philippines.

The lowest rates of agreement are found in English-speaking countries of several different regions: in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, and the United States, less than 65 percent of adults agree that both the man and woman should earn income for the family. In spite of this fact, over half of women are part of the labor force in each of these countries,<sup>44</sup> and support for working moms is moderately high (as described below). Though it may seem surprising, English-speaking countries tend to hang together with more traditional values.<sup>45</sup>

With all attitude-based indicators, it is important to keep in mind that attitudes and behaviors do not always align.<sup>46</sup> For additional information on the distribution of household labor and gender attitudes, see the essay section of this report.

## Discussions With Parents

Communicating with children, both generally and about school, is a positive family activity that any parent can do, and that can enhance parent-youth relationships as well as student academic outcomes.<sup>47</sup> Here we will report on two different indicators of parent-adolescent communication: how often they talk in general and how often they discuss school. Data for this indicator come from the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey. The PISA sample contains primarily middle- and higher-income countries, and only eight countries included in the *World Family Map* chose to include questions on parental communication with students. PISA asks parents of 15-year-olds how frequently they discuss their son or daughter's school performance with them and how often the two spend time talking about anything. The indicators report the percentage of 15-year-olds whose parents report that they have such conversations every day or almost every day.

How often students discuss school with and spend time just talking to their parents varies widely throughout the world. In some regions, discussing school is more popular, while in others general conversation occurs more often. Across surveyed countries, between 44 and 92 percent of 15-year-olds spend time just talking to their parents every day or almost every day, and between 19 and 79 percent of teens discuss how well they are doing at school with their parents as frequently, as seen in [Figure 9](#).

<sup>43</sup> World Bank, "World Development Indicators: Labor Force Structure Table 2.2" (World Bank, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> World Bank, "World Development Indicators: Labor Force Structure Table 2.2."

<sup>45</sup> B. Ebbinghaus, "Comparing Welfare State Regimes: Are Typologies an Ideal or Realistic Strategy?" in *European Social Policy Analysis Network, ESPAnet Conference* (Edinburgh, UK, 2012); G. Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>46</sup> B. A. Hopkins, "Gender and Provisioning under Different Capitalisms," in *Handbook of Research on Gender and Economic Life*, ed. D. M. Figart and T. L. Varnecke (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> D. H. Caro, "Parent-Child Communication and Academic Performance: Associations at the within- and between-Country Level," *Journal for Educational Research Online* 3, no. 2 (2011); G. Hampden-Thompson, L. Guzman, and L. Lippman, "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 54, no. 3 (2013).

**FIGURE 8** Family satisfaction and views on contribution to household income, 2012



In Asia, 15-year-olds from South Korea and from two Special Administrative Regions in China, Hong Kong and Macao, are less likely to discuss how well they are doing in school with their parents every day or almost every day than those in other parts of the world. In Macao, just 19 percent do so, while in South Korea 28 percent and in Hong Kong 31 percent do so. By contrast, students in these Asian regions talked to their parents frequently about more general topics at similar rates to students in other regions, from 39 percent in Macao to 66 percent in Hong Kong.

In the Americas, represented by Chile and Mexico, students are more likely to discuss school with their parents than to spend time just talking—a pattern unique to these regions. About 60 percent of students discuss school with their parents daily or almost daily, while about 45 percent of students spend time just talking to their parents with the same frequency.

In Europe, teens have comparatively more discussions with their parents. In Italy and Hungary, approximately three-quarters of 15-year-olds talk with their parents daily or almost daily both about their school performance and about other topics. German teens are less likely to discuss school with their parents (just 36 percent do so almost every day or daily) but are the most likely to spend time just talking to their parents on a daily or near-daily basis, with 92 percent doing so.

## Family Meals

When families eat meals together regularly, children can talk with their parents and share what is going on in their lives.<sup>48</sup> It is a direct measure of a positive family process.

In the United States, eating together as a family has been linked to myriad positive outcomes, ranging from reduced levels of substance and alcohol use to lower levels of depression, even after accounting for other family factors. Eating meals together is also associated with favorable educational outcomes, such as showing a commitment to learning, seeking and earning higher grades, spending more time on homework, and reading for pleasure.<sup>49</sup> After including controls for background characteristics, one study found that eating meals as a family was the most important predictor of adolescent flourishing.<sup>50</sup> Recent longitudinal research has found that the value of eating meals together as a family may dissipate as adolescents enter young adulthood, leaving only indirect effects on well-being.<sup>51</sup> The influence of sharing meals on young people's outcomes also depends on the quality of family relationships. While sharing meals in families with stronger relationships has been found to have positive associations with child well-being, sharing meals has been found to have less influence on children's development in families that are marked by poorer or conflict-filled relationships.<sup>52</sup>

Internationally, research has demonstrated that students who eat meals with their families more frequently are more likely to achieve high scores in reading literacy in 16 out of 21 examined countries. This relationship is more consistent than that between discussing general topics with parents and reading literacy.<sup>53</sup>

Families all around the world eat meals together, though the particular meal of importance may vary from country to country, and adolescents and their parents agree that eating together is important, although parents place more value on mealtime.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, "The Importance of Family Dinners VI" (New York: Columbia University, 2010).

<sup>49</sup> M. Eisenberg et al., "Correlations between Family Meals and Psychosocial Well-Being among Adolescents," *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine* 158, no. 8 (2004); J. A. Fulkerson et al., "Family Dinner Meal Frequency and Adolescent Development: Relationships with Developmental Assets and High-Risk Behaviors," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 39, no. 3 (2006).

<sup>50</sup> N. Zarrett and R. Lerner, "Ways to Promote the Positive Development of Children and Youth," in *Research-to-Results Brief* (Washington, DC: Child Trends, 2008).

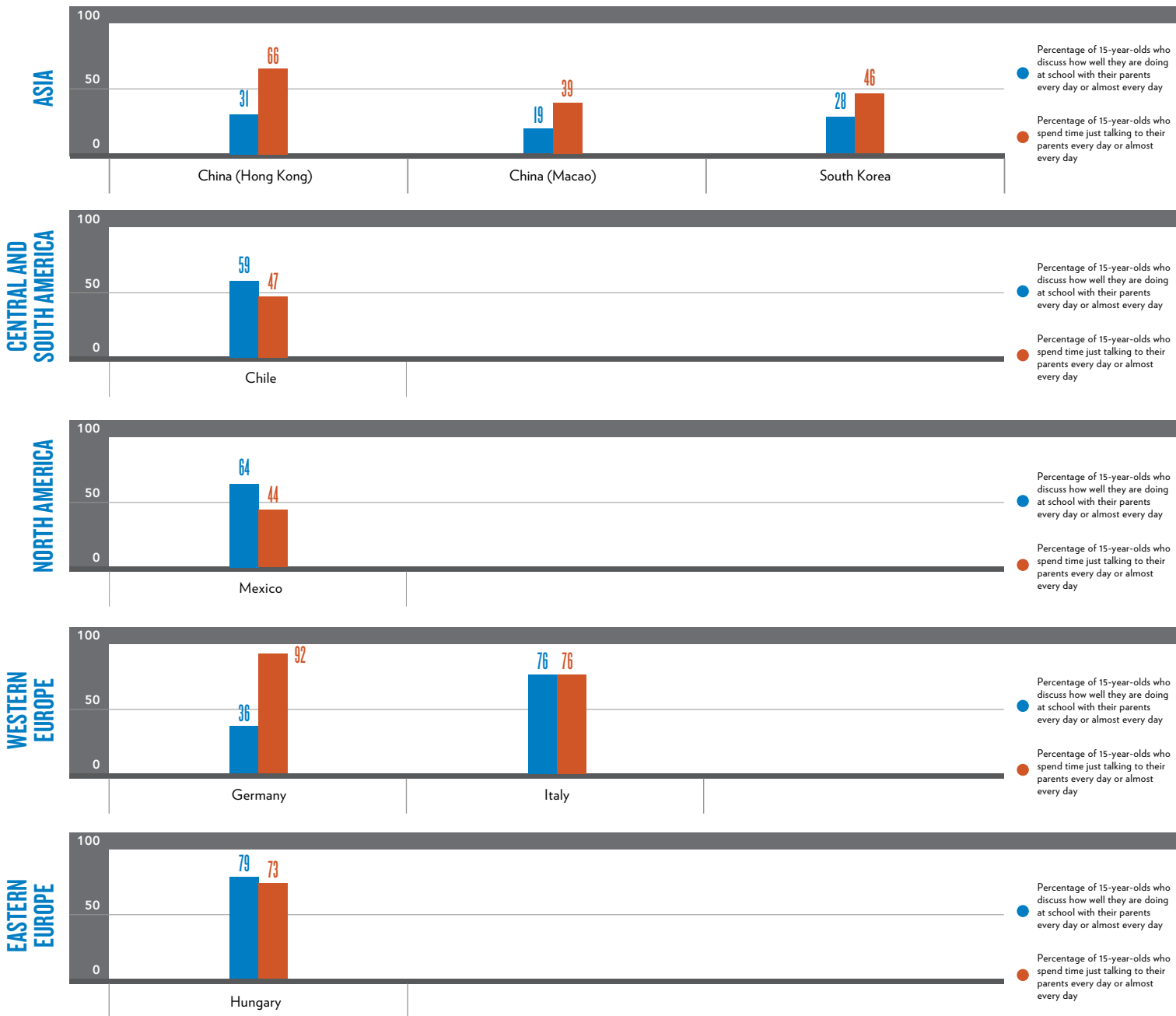
<sup>51</sup> K. Musick and A. Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations between Family Dinners and Adolescent Well-Being," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 74, no. 3 (2012).

<sup>52</sup> Musick and Meier, "Assessing Causality and Persistence in Associations."

<sup>53</sup> Hampden-Thompson et al., "A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy."

<sup>54</sup> J. A. Fulkerson, D. Neumark-Sztainer, and M. Story, "Adolescent and Parent Views of Family Meals," *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106, no. 4 (2006).

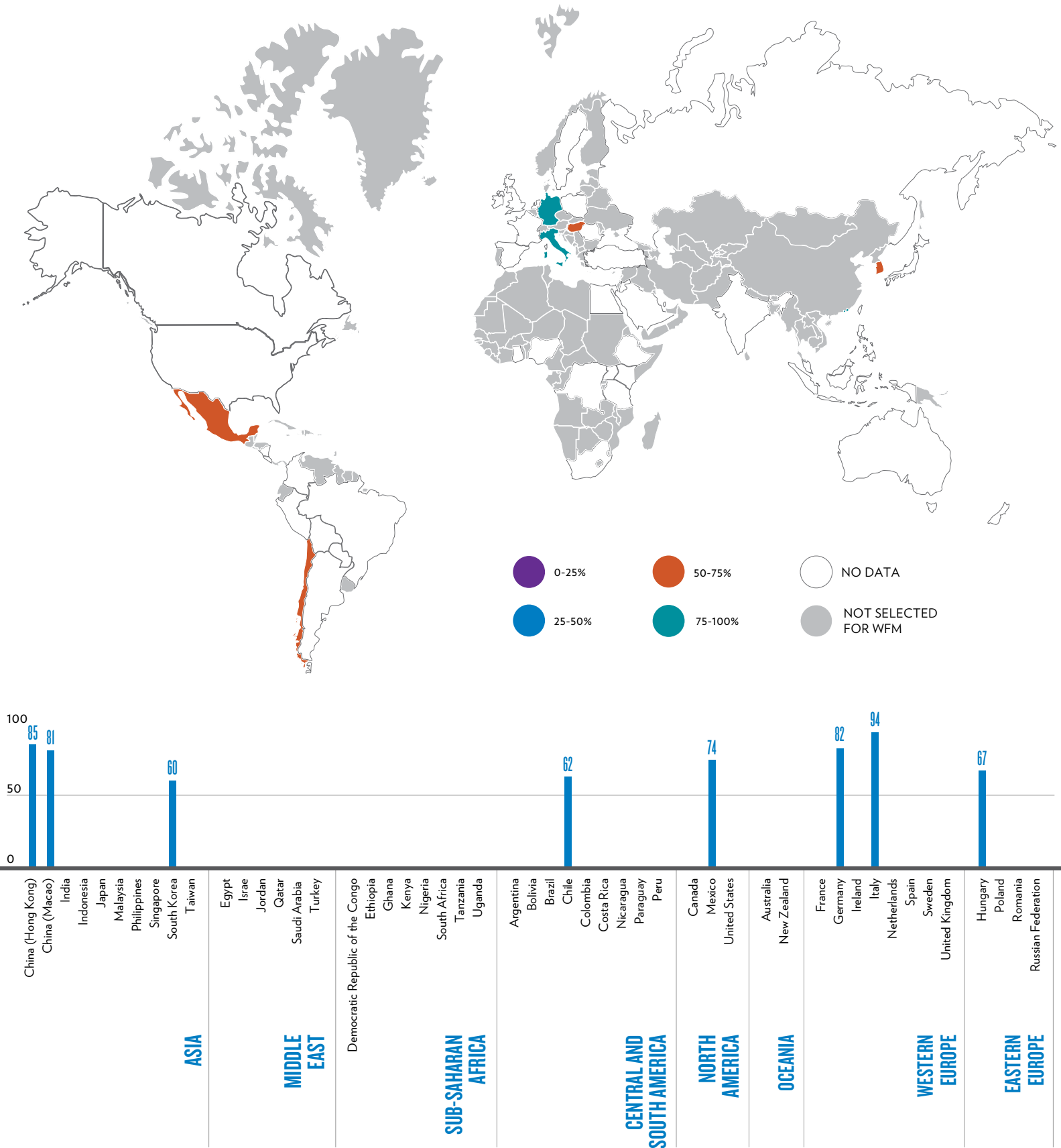
**FIGURE 9** Parental involvement, 2012



Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix)

# FIGURE 10 Family meals, 2012

Percentage of 15-year-olds who eat the main meal with their parents around a table every day or almost every day



Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/appendix)

The *World Family Map* presents the proportion of children who eat the main meal of the day with their families every day or almost every day as an indicator of family processes. The information for this indicator is drawn from the direct answers given by parents of 15-year-olds from a variety of countries participating in the 2012 PISA survey.

These data indicate that the percentage of 15-year-olds who frequently eat meals with their families varies widely throughout the world, ranging from 60 percent in South Korea to 94 percent in Italy, as seen in [Figure 10](#).

In Asia, represented by South Korea and two regions in China, there is diversity in the number of teens who eat with their parents on a daily or almost daily basis. Sixty percent of teens in South Korea eat the main meal with their parents almost every day or daily, while more than 80 percent do in both Macao and Hong Kong. Around six in 10 teens (62 percent) eat the main meal of the day with their parents in South America, as represented by Chile. Rates are higher in North America and Europe, where between 67 percent (Hungary) and 94 percent (Italy) of teens eat the main meal with their parents every day or almost every day. Mexican and German teens fall in between, with 74 percent and 82 percent of teens, respectively, eating with their parents at least almost every day.

The differences in the frequency of families' eating meals together may reflect differences in family structure, time use, proximity of work and school to home, rates of female labor-force participation, and cultural patterns.



In Asia, represented by South Korea and two regions in China, there is diversity in the number of teens who eat with their parents on a daily or almost daily basis. Sixty percent of teens in South Korea eat the main meal with their parents almost every day or daily, while more than 80 percent do in both Macao and Hong Kong



# Family Culture

## Key Findings

Family culture refers to the family-related attitudes and norms a country's citizens express. Data suggest that adults take a range of progressive and conservative positions on family issues.

- Attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood differ from one region to another, with adults in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania leaning more toward acceptance (with a high acceptance rate of 80 percent in Spain), and those in Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa leaning more toward rejection (as evidenced by an acceptance rate of only 2 percent in Egypt and Jordan).
- About half of adults agree that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents, with support ranging from 24 percent in China to 69 percent in South Africa.
- In all of the countries featured in this study with available data, most adults—from 52 percent in Chile to 84 percent in Taiwan—believe that working mothers can establish relationships with their children that are just as good as those of stay-at-home mothers.
- Most adults worldwide report that they completely trust their families; however, levels of trust vary by region and country, with 63 percent of adults reporting they completely trust their families in the Netherlands, and 99 percent reporting this to be the case in Egypt. It should be noted that the willingness of adults to affirm the term “completely” (regardless of the topic) varies across countries.

To shed light on adults' attitudes toward family life around the world, we relied on data from the World Values Survey (WVS), collected between 2000 and 2013, and the 2012 edition of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) surveys on four cultural indicators in 32 countries: 1) approval of single motherhood, 2) agreement that one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents, 3) approval of working mothers, and 4) presence of family trust.<sup>55</sup> Given that respondents in different countries may interpret the questions and response categories somewhat differently, and that population representation of the surveys varies from country to country, the WVS and ISSP do not allow us to draw a perfect comparison between countries.

## Attitudes Toward Voluntary Single Motherhood

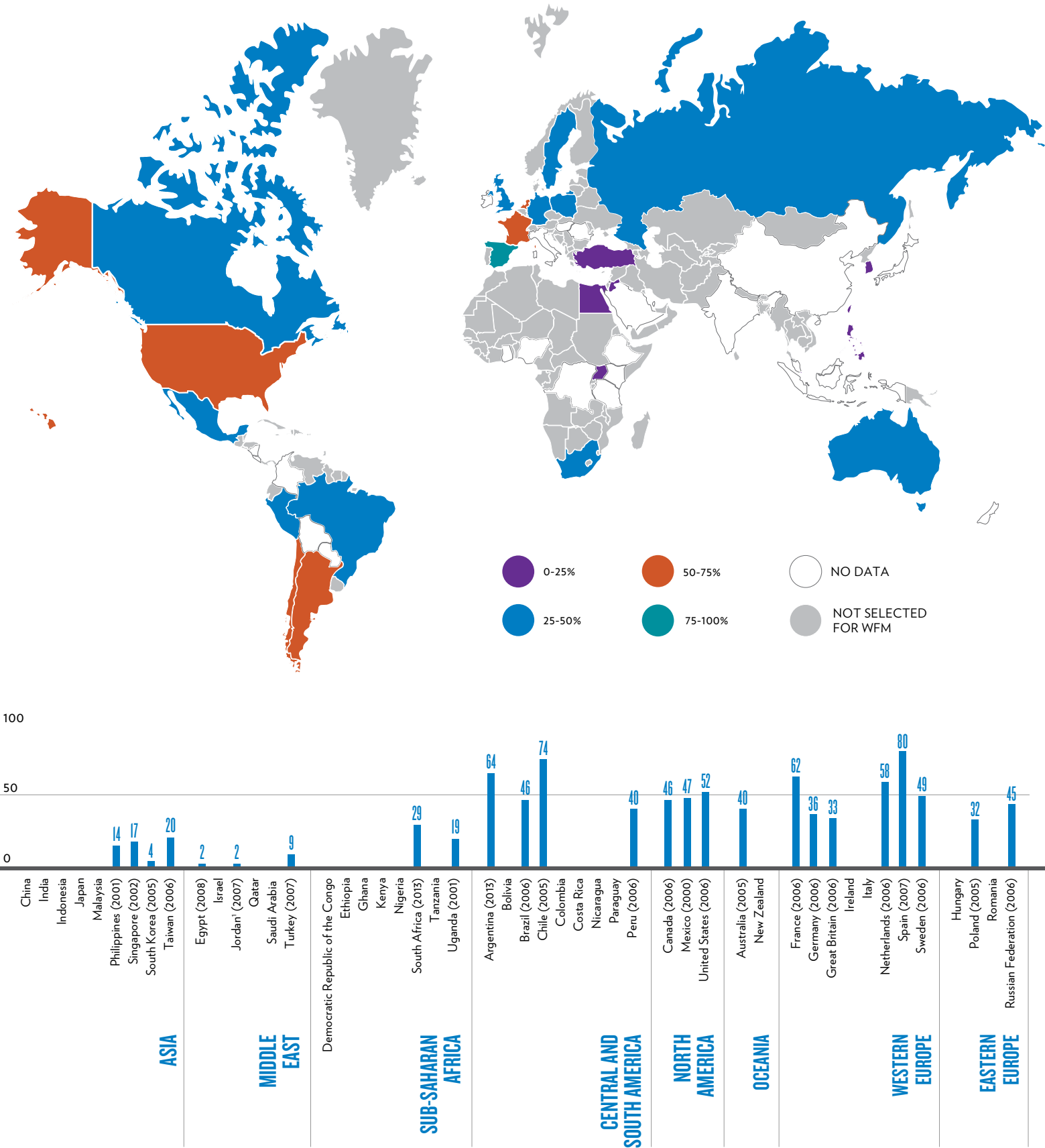
Adult attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood vary greatly by region, as seen in [Figure 11](#). The WVS asked adults if they approved of a woman seeking to “have a child as a single parent” without a “stable relationship with a man.” In Asia, the Middle East, and sub-Saharan Africa, little public support exists for this type of single motherhood. Specifically, in Asia and the Middle East, support for this view ranges from a high of 20 percent (Taiwan) to a low of 2 percent (Egypt and Jordan). Support is also comparatively low in sub-Saharan Africa, where only 19 percent of adults in Uganda and 29 percent of adults in South Africa express approval of voluntary single motherhood.

<sup>55</sup> World Values Survey Association, “World Values Survey 1981-2008 Official Aggregate V.20090901,” [www.worldvaluessurvey.org](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org) (Aggregate File Producer: ASEP/JDS, Madrid, 2009); World Values Survey Association, “World Values Survey Wave 6 2010-2014 Official Aggregate V.20150418” (Aggregate File Producer: Asep/JDS, Madrid, 2015); ISSP Research Group, “International Social Survey Programme: Family and Changing Gender Roles-Issp 2012” (Cologne: GESIS Data Archive, 2014); Hampden-Thompson et al., “A Cross-National Analysis of Parental Involvement and Student Literacy.”



# FIGURE 11 Attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood, 2000-2013

Percentage of adults (18+) who approve of a woman who wants to have a child as a single parent but doesn't want to have a stable relationship with a man



Support for voluntary single motherhood is markedly higher in the Americas, Europe, and Oceania. Forty percent or more of adults living in Oceanic or American countries surveyed in the WVS accept it. For example, 52 percent of adults in the United States, 46 percent in Canada, 40 percent in Australia, and 74 percent in Chile indicate that they approve of unmarried women having children on their own. Views are more heterogeneous in Europe. Just 32 percent of adults in Poland express support for voluntary single motherhood, compared with 80 percent of adults in Spain. Overall, slightly less than half of the adults in most other European countries register their approval of voluntary single motherhood. In general, adults in countries with more affluence, lower levels of religiosity, and/or high levels of single parenthood prove to be more supportive of women having children without a husband or male partner. By contrast, countries with strong religious or collectivist orientations are less supportive of women who choose to be single mothers.<sup>56</sup>

## Attitudes About Whether Children Need Two Parents

Despite the considerable regional variation in attitudes toward voluntary single motherhood, there is relatively little variation among countries in attitudes about the value of a two-parent home. In most of the world, about one-half of adults believe that “one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together,” as [Figure 12](#) illustrates.<sup>57</sup>

Adults in Asia show the widest range of beliefs on this indicator. In China, less than one-quarter of adults believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents, whereas in India, the Philippines, and Taiwan, over one-half of adults think that one parent can. Data are very limited for sub-Saharan Africa, and South America, but where they are available, adults tend to believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two: in South Africa, 69 percent of adults affirm that, and in South America, as represented by Argentina and Chile, about 60 percent do.

Adults in North America and Oceania are more skeptical of single-parent families, with just under half of adults believing that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents in Canada, Australia, and United States. In both Western and Eastern Europe, about half of adults believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two parents, with agreement ranging from 39 percent to 60 percent.

For the countries with available data, attitudes about whether children need two parents generally align with behaviors. In South Africa, adults have the world’s highest level of endorsement for one-parent families, and more than half of children grow up living with a single parent. Single parenthood is less widespread in areas with lower levels of endorsement for single parents’ abilities to raise children alone. For example, in North America and Oceania, where less than one-half of adults believe that one parent can raise a child as well as two, over three-quarters of children live with two parents (with the exception of the United States).

## Support for Working Mothers

The 2014 edition of the *World Family Map* cautioned against drawing conclusions about support for working mothers because the most recent data available were from the turn of the millennium. Fortunately, the ISSP included this question in their most recent round of survey data collection around 2012. The countries for which data are available are not identical to those covered in the 2014 edition, and again it is important to be cautious in comparing this year’s reported data to those in last year’s report due to the different data sources.

Across the world, one-half of women aged 15 and older participate in the labor force.<sup>58</sup> In line with this trend, as [Table 4](#) indicates, a majority of adults in all countries surveyed around the globe believe that a “working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work.”

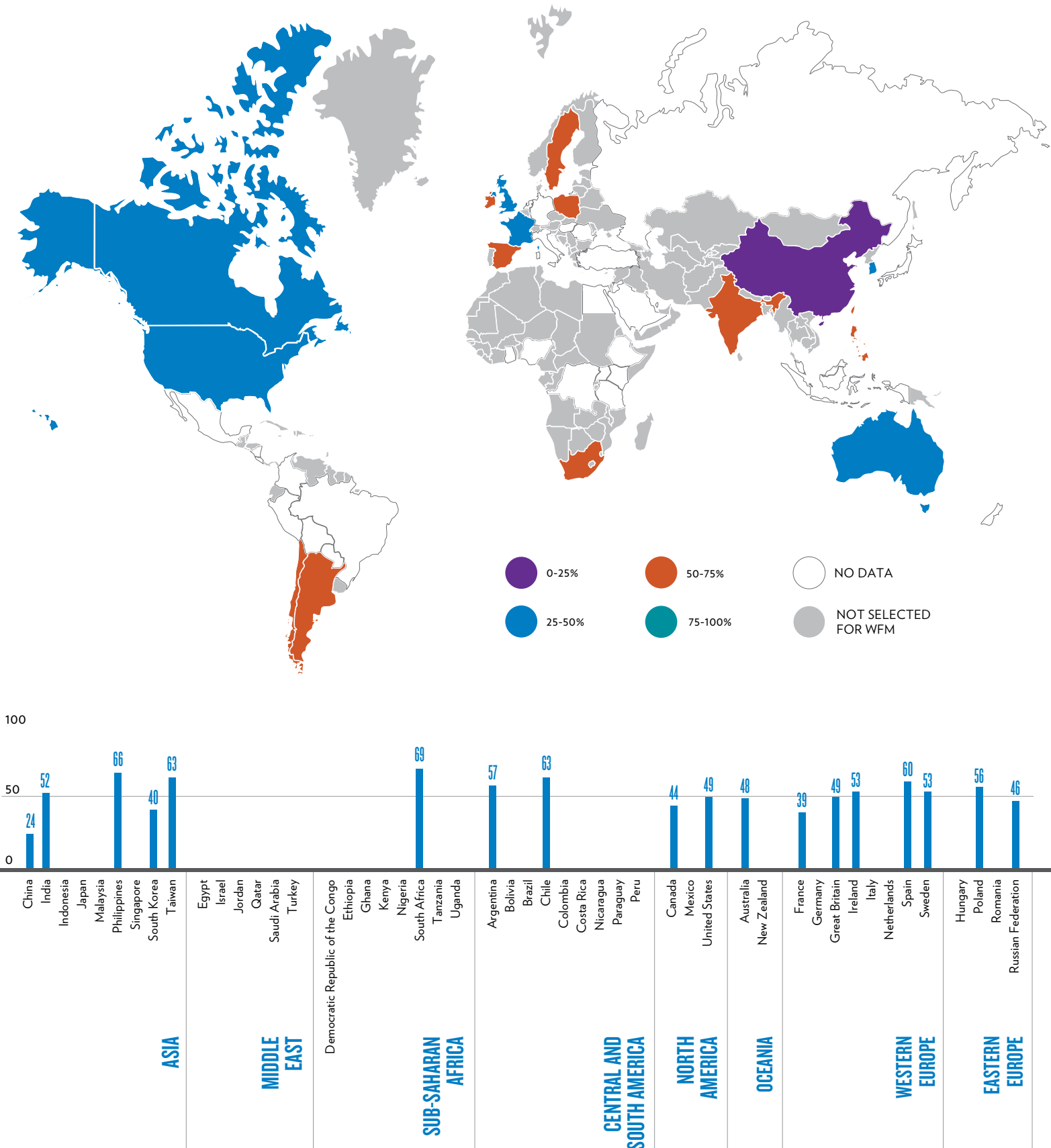
<sup>56</sup> R. Inglehart and P. Norris, *The Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World* (New York: Cambridge, 2003).

<sup>57</sup> In previous editions of the *World Family Map*, this indicator was whether a child “needs a home with both a mother and a father to grow up happily.” This year, this indicator has been replaced with a non-gendered version, for which more recent data are available.

<sup>58</sup> World Bank, “World Development Indicators: Labor Force Structure Table 2.2.”

**FIGURE 12** Attitudes about the need for two parents, 2012

*Percentage of adults (18+) who agree or strongly agree that one parent can bring up a child as well as two parents together*



This view seems to be particularly prevalent in Western Europe and North America, where more than two-thirds of adults in the surveyed countries agree that working mothers perform just as well as mothers who do not work outside the home. For instance, 72 percent of adults in the United States, 78 percent of adults in Sweden, and 81 percent of adults in France express the belief that working mothers can establish as good a relationship with their children as can stay-at-home mothers.

The available evidence in sub-Saharan Africa comes from South Africa, where 75 percent of adults agree that working mothers do as well as mothers who do not work outside the home.

Support for working mothers is more moderate in other regions of the world. In parts of Asia (including China, India, and South Korea) and Eastern Europe, about 65 percent of adults agree that working mothers can establish strong relationships with their children. Support is higher in the Philippines and Taiwan, though, at 72 percent and 84 percent, respectively. In Australia, 68 percent of adults hold similar views. Adults in South America express less support for working mothers than those in other regions. In Chile, 52 percent of adults believe that working mothers develop relationships with their children that are as secure as those of non-working mothers. In Argentina, 61 percent of adults feel the same way. Unfortunately, no Middle Eastern countries were included in this data source, but older findings for this region were reported in the 2014 *World Family Map* report.

In general, then, this somewhat limited global survey of attitudes towards working mothers suggests that in most regions, public support for working mothers is high. Despite the conventional wisdom that children do best when their mothers are caring for them full-time in the home, at least 50 percent of adults believe that working mothers can establish relationships with their children which are as strong and secure as those of non-working mothers in every surveyed country. In fact, recent research has found little relationship between the quantity of time that children or adolescents spend with their mothers and their educational and behavioral outcomes.<sup>59</sup>

## TABLE 4 Support for working mothers, 2012

*Percentage of adults (18+) who agree or strongly agree that a working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work*

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China 64	Egypt -	Democratic Republic of the Congo -	Argentina 61
India 64	Israel -	Ethiopia -	Bolivia -
Indonesia -	Jordan -	Ghana -	Brazil -
Japan -	Qatar -	Kenya -	Chile 52
Malaysia -	Saudi Arabia -	Nigeria -	Colombia -
Philippines 72	Turkey -	South Africa 75	Costa Rica -
Singapore -		Tanzania -	Nicaragua -
South Korea 67		Uganda -	Paraguay -
Taiwan 84			Peru -
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada 71	Australia 68	France 81	Hungary -
Mexico -	New Zealand -	Germany -	Poland 64
United States 72		Great Britain 77	Romania -
		Ireland 71	Russian Federation 66
		Italy -	
		Netherlands -	
		Spain 68	
		Sweden 78	

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix)

<sup>59</sup> M. A. Milkie, K. M. Nomaguchi, and K. E. Denny, "Does the Amount of Time Mothers Spend with Children or Adolescents Matter?" *Journal of Marriage and Family* 77, no. 2 (2015).

**TABLE 5** Family trust, 2005-2014*Percentage of adults (18+) who completely trust their families*

ASIA	MIDDLE EAST	SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA	CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA
China (2012) 90	Egypt (2013) 99	Democratic Republic of the Congo -	Argentina (2013) 92
India (2014) 65	Israel -	Ethiopia -	Bolivia -
Indonesia -	Jordan <sup>1</sup> (2007) 97	Ghana (2012) 67	Brazil (2014) 70
Japan -	Qatar (2012) 91	Kenya -	Chile (2005) 83
Malaysia -	Saudi Arabia -	Nigeria (2011) 88	Colombia -
Philippines (2012) 86	Turkey (2011) 94	South Africa (2013) 76	Costa Rica -
Singapore (2012) 82		Tanzania -	Nicaragua -
South Korea (2010) 83		Uganda -	Paraguay -
Taiwan (2012) 83			Peru (2012) 79
NORTH AMERICA	OCEANIA	WESTERN EUROPE	EASTERN EUROPE
Canada (2006) 83	Australia (2012) 82	France (2006) 80	Hungary -
Mexico -	New Zealand -	Germany (2013) 76	Poland (2012) 70
United States (2011) 70		Great Britain (2006) 86	Romania (2012) 81
		Ireland -	Russian Federation (2011) 88
		Italy -	
		Netherlands (2006) 63	
		Spain (2011) 94	
		Sweden (2013) 89	

Sources: [www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix](http://www.ifstudies.org/reports/wfm/2017/eppendix)

## Family Trust

The family is an important social institution around the world. Most societies see the family as a fundamental source of socialization, the place that meets some of humankind's deepest needs for belonging, and the wellspring of the emotional and social support needed to flourish. What, then, does the global public believe about the presence of trust in their own families? The World Values Survey asked respondents if they trust their families, and the results suggest that trust remains high in most families around the world (see Table 5). Here the *World Family Map* records the percentage of respondents affirming that they “completely” trust their families,<sup>60</sup> the highest answer they could select, because there is a tendency for respondents to pick the top category in reporting on such a socially desirable indicator. However, differences across cultures exist in the degree to which survey respondents will affirm the category “completely.” Evidence suggests that in the Netherlands and in Latin America, specifically, and perhaps in other countries, respondents often avoid choosing the highest categories on survey questions because these response options are not culturally acceptable.<sup>61</sup>

With these caveats, we find that family trust is almost universal among adults in the Asian, Oceanic, and especially Middle Eastern countries studied. In the Middle East, 91 percent of Qatari adults indicate that they completely trust their families, as do 94 percent of Turkish adults and a remarkable 97 percent of adults in Jordan and 99 percent of adults in Egypt. Likewise, 90 percent of adults in China express complete trust in their families, as do 82 to 86 percent of adults in other Asian countries, and 82 percent of Australians. India appears as an exception to the high rates of family trust in Asia, with just 65 percent of adults saying they completely trust their families.

Levels of family trust are more mixed in Europe and the Americas. In Europe, the proportion of adults who report completely trusting their families ranges from 63 percent in the Netherlands to 94 percent in Spain. Notably, the percentage of adults who completely trust their families decreased by five percentage points in Germany between 2006 and 2013, to 76 percent.

In the Americas, the proportion of adults who affirm that they completely trust their families ranges from 71 percent in Brazil to 92 percent in Argentina, with North American percentages falling between 70 and 83 percent. In sub-Saharan Africa, 67 percent of adults completely trust their families in Ghana, while 76 percent express this trust in South Africa and 88 percent do in Nigeria.

<sup>60</sup> Respondents could indicate that they trust their family “completely” or “somewhat,” or that they “do not trust [their family] very much” or “do not trust [them] at all.”<sup>61</sup> *World Family Map* partner research institutions in the Netherlands and South America, email message to authors, October 2012.

Given the heterogeneous character of countries that register high levels of family trust—with at least nine in 10 adults completely trusting their families in Argentina, China, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Spain, and Turkey—we cannot be sure of the role factors like affluence, public policy, religion, and familism (the elevation of the family over individual issues) play in fostering high levels of family solidarity. Nevertheless, the varied character of nations scoring highly on the attitudinal measure of family trust suggests that different factors foster strong family solidarity in different regional contexts.

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While research consistently demonstrates that families exert a strong influence on child outcomes, our ability to monitor families and understand how to strengthen them, and thus improve child outcomes in many regions of the world, is hampered by a lack of data. For example, in many countries, even basic data—such as the relationship between a child’s parents, information on extended family members and non-residential parents, and the education level and employment status of both parents—are unavailable. Though improved, the need for data on additional countries for the indicators in the family process and culture sections is obvious, and the areas of family structure and socioeconomics would be strengthened if there existed more data allowing for comparisons across regions and countries of the world. To further understand the family dynamics underlying child well-being, we need comparable data for additional indicators of family well-being.



**In the Middle East, 91 percent of Qatari adults indicate that they completely trust their families, as do 94 percent of Turkish adults and a remarkable 97 percent of adults in Jordan and 99 percent of adults in Egypt.**

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