

The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities

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The impact of parental leave schemes on the employment of mothers with young children in European societies

preliminary draft

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Abstract

Social policy usually agree that the availability of formal childcare has a positive effect on women's employment. In contrast, it is a common argument that generous parental leave schemes have a negative effect on women's employment. In this paper I analyse the relationship between the degree of generosity of parental leave schemes and the employment rate of mothers with young children in a cross-national perspective, using OECD data and EU-SILC data for EU countries. Those who are critical against generous parental leave schemes sometimes assume that welfare states are using generous parental leave as a substitute for policies towards a generous provision of formal childcare. In a first step I therefore evaluate the relationship between parental leave schemes and the use of formal employment. In a second step I analyse the relationship of the degree of generosity of parental leave schemes and the employment rates of mothers with young children in the EU countries.

The findings show that in most welfare states which are providing generous parental leave schemes, these are not so much used as a substitute to formal childcare, but these schemes exist together with a relatively high proportion of children in formal childcare. These findings indicate that generous parental leave schemes mainly exist in welfare states in which family policies are altogether relatively generous and offer parents different option for childcare. Moreover, the findings do not support the assumption that the degree of generosity of family leave schemes has a negative impact on the employment rate of mothers with children below 2 years. Also, it turns out that the employment rate of mothers with children between 3 and 6 years is considerably higher in welfare states with generous family leave schemes than in those with less generous leave schemes. A rather general explanation is that family leave policies, like other welfare state policies, do not determine behaviour. The outcome of such family policies differs depending on the cultural, institutional, social and economic context in which they are embedded. This is demonstrated by the findings of qualitative and quantitative research in the EU project "Formal and Informal Work in Europe" (FIWE). It is shown that particularly also differences in the labour market situation of the country and differences with regard to the dominant cultural family model can contribute to the explanation.

Keywords: family policies, parental leave, EU-25, cross-national analyses, employment rate of mothers,

1. Introduction

The question of how a society organises the tasks involved in care is one that touches upon fundamental elements of the organisation of post-industrial societies. Important here are the contributions made by the family, the welfare state, the market and the non-profit sector respectively as ingredients in the 'welfare mix' (Evers/Olk 1995, Evers 2005). In view of the rise in the numbers of women in gainful employment, the welfare states of European societies have since the end of the 1980s increasingly been faced with the task of reorganising the area of childcare.

In the last decades, at the EU level and in the member states, policy instruments were developed that aim at supporting gender equality and the 'adult worker model' (Lewis and Guillari 2005). The European Commission has defined the strengthening of the 'employability' of women as a main aim in this context and supported public childcare provision as part of the European Employment Strategy (EES) since the middle of the 1990s. This is part of a more general policy trend in the EU and its member states towards the 'active citizen' who is autonomous and self-reliant on the basis of his or her full integration into waged work (Jensen and Pfau-Effinger 2005). In this context, the EU has recommended to the Member States to extend the provision with formal childcare in order to extend the options for mothers respective parents to reconcile employment and care responsibilities. Accordingly, policies that support public childcare provision were extended in many European welfare states.¹ In social policy research, such policies were classified as "defamilialization" of family tasks, meaning that the task of childcare should not be carried out by family members only (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

However, It has turned out as a result of empirical research that mothers of young children in many European countries parents think that spaces of time in which they themselves care for their children is a precondition of a "good childhood", and a contribution to their own quality of life. Therefore, defamilialization and a comprehensive public provision of childcare alone would not solve the problem of the reconciliation of employment and care responsibility of parents. This is a reason why family leave schemes which include maternity leave, parental leave and paternity leave were introduced and extended in many European welfare states in the last decades (Escobedo 2008; Moss and Korintus 2009; Pfau-Effinger, Jensen and Flaquer 2009; Salmi 2006). The degree of generosity of parental leave schemes clearly differs between welfare states (Escobedo 2008; Kamerman and Moss 2009).

The introduction of such family leave schemes was reinforced by the Parental Leave Directive of the European Social Partners of 1996 which is a negotiated framework agreement and aimed to support the reconciliation of waged work and family responsibility. It was part of EU policies to relief 'work-life balance' as part of the 3rd Action Plan 1995-1997. The Parental Leave Directive from 1996 provides an individual right to parental

¹ In some post socialist Central and East European welfare states like for example Poland and the Czech Republic, the opposite development took place, in that public childcare provision was cut down and the task of childcare transferred to the family (Surdej and Slezak 2009; Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2009).

leave to working mothers or fathers on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child. Moreover, in 2008, the European Commission announced 'a work-life balance package' in which the Commission suggested to "strengthen women's entitlement to...maternity leave" by a revision of the existing Directive on maternity leave, in that the duration of leave shall be extended from 14 to 18 weeks; introducing the principle of full pay during this period (European Commission 2008). It also recommended to extend paid parental leave schemes (see also Fusulier 2008).

The parental leave Directive of the EU is based on a relatively small number of minimum standards. Moreover, it has the status of an agreement of the social partners and is therefore only a 'soft' policy measure.² This reflects the fact that, in contradiction to policies to support public childcare, parental leave is a much more contested policy instrument among social policy researchers. Those who argue in favour of paid family leave schemes are using three main arguments: These schemes create a family friendly and child-friendly welfare state and labour market in that they offer the opportunity for parents to spend time with their children, they create new options to include fathers into the family childcare and therefore to pursue gender equality objectives in the family, and they can be used as an instrument against the 'care crisis' if professional staff for public childcare is rare (Hobson 2001, Saxonberg 2003; Flaquer, 2007; Pfau-Effinger, Jensen and Flaquer 2009). Those who have been more critical of the paid parental leave schemes argue that it is detrimental for mothers, for it keeps them out of the labour market for long periods, which jeopardizes their income chances and makes it more difficult to have a career (e.g. Leira 2001). Thus they claim that real "choice" only exists for mothers when they are commodified and "freed" from caring duties (Langan & Ostner 1993; for an overview see Knijn and Ostner 2003). So far, empirical research with regard to this issue is relatively rare.

In this paper, I analyse the relationship between welfare state policies towards family leave and the employment rates of mothers with young children in a cross-national comparative perspective, using OECD data and EU-SILC data for the countries of the European Union, as well as findings from the EU project "Formal and Informal Work in Europe" (FIWE) that I have coordinated. In a first step I evaluate the relationship between parental leave schemes and the use of formal employment. In a second step I analyse the relationship of the degree of generosity of parental leave schemes and the employment rate of mothers with young children. Finally I discuss possibilities for an explanation of the results.

2. Main features of innovative family policies with regard to childcare

In many Western European societies, childcare is to a great extent subject to political regulation through welfare state policies, which have also made a decisive contribution to its restructuring (Anttonen/Sipilä 2005; Daly/Lewis 2000; O'Connor 1996). The Western European welfare states have decisively shaped the restructuring of childcare on the ba-

² Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC.

sis of its formalisation on one hand and the introduction of the support of family care by family leave schemes like maternity leave, parental leave and paternity leave. In this way, the policies have reacted to the change in family structures and in their cultural foundations in the direction of a dual-earner model, even if change was frequently marked by considerable contradictions and a lack of synchronicity (Pfau-Effinger 2004).

In this context, a new type of social rights has been established for parents and children, as Knijn and Kremer (1997) have argued.³ The social rights, which were anchored in the expansion of the welfare states in the second half of the 20th century, were linked to gainful employment and provided social security for employees for times in which they were not in employment (“decommodification”, following Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). In the framework of more recent developments, as a reaction to the change in family structures and their cultural foundations, new types of social rights have been established that are now no longer primarily oriented towards gainful employment but rather towards care. In this regard, two new types of social rights with regard to childcare can be distinguished (Knijn/Kremer 1997), social rights to make use of childcare or elderly care, and social rights to temporarily care for one’s own children in one’s own household. These formed the essential foundations for the formalisation of childcare as well as the emergence of new, paid forms of parental childcare within the family household (Pfau-Effinger 2005b).

The concern with *social rights to make use of childcare* is with social rights of children or parents that exist in relation to the use of public or publicly financed childcare. Generally speaking, one perspective is a component of the “European model” that childcare – as well as education – is the task of the community and belongs under the responsibility of the welfare state or non-profit organisations commissioned and financed by the welfare state (England 2004).⁴ A comprehensive offer of public childcare can be seen as a central prerequisite for enabling women or parents to be gainfully employed to the extent that they desire.

Social rights to temporarily care for one’s own children in one’s own household, on the other hand, can have the form of maternity leave, parental leave, paternity care leave and child allowance. These systems usually have in common that the parent who is taking it stays within the employment contract and has the right to return to her or his employment position after the end of the leave. Moreover, in all countries of the EU, at least some parts of the times in family leave are paid. The construction of this payment generally bears no relation to the scope of the care work actually carried out. Instead, it is often based on the same principle as benefits in the context of decommodification in social security. Typical examples are the flat rate childcare allowances paid to parents on parental

³ I use the term “social rights” with reference to the theory of T. H. Marshall (1992) on the historical development of citizenship. Here, the history of modern societies is seen as a process, in the course of which people can broaden their basic rights in the following order: general civic rights, political rights and then social rights.

⁴ In the only country that has previously extensively left childcare to the market, Great Britain, the state has recently also proceeded more strongly to finance childcare publicly, although without undertaking a significant expansion of the public infrastructure for childcare. For as long as the prices were determined by the market, a place at a nursery was at best affordable for families of the upper middle class and a small number of low-income earners who received a subsidy for a place at a nursery (Meyer et al. 2009).

leave, which are often also means-tested. In other cases, wage replacement payments are made whose size amounts to a certain percentage of the income previously earned. Usually during times of leave, the parents are also included in the social security system. In order to promote gender equality in the field of family care, several welfare states, particularly in the Nordic countries, have also established independent rights for fathers (“daddy months”), as programmes formulated in a gender-neutral manner have proved to be of little effectiveness in increasing the proportion of men carrying out care in the family. This has led to a clear rise in the participation of fathers in family childcare (Eydal 2005; Hobson 2008).

As a consequence, a new type of parent has emerged who looks temporarily after his or her own children in his or her own home, and is therefore released from employment, receives some type of payment, and is included in social security in one way or another.

2. The relationship between family policies and the employment of mothers with young children in Europe

In this section I will evaluate the impact of family leave policies on the employment of mothers with young children.

The relationship between the provision of formal childcare and parental leave policies

A main argument against generous family leave schemes is that welfare states mainly use it in order to oblige women with small children to stay at home and care themselves for their children, instead of providing an adequate supply of public childcare.

This argument would make sense if welfare states are using generous parental leave instead of providing comprehensive formal childcare. In a first step I therefore evaluate the relationship between the degree of generosity of parental leave schemes and the use of formal childcare. If the argument would hold that generously paid parental leave motivates mothers of small children to stay at home, the size of the benefits must be so high that it can substitute relevant parts of the income from waged work. I therefore use the number of months for which mothers resp. parents can take up parental leave with benefits replacing at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the salary as indicator. I define the degree of generosity of a family leave scheme as “relatively high” if the number of months for which mothers resp. parents can take up parental leave with benefits replacing at least $\frac{2}{3}$ is above the European average of 7 months, and as “relatively low” if it is 7 months or less. Table 1 shows that it is possible to distinguish two different kinds of welfare states with regard to the generosity of family leave schemes. In several welfare states, generous leave schemes exist with maternity/paternity/parental leave for 10-13 months on the basis of benefits replacing at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of salary. In the rest of the European welfare states family leave schemes are far less generous; benefits replacing at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of salary are only paid for 3-5 months and most often restricted to maternity leave.

In the great majority of those countries in which generous family leave schemes exist, also the use of formal childcare is above the European average (see table 1). This group in-

cludes the Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway), some Eastern European countries (Estonia, Slovenia, Lithuania), and Luxembourg. It should be considered that in Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, even a universal social right for each child from 0-6 years to public childcare exists. Most welfare states in this group seem to offer a real choice for mothers/parents of young children between formal childcare and parental leave. In this respect, as Leira argues in relation to the Scandinavian welfare states, a 'dual concept of social citizenship' has developed: 'one associated with citizen as wage-worker, the other with citizen as carer' (Leira 2002: 147).⁵

Only in a relatively small group of countries which comprises Austria and Estonia, a relatively generous policy towards family leave is connected with a relatively low proportion of children below 3 in formal childcare. Altogether this pattern is not very common (see table 1). In the great majority of the welfare states with generous family leave schemes, also the use of formal childcare is above the European average. It would be therefore misleading to assume that generous family leave schemes are connected with a relatively low provision of formal childcare in the family policies of European welfare states.

Among welfare states with less generous family leave schemes, the proportion of children in formal childcare differs considerably. Countries like the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and the UK belong to the group in which generous family leave schemes do not exist and the proportion of children in formal childcare is above the European average. Several countries of this group like Netherlands and Spain have been classified as "conservative" welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999) or "strong male breadwinner" welfare states (Lewis and Ostner 1994). It is a common assumption that such welfare states particularly support maternal childcare in the family household instead of formal childcare. However, it turns out that in these welfare states, children below 3 years have relatively good options to use formal childcare, whereas generous parental leave that might support parental childcare in the family household is not available.

⁵ It should be considered that data on the actual use of formal childcare in a country can only to a rather limited degree be used as indicator for the degree to which family policies are supporting formal childcare and the actual use of formal childcare by parents in European countries (see also Lohmann 2009; Plantenga/Remery 2007; Pfau-Effinger 2004).⁵ On one hand, the public provision of public childcare is in some cases underestimated, since the take-up rates of public childcare are lower than the principle supply. This is particularly the case in the Nordic welfare states like Finland, Denmark and Sweden, where each child from 0-6 years has a principle social right to get (publicly organised and financed) childcare, but actual take up-rates are clearly below 100 per cent. On the other hand, the category 'formal childcare' from the European survey data includes besides publicly provided or at least publicly finances formal childcare also formal childcare which is organised via the market or the non-profit sector and which is not publicly financed. Therefore, it is possible that the degree to which the welfare state promotes the supply of formal childcare is overestimated, like it is for example the case in the U.K. (Meyer et al. 2009).

Table 1: The interaction between the use of formal childcare and family leave policies

Degree of generosity of family leave schemes (maternity/parental/paternity leave) Number of months of family leave with benefits replacing at least 2/3 of salary, 2005/2006, (=second number in bracket behind country name) (2)	Use of formal childcare for children 0-3 years (=first number in bracket behind country name)	
	high (above EU average of 26%)	Low (at or below EU average of 26%)
high (number of months above EU average of 7 months)	Sweden (44*/16) Denmark (73*/11,5)* Lithuania (31/12) Slovenia (29/12) Norway (33/12) Luxemburg (31/10) Finland (27*/10)*	Austria (4/12)***** Estonia (18/12)
low (number of months at EU average of 7 months or below)	Netherlands (45/4) France (31/4***) Belgium (40/2,5) Portugal (33/4) Spain (39/4) UK (33/1,5)	Cyprus (25/4) Italy (26/5) Ireland (18/5) Germany (18/3,5**) Greece (10/4) Poland (2/4) Latvia (16/4) Malta (8/3) Czech Republic (2/7) Slovakia (5/7****)

* welfare state guarantees universal social right to childcare for children below age 6 years ** according to the EU data 3, but 3,5 is correct. Since 2007 it is 13,5 months; but this change is not considered here because the time frame would not match with the employment data that are used. *** 6 from 3^d child, ****salary replacement 55%, *****since 2008

Source: (1) Escobedo (2008: 74) after Moss and Korintus (2008), EC 2009; (2) EU Statistics on Income and Living Concitions 2008: Indicator 18M3.

In another group of countries generous family leave schemes do not exist, and also the proportion of children in formal childcare is below the European average. This relates to several Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Italy, Greece, Malta), some Central and Eastern European countries (Poland, Latvia, Czech Republic and Slovakia), and Ireland.

The relationship between the generosity of family leave schemes and the employment of mothers with young children

In the following section it will be analysed if there is evidence that the employment rate of mothers with young children is lower in countries with generous leave schemes than in others. As an indicator, I use the employment rate of mothers with children under the age of 2 years age who are employed and not on full-time leave. In order to find out if the degree of generosity of family leave schemes has a long-term effect on women's chances to

be employed, I include the employment rate of mothers with children from 3 to 6 years as another indicator.

Table 1 shows how family leave schemes and employment rates of mothers with children under 2 years age interact. The findings would support the common assumptions of a negative impact of generous family leave schemes on the employment rate of mothers with small children if the countries would cluster in a group of countries which combine a relatively high generosity of family leave with a low employment rate of mothers, and in another group which combines a low degree of generosity of family leave and a high employment rate of mothers, and if the average employment rate of mothers with children below 2 years is higher in the countries with a relatively low generosity of family leave schemes than in others.

The findings do not support the assumption that in welfare states with more generous family leave schemes, the employment of mothers with children under 2 years is lower than in welfare states with less generous family leave schemes. The countries do not cluster in a clear pattern. Also, the average employment rate of mothers with children below 2 years is similar in the countries with less and in those with more generous family leave schemes, it is even slightly higher in the first group. Altogether, the findings indicate that there is no clear impact of the degree of generosity of family leave schemes on the employment rate of mothers with children below 3 years in European welfare states.⁶

Table 2 also shows how the employment rate of mothers of children between 3 and 6 years is related with the degree of generosity of family leave schemes. It turns out that in all countries with a generous family leave schemes for which data exist, the employment rate of mothers with children from 3 to 6 years is above the European average, and it is below the European average in countries with less generous family leave schemes.

⁶ It would be useful to do more elaborated statistical data analyses, which is planned in the next step of this research.

Table 2: The interaction between family leave schemes and employment of mothers with young children

Country	Number of months of family leave with benefits replacing at least 2/3 of salary (2005 and 2006 data) (1)*	Proportion of mothers in employment with children under 2 years (2) ("+" means above EU-25 average)	Proportion of mothers in employment with children 3-5 years (3) ("+" means above EU-19 average)
Countries with a relatively high number of months of family leave (above EU average, average = 7 months)			
Sweden	16	44+	81,3+
Slovenia	12	50+	missing data
Denmark	11,5	51+	77,8+
Luxembourg	10	46+	58,7+
Estonia	12	33	missing data
Lithuania	12	37	missing data
Finland	10	34	80,7+
average within this group		42	74,7
Countries with a relatively low number of months of family leave (average level or below, average = 7 months)			
Portugal	4	62+	71,8+
Ireland	5	43+	missing data
Greece	4	46+	53,6
Spain	4	47 +	54,2
France	4****	46 +	63,8+
Netherlands	4	64+	68,3+
Cyprus	4	57+	missing data
Belgium	3,5	57+	63,3+
UK	1,5	52+	58,3+
Czech Republic	7	12	50,9
Slovak Republic	7	16	46,6
Italy	5	41	50,6
Poland	4	35	missing data
Latvia	4	33	missing data
Austria	4	27	62,4+
Germany	3,5*****	32	54,8
Malta	3	32	missing data
average within this group		41	47
EU-25 average	7	42	58,2 (EU-19)

*data are missing for Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania; ** above EU-19 average; *** data are missing; **** until 2006; since then 13,5 months; ***** 6 from 3rd child;

Source: (1) EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions 2008: Indicator 18M3; EC 2009; (2) OECD Family database www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database 29-07-2009, Chart LMF2.4, 2006; this statistic differentiates between mothers with children under 3 years in-work, on maternity leave and on parental leave; (3) OECD 2007: table 3.2, data for 2005 and 2006, Denmark 1999, Finland 2002, Italy 2003.

pean average (Greece, Spain, Slovak Republic, Italy, Germany). It therefore seems that generous family leave schemes have a more positive influence on the employment rate of mothers with young children than less generous family leave schemes.

To conclude: In the great majority of welfare states which are providing generous parental leave schemes, these are not used as a substitute to formal childcare, but these schemes exist together with a relatively high proportion of children in formal childcare. The findings also indicate that generous parental leave schemes mainly exist in welfare states in which family policies are altogether relatively generous and support gender equality. Moreover, the findings do not support the assumption that the degree of generosity of family leave schemes influences the employment rate of mothers with young children. It seems that the availability of generous parental leave schemes even have a positive effect on the employment rate of mothers with young children between 3 and 6 years.

3. The relationship of family leave schemes and employment rates of mothers with young children in societal context

In this section I discuss how it can be explained that a clear relationship between the degree of generosity of family leave schemes and the employment rate of mothers with young children does not exist, in that the employment rate of mothers with young children would be lower in welfare states with generous family leave schemes than in others.

It is often assumed that the state determines behaviour: that people respond to the policymakers' policy initiatives in a specific, predictable manner and thus bring about the result intended by politics. There is no doubt that the influence of the framework provided by the welfare state is significant for women's labour force participation. However, the interrelations between welfare state policies and social practices of individuals are a more complex matter. The social action of individuals is not a simple outcome and not determined by state policies. The social behaviour of individuals is a process which takes place in a very complex field of influences, where other institutional, social and economic variables. Also, cultural ideals and values play an important role. The effects of concrete political measures are a reflection not simply of material interests of individuals but also of cultural values and ideals which influence the degree to which policies are accepted by the population and their impact on social practices of individuals (Duncan 2003; Kangas and Rostgaard 2007; Pfau-Effinger 2004, 2005; Saxonberg and Szelewa 2008). They limit the range of options considered by social actors and shape the range of options for choice which are noticed by the individuals.

Because of such reasons, similar family leave schemes can lead to differences with regard to take up-rates and average duration of the actual times of leave by mothers resp. parents of young children. In the following part, I will show this by using findings from qualitative and quantitative research in the context of the EU research project EU-Projekt „Formal and informal work in Europe. A comparative analysis of their changing relationship and their impact on social integration' (Pfau-Effinger u.a. 2009a) that I have coordi-

nated and in which comparative research was conducted in six European countries (Denmark, Germany, Finland, Poland, Spain, UK).⁷

According to table 1, family leave schemes in Denmark and Finland, for example, are both relatively generous. However, the employment rate of mothers with children below 2 years is considerably above the European average in Denmark, whereas it is below the European average in Finland. Both welfare states have in common that children below 6 years have a principle individual right to public childcare. Therefore, the differences cannot be explained with differences in the availability of public childcare. Instead, differences in the labour market situation contribute to the explanation why the employment rates of mothers with small children are considerably lower in Finland: the unemployment rates are considerably higher in Finland than in Denmark. Therefore, women in Finland in part are taking up parental leave in order to avoid to be unemployed, which is not the case in Denmark (Haataja 2005; Jolkonen et al. 2009; Pfau-Effinger et al. 2009; Salmi and Lammi-Taskula 2006, 91-92.). Besides, there also seem to exist some cultural differences between both countries, even if in both countries a cultural family model is dominant that I classify as “dual breadwinner/state care provider model” (Pfau-Effinger et al. 2009). The proportion of those who agree or strongly agree with the item of the ISSP of 2002 that mothers with children below school age should stay at home is considerably higher in Finland (39,8%) than in Denmark (23%), even if it is in general relatively low in both countries (see table A1).

Spain and Germany provide examples for two countries with rather less generous family leave schemes, which differ with regard to the employment rates of mothers with children below 2 years. Whereas this is below the European average in Germany, it is above the European average in Spain. Behind these differences, differences in the cultural values with regard to childcare can be found.

In Germany, the proportion of those in the population who think that mothers with children in preschool age should stay at home is considerably higher than in Spain (52% versus 37% see table A1). In Germany, it is a common belief that children under three years should be cared for in the family household by their own mother. Accordingly, women tend to stay at home if they have children, even if this might lead to financial dependence from the male breadwinner and a considerable deterioration of their labour market chances, income and social security. This is a main reason why the employment rate of mothers with young children is relatively low, and 76% of the children below the age of 3 are cared for by their mothers (Escobedo 2009: 89 after Moss and Korintus 2008, EU-SILC 2006)..

Until 2006, a family leave scheme existed which was means-tested, with benefits far below the subsistence level for those low-income groups of women who were eligible; only

⁷ The group of partners included Per H. Jensen/Jens Lind, Aalborg University (Denmark); Pertti Koistinen, University of Tampere (Finland); Birgit Pfau-Effinger, University of Hamburg (Germany); Traute Meyer, Southampton University (Great Britain); Alexander Surdej, Economic University of Warczow (Poland); Lluís Flaquer, Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain). Besides analyses of national and international survey data, qualitative research was conducted that was based, among other things, on 215 semi-structured guided interviews in middle-class households with children under six years in cities and their suburbs in Finland, Denmark, Great Britain, Germany, Poland and Spain.

the first four months of maternity leave were fully paid. Even if this scheme was not generous and for relevant groups of women even unpaid, the great majority of women stayed out of the labour force for the whole period of three years during which they could keep their work contract, and in many cases even longer. It is not possible to explain this behaviour simply with a low degree of availability of public childcare. This was mainly also a consequence of strong, general cultural orientation in the (West) German society towards maternal childcare for children below the age of 3. The results of the study of Schneider and Rost (1998) show that the common decision of women for a long period of parental leave in (West) Germany are significantly influenced by their cultural orientation. The four most frequently named reasons, leading by a wide margin, are: 'I wanted to dedicate myself completely to the child.' (70 per cent), 'I do not want to work as long as my child is small.' (67 per cent), 'It was absolutely natural for me to stay at home once I had a child.' (63 per cent), and 'to be able to breast-feed my child' (60 per cent). The decisive motive is therefore the orientation towards the child. Schneider and Rost interpret the result as follows:

'A certain share of women stays at home after a birth because they explicitly do not want to be gainfully employed as long as the child is small so they are able to completely dedicate themselves to their child. Women make these decisions actively on the basis of respective considerations. The decision is not immediately influenced by situational facts or opportunities and not a result of non-reflected customs taken for granted.'

This is different in Spain. The employment rate of women with children below 2 years is above the European average, since it is common that relatives instead of the child's mother are the main providers of childcare (Escobedo 2008; Flaquer/Escobedo 2009). This is reflected in the data of EU-SILC, which show that "other types of childcare", which mainly also include childcare by relatives, are rather common for children under 3 years old in Spain, but not in Germany (26% versus 7%; see Escobedo 2009: 89 after Moss and Korintus (2008) and EU-SILC 2006). It is not common in Germany that relatives are main providers of childcare, since childcare by relatives is seen as a much less favourable solution compared with maternal care (Pfau-Effinger/Sakac-Magdalenic 2009).

The cultural model of the family that is dominant in Spain resembles the "dual breadwinner/extended family care" model. As Lluís Flaquer and Anna Escobedo (2009) outlined for Spain, this model is based on the notion that both parents are employed full-time while other adults, who live in the same household in the context of the "complex family," care for the children. With the increase in the labor force participation rates of women, including older women, it is becoming increasingly difficult in both countries to maintain this model. In Spain, as a consequence, there is a strong trend to substitute informal childcare by caring relatives with paid, undeclared childcare by immigrant women within the private household (Flaquer/Escobedo 2009). More recently, there was a political debate about the problems of this solution. Therefore, childcare by immigrant childminders in the family household was in part legalised and therefore is in part provided now in a formal form. Moreover, also public childcare was extended (Flaquer/Escobedo 2009).

With regard to countries like Germany, with their cultural orientation towards maternity resp. parental care in early childhood, the common argument that generous parental leave

schemes motivate women with young children to stay out of employment is in part misleading, in that it is based on the assumption that women with small children would stay in employment instead of taking up parental leave if such schemes would not exist. This argument neglects the modifying influence that cultural family models can have. In countries like Germany in which the dominant cultural family model is based on the assumption that a “good childhood” of children below 3 years is based on exclusive care by the child’s mother, a majority of mothers stay at home on the basis of income transfer in the male breadwinner marriage, even if this means that they have to accept a deterioration of their labour market chances. In such a situation, the lack of a generous parental leave scheme does not alter substantially women’s behaviour. But such situation creates considerable “new social risks” for women with young children, which include a loss of income, the risk of financial dependency within the couple, and old age poverty particularly also for single mothers, as it is actually the case in Germany.⁸

Altogether, family policies with a low level of generosity with regard to family leave produce, as also Anna Escobedo (2008) has pointed out, in a societal context in which mothers or parents decide to stay temporarily out of the labour force, considerable social risks of marginalisation and social risks for women with young children. Such policies are “embedded in familialistic logics of re-conjugalisation (they are used as long a household can afford a male-breadwinning solution at least for a time, in any of its variations and for differing periods of time) however with a clear gender impact lowering mothers’ economic opportunities and males’ caring opportunities” (Escobedo 2008: 38). Generous parental leave schemes with relatively high compensation rates of the income from waged work, instead, in such context give women and men the option to remain attached to the employment system during their leave and temporarily provide family care without being financially or personally dependent on another person, and insofar to act as ‘autonomous caregiver’. In this regard, it is a measure of decommodification with regard to the employment of parents and, as Anna Escobedo (2009: 37-38) points out, and it also has the effect of “de-conjugalisation of income-pooling”, which means that it lessens interdependencies in a couple.

4. Conclusion

In the field of family policies in the last decade, European welfare states have largely extended social rights which are related to childcare. This change has clearly increased the option of women to be employed when they are mothers of small children. However, many social policy researchers expect that different types of family policies have different effects on women’s employment and therefore also on gender equality. They usually agree that the availability of formal childcare has a positive effect on women’s employment. In con-

⁸ Since people in Germany are treating care of children below 2 more as a task of the child’s mother, a generous parental leave scheme would more match the demand of mothers/parents here than in Spain. A more generous parental leave scheme was introduced in Germany 2007, with 14 months paid parental leave with benefits replacing at least 2/3 of salary.

trast, it is a common argument that generous parental leave schemes have a negative effect on women's employment.

In this paper I have analysed the relationship between the degree of generosity of parental leave schemes and the employment rate of mothers with young children in a cross-national perspective, using OECD data and EU-SILC data for EU countries. Those who are critical against generous parental leave schemes sometimes assume that welfare states are using policies towards generous parental leave as a substitute for policies which promote formal childcare. In a first step I therefore have evaluated the relationship between parental leave schemes and the use of formal employment. In a second step I have analysed the relationship of the degree of generosity of parental leave schemes and the employment rates of mothers with young children in the EU countries.

The findings show that in most welfare states which are providing generous parental leave schemes, these are not so much used as a substitute to formal childcare, but these schemes exist together with a relatively high proportion of children in formal childcare. These findings indicate that generous parental leave schemes mainly exist in welfare states in which family policies are altogether relatively generous and offer parents different option for childcare. Moreover, the findings do not support the assumption that the degree of generosity of family leave schemes has a negative impact on the employment rate of mothers with children below 2 years. Also, it turns out that the employment rate of mothers with children between 3 and 6 years is considerably higher in welfare states with generous family leave schemes than in those with less generous leave schemes. A rather general explanation is that family leave policies, like other welfare state policies, do not determine behaviour. The outcome of such policies differs depending on the cultural, institutional, social and economic context in which they are embedded. This is demonstrated by the findings of qualitative and quantitative research in the EU project "Formal and Informal Work in Europe" (FIWE). It is shown that particularly also differences in the labour market situation of the country and differences with regard to the dominant cultural family model can contribute to the explanation.

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Table A1 Attitudes towards the employment of mothers with children below school age. ISSP, 2002 (v15)

Label of variable	Germany	Spain	Denmark	Finland
Should women work:child under school age: work full-time + work part-time	48,0%	63,0%	76,7%	60,2%
Should women work:child under school age: stay at home	52,0%	37,0%	23,3%	39,8%

The proportion in per cent that is given in the table refer to the proportion of respondents who “strongly agree” and “agree” in relation to the variables v5, v6, v10, v11, v13, v28: strongly agree + agree

Source: ISSP 2002: Family and Changing Gender Roles. The data were weighted on the basis of the ISSP 2002 Study Description, pp. 1-18, 49, 119

Exact formulation of the questions in the questionnaire (Source Questionnaire Family 2002 - http://www.za.uni-koeln.de/data/en/issp/codebooks/ISSP2002_source_quest.pdf): R 3. (3) Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all under the following circumstances? (v15) b. When there is a child under school age.