

Introduction: Family Policies in the German-Speaking Countries Reforms and Explanations

Regina Ahrens

University of Münster (Germany)

Sonja Blum

University of Münster (Germany)

Irene Gerlach

Protestant University of Applied Sciences
Rheinland-Westfalen Lippe (Bochum) (Germany)

1 Family Policy Reforms in the German-Speaking Countries

By referring to the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth as „Frauen und das ganze Gedöns“ (*women and all this hullabaloo*; Ristau 2005: 21), former chancellor Gerhard Schröder couched the relative insignificance of the ministry and family policies in general, compared to other departments of his government. Having been institutionalized as a sort of “less-than-ideal” solution (Gerlach 2010: 245) in the 1950s, German family policy was for a long time affected by partisan argumentation and has only slowly adapted to families’ real living situations. In the last few years though, the importance of the policy field has increased significantly and family policy has been subject to several far-reaching reforms, e.g. the introduction of an income-related parental benefit (2007). Similar developments can be observed for Swiss and Austrian family policies (in the following see *Blum* and *Häusermann/Kübler* in this issue): In Switzerland, family policy benefits remained on a very modest level until the late 1990s. However, at the turn of the millennium, a series of reforms gave a boost to the policy field, e.g.

by the implementation of a federal program to subsidize child-care infrastructure (2003), the introduction of a compulsory maternity insurance (2005), and a nationwide harmonization of family allowances (2006). Similar to German and Swiss family policy, also Austrian family policy can be considered as being traditionally strongly familialistic, but has also recently been subject to ongoing restructuring, e.g. in the field of leave policies, which were repeatedly reformed in 2000, 2002, 2008 and 2010. All in all, family policies in the German-speaking countries have lately been subject to expansion.

These changes in family policies happened against the background of demographic changes and economic and societal challenges. However, scientific findings concerning these developments did not alone manage to provoke political responses. These reactions have also been considerably influenced by supranational developments like the adoption of the EU's Lisbon Strategy (2000) that called for making the European Union the "most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (European Council 2000). By recognizing the consequences of demographic and societal changes for the families, the Lisbon Strategy set the landmark for higher (female) employment rates and improved child-care provision (European Council 2000). In addition to the Lisbon Strategy, developments in other policy fields have also influenced changes in family policy. As *Augustin-Dittmann* (see her contribution to this issue) shows for the German case, the results of the 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA) published in 2001 had major impacts on family policy by boosting the debate about full-time schooling and thereby shaping the question of a better reconciliation of work and family life.

We argue that developments like PISA and the Lisbon Strategy have also contributed to an increase in international benchmarking (including the identification of 'good practices') which aims at defining factors of success and failure in terms of family policy goals. In this vein, even though the European Union has no legal competence in the field of family policy, it indirectly influences national family policies via different instruments (for

a more detailed overview see Ahrens 2008). As an example, the open method of coordination and benchmarking processes—set up by the Lisbon Strategy—were adopted to the area of social policy within the European Union and are also used in the realm of family policy. Both methods aim at encouraging an active exchange of Member States in different areas (e.g. Commission of the European Communities 2001: 28). In the context of family policy, the so called European Alliance for Families, set up in 2007 under the German presidency, institutionalizes these exchanges of knowledge and good practices. The Alliance serves “as a platform for the exchange of views and knowledge on family-friendly policies as well as of good practices between Member States” (European Council 2007: 8) and thereby aims at fostering policy learning processes across the EU.

However, despite of similar starting conditions in terms of welfare state regimes¹ and despite of similar international developments shaping the three countries, family policy reforms in Germany, Switzerland and Austria had different outputs, for example in the area of leave policies: Although the changes that occurred in this realm in the last decade can be classified as far-reaching ones, only the German reform with its introduction of the income-related parental benefit in 2007 may be considered as a real system shift. In contrast, the reforms of the Austrian parental leave (2000, 2002, 2008 and 2010) have resulted in a mixture of measures, adding always additional elements to the previous policy (see *Blum* in this issue). While in Germany and Austria, the new leave schemes are far-reaching mainly in the way that they are income-related, aiming at encouraging mothers to return to work quickly, and also putting incentives for fathers to take part of the leave, Swiss leave reform has a partly different output: The Swiss maternity insurance scheme, set up only in 2004, ex-

¹ Even if in international comparisons, the Swiss welfare state was often qualified as being a ‘liberal’ or ‘residual’ one (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990), Swiss social policy has gradually expanded from the late 1970s onwards. Armingeon (2001) therefore argues that the Swiss welfare state came closer to the ideal type of a continental European welfare state. Concerning family policy, an expansion only took place at the turn of the millennium (for further details see Häusermann/Kübler in this issue).

cludes fathers since it only applies to mothers (see *Häusermann/Kübler* in this issue).

2 Explanations from a policy analysis perspective

This special issue asks for the reasons for these differing outputs of recent family policy reforms in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. International comparisons of family policies were virtually non-existent for a long time: Traditionally, comparative welfare state research focused on pensions or unemployment, but lost sight of family policies. First international comparisons of family policies only began at the end of the 1970, when especially Sheila Kamermann and Alfred Kahn (1978) edited their comparison of public family policies in 14 countries. As a pioneering work, their study was focused on building up the groundwork for future research and remained largely descriptive. By comparing family policy systems and benefits, Kamerman/Kahn (1978) arrived at a first typology of *explicit and comprehensive* (e.g. Sweden, France, Hungary), *sectoral* (e.g. Austria, Germany) and *implicit and reluctant* (e.g. UK, US) family policy-making styles.

During the 1990s, these first descriptive comparisons were complemented by—for the most part international-comparative—analyses, which aimed at including family policies into comparative welfare state research (e.g. Hantrais 1995; Gauthier 1996; Harding 1996). For example, Gauthier (1996) in her historical-analytical analysis of family policy traditions in OECD countries identified four groups: the *pro-egalitarian* (e.g. Sweden, Denmark), the *pro-family/pro-natalist* (e.g. France), the *pro-traditional* (e.g. Germany) as well as the *pro-family but not interventionist* (e.g. UK) family policy model.

For the research processes of the later 1990s, Esping-Andersen's (1990) "Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" played a double role: On the one hand, he focused on typology-building and established the—already entrenched approach (e.g. Titmuss 1974; Korpi 1985)—of clustering welfare states in order to facilitate systematic comparisons as the predominant strand of research (cf. Blum and Rille-Pfeiffer 2010). On the other hand,

Esping-Andersen's works, by focusing on *state* and *market*, unfolded a deficit: Namely, the so called feminist criticism elaborated that the family's role in welfare provision and gender-specific problems had been thitherto neglected by comparative welfare state research (e.g. Daly 1994). In the consequence, *gender* was integrated as a central category in comparing welfare states and building typologies (especially Lewis and Ostner 1994), which, before, had been vastly invisible on highly-aggregated levels of welfare state spending (cf. Kulawik 1996).

With rising political importance and ongoing restructuring of family policies since the early 2000s, as they have been addressed in the previous section, research and publications on this policy field have also been on the increase. However, studies and findings differ substantially between different family policy areas and countries (for a current overview of the state of the art see Blum/Rille-Pfeiffer 2010). Regarding family policy areas and speaking very broadly, leave and childcare policies have been profitably studied during the last years, while much less is known on regulatory frameworks or family tax benefits. Regarding countries, bigger and "close-to-ideal-type" welfare states come up again and again in international comparisons (especially Germany, Sweden, and the UK), while countries remain particularly under-researched if they share one or several of the following characteristics: "being a new member state, being small, and not being in the OECD" (Blum and Rille-Pfeiffer 2010).

What is more: Looking at the central interest of policy analysis—i.e. what governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes (Dye 1972: 1)—it is striking how most international comparisons of family policies focus on the first and second of these three questions. This special issue of *German Policy Studies* wants to make a contribution to filling this gap and focuses on *explanations* for the differing policy outputs in the German-speaking countries that have been mentioned above: Why do we observe such differing reform outputs, although Germany, Austria and Switzerland are influenced by very similar developments (e.g. in terms of welfare state typology, concerning demographic and societal changes)? This is highly relevant from a policy-analytical, but also from a political perspective: Against the

background of defined targets (e.g. regarding fertility rates, employment rates, educational levels) that have amongst others been set up by the EU Lisbon Strategy, questions on the transferability of policy measures, learning from each other, and regime-specific barriers for this are decisive. Since many traditional approaches (e.g. color of parties in power, policy inheritance, problem pressures) were found *not* to offer satisfying explanations for recent family policy changes (for their discussion see also Blum in this issue), the authors of this special issue apply newer *institutional*, *actor-* and *idea-centered* theoretical approaches in case studies on family policy changes in Austria, Germany and Switzerland. As a systematic analysis of recent reforms in Germany, Austria and Switzerland concerning the three explanatory factors mentioned goes beyond the scope of this special issue, these analytical lenses are applied to *exemplary* cases: Some contributions exclusively follow one of these explanatory factors (e.g. institutional factors by *Thoenen* in this issue), some draw on two (e.g. actor- and idea-centered factors by Blum in this issue). In the following section, we are going to present the contributions and discuss their results.

3 Contributions and results

Olivia Thoenen examines Swiss reconciliation policies in international perspective. Studying leave and childcare policies (thereby putting a special focus on the situation of different federal levels), *Thoenen* finds that Switzerland lacks far behind in helping parents to combine work and family life. To answer the questions why this is the case, she investigates two institutional factors, which international research has stressed as important to explain variations in reconciliation policies: the decentralization of a country on the one hand, and women in politics on the other. She finds that both factors are of high relevance with regard to Switzerland. Firstly, decentralized public structures and the fragmentation of responsibilities led to a low level of public reconciliation policies. Secondly, the late inclusion of Swiss women into politics and the weak women's mobilization contributed to a

small amount of women in politics still nowadays. Former research, however, has shown that countries with a high proportion of women in politics have more and better public support of work-life balance. With her analysis, *Thoenen* shows how these institutional factors can offer a satisfying explanation for Switzerland's less developed public reconciliation policies.

In her article, *Sandra Augustin-Dittmann* analyzes the development of all-day schooling in Germany—a reform process which lies at the intersection of educational and family policies. As Germany's passed-down half-day schooling has, over the last years, been gradually amended by full-time alternatives, *Augustin-Dittmann* identifies far-reaching changes of this “conservative welfare state”: The traditionally strong separation between educational and social policy is vanishing, as the focus on reconciliation of work and family life prevails. Against this background, *Augustin-Dittmann* employs the multiple streams approach to explain how the—seemingly unlikely—change from half-day schooling to the development of all-day schools was possible. She finds that the reform was possible, because a set of various structural factors enabled its enforcement and a committed policy entrepreneur pushed it through. However, as the political challenges bore no inherent necessity to expand full-time schooling, serendipities played a role as well and the policy change was rendered possible by a mixture of contingency and strategy.

Analyzing recent reforms of parental leave policies in Germany and Austria, *Sonja Blum* resorts to actors and ideas as explanatory factors for policy change. She shows that although they have been ascribed a low reform potential, both countries have considerably changed their leave schemes during the last decade. Blum argues that traditional explanatory factors—like post-industrial problem pressures, power resources approaches and the “parties matters” thesis—do not satisfyingly explain the reform process, and what is more, its different outputs in German and Austrian parental leave schemes. As a consequence, Blum makes use of a different analytical lens by applying Hall's concept of social learning and Howlett et al.'s model of policy formulation modes to the recent reforms of leave policies in Germany in Aus-

tria. Her analysis reveals that in contrast to the German reform of 2007 which may be rated as being a policy renewal, Austrian parental leave schemes—currently offering five different variants of parental leave—are rather marked by path-dependency. The differing availability of new ideas and entrance of new actors between Germany and Austria is shown to be an important explanatory factor for these differing outputs.

The contribution of *Margitta Mätzke* and *Ilona Ostner* discusses the relation between the development of policy ideas and policy changes in German family policy by putting an emphasis on the reciprocity of this relationship. Using John Kingon's concept of policy innovation in which he stresses the importance of familiarity, maturity and political resonance of policy ideas, they show that ideational change in German family policy already originate in the late 1950s, preparing the ground for major reforms of the recent past. Stressing the importance of duration within the political process, *Mätzke and Ostner* argue that while policy change might occur rather rapidly, policy ideas need time to develop. Using the example of child allowance, policies to foster maternal employment, parental leave and childcare, they show that the recent reforms' underlying ideas had been around for several years or even decades, getting obvious through incremental policy change from the 1970s onwards, which prepared the ground for the recent more profound changes. To sum up, their contribution reveals that the new policy agenda is dominated by rather old than substantially new ideas.

Using ideational aspects as explanatory factors for recent changes, *Silja Häusermann* and *Daniel Kübler* resort to the concept of frames in their analysis of the politics of family policy reform in Switzerland. They argue that a focus should be put on underlying political frames when analyzing family policy developments. On an empirical basis, the authors systematically point out recent changes of Swiss family policy at the national level concerning parental leave schemes, childcare services, and family and child allowances. Häusermann and Kübler show that Swiss family policy is currently framed in different ways, i.e. as social policy, labor market policy and gender equality policy. According to the authors, successful reforms have been possible

due to the fact that its measures allowed a combination of different family policy frames. In contrast, reforms which appealed to a single policy frame only lacked the sufficiently broad coalition support to pass. Against this background, Häusermann and Kübler identify a high potential for reform in cases in which reforms address different frames of family policy. However, they emphasize that these reform coalitions are fragile as they are based on ambiguous agreements between very different actors. As a consequence, their potential for reform must be mobilized each time anew.

In her contribution to this special issue, *Regina Ahrens* focuses on the so called “sustainable family policy”, which has been the subject heading of German family policy developments over the last years. Given the outstanding importance of this concept, *Ahrens* raises a very important question, namely: What exactly do (different) family policy actors in Germany actually understand by “sustainable family policy”? This she analyzes against the background of theoretically developed requirements of “sustainability”, namely normative and integrative aspects as well as the implementation of participative aspects in actors’ cooperation. In her article, which is based on 18 expert interviews conducted with scientists and policy makers, *Ahrens* is able to show that although they frequently refer to sustainability in the context of family policy, these actors have a very heterogeneous understanding of this term. What is more, the normative, integrative and participative theoretical requirements have not been integrated into their understanding of the concept. Given these findings, *Ahrens* asks for the reasons of sustainability discourse by showing that the latter seems to be connected to major societal and political developments that occurred at the turn of the new millennium. As a consequence, she reasons to what extent the “sustainable family policy” concept and the underlying discourse are not (only) a concrete ambition in themselves, but have also been used as a strategic means within German family policy reform process.

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