

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

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***The reframing of family policies in France:
Process and actors***

Claude Martin*

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*** Director of research CNRS
University of Rennes 1 and EHESP school of public health**

Abstract:

French family policy is generally considered as one of the oldest, most explicit and intensive in Europe. To understand the changes in this public policy sector during the past decades, we propose, first, to set out and discuss its perimeter, and second, to identify its phases, based on different policy goals or priorities. But the main objective of this paper is to suggest a matrix of tension between different frames of reference: universality versus selectivity and familialism versus individualism, which helps to explain the process of change. This matrix is completed by a detailed analysis of the dynamics of change and the role of the different protagonists of this change: political actors, high-rank civil servants, family associations and experts. We underline the importance of a small group of high-ranking civil servants, called 'elite of welfare' in this specific sector.

The reframing of family policies in France: Process and actors

**Claude Martin, director of research CNRS
University of Rennes 1 and EHESP school of public health**

There is no doubt that defining family policy presents quite a challenge. Comparative analysis generally begins with this assessment and comes up against this preliminary difficulty: what does family policy mean depending on the country? The definition of this field of public intervention needs to refer to a nation-based historical context¹.

French family policy is generally considered as one of the oldest, most explicit and intensive in Europe. Historically, it is even stated that « family issues » could be the basis of the French social security system, just as poverty was the cornerstone of the Anglo-Saxon *Welfare State* and workers' status that of Germany's *Sozial Staat* (Merrien, 1990; Friot, 1998)². This institutional root justified the French specificity.

A great number of reforms have been implemented since just after the Second World War when this sector of public intervention became institutionalised. To understand these changes during the past decades, we propose, first, to set out and discuss the perimeter of this sector, and second, to identify phases, based on different policy goals or priorities. But the main objective of this paper is to suggest a matrix of tension between different frames of reference: universality versus selectivity and universalism versus individualism, which helps to explain the process of change and its nature. This matrix is completed by a detailed analysis of the dynamics of change, in order to identify the role of the different protagonists of this change: political actors, high-rank civil servants, family associations and experts.

Roots and perimeter of the French family policy

Initial configuration

In France, childhood has been considered quite early as a “public good” and a source of human capital, mainly because of the demographic challenge that this country was facing at the beginning of the 20th century. The low level of fertility during the 19th century and the trauma of the 1st World War explain a strong pro-natalism in France. At the beginning of the 20th century all the conditions were satisfied to promote both fertility *and* family as public concerns. First of all, a public issue: the demographic deficit; second, a strong public debate confronting different traditions of thinking and ideologies (familialism, pro-birth republican hygienism, libertarian antistatism); third, social movements to promote a family institution and fertility³, and fourth, experimentations like premiums for the family in ‘patriarchal industries’ and for civil servants at the end of the 19th century⁴; institution of mutual aid funds (“les caisses de compensation”) in the 1920s to distribute these family benefits; and the development of pre-schools since the end of the 19th century (see box 1).

Box 1: Pre-school in France: A long tradition

The history of pre-schools in France is probably one of the longest in Europe (with Belgium) (Norvez, 1990; Willekens, 2009). Since 1887, a decree prepared by Pauline Kergomard⁵ has defined the objectives of these institutions created to receive children aged more than two years old: “Pre-schools are institutions of prime education, where the children of both sexes receive in common the care necessary for their physical, moral and intellectual development”. The main objective was initially a social one, and pre-school was conceived both as a ‘shelter’ to protect the child, and a place where he could receive elements of education which could be missing because of the absence of the working mother. The development of this institution has been rapid between 1875 and 1900 (for more details, see Norvez, 1990). In 1901, 754,000 children were already taken care of in 6,000 institutions (private and public). The closing of the private and religious institutions in 1903 (which represented 60% of the total number of pre-schools at the time) put an end to this development and led to a deep crisis. In 1938-1939, the number of children in pre-schools was less than 400,000 (which represented 16% of the under 6's) and only 290,000 at the end of the second world war, in 1945. 1946, the period of institutionnalization of family policy, marked a new increase in the number of children in pre-schools. Between 1945 and 1951, it more than doubled and reached 800,000 in 1959, which represented 40% of the 2-5 year olds and already 90% of the 5-year olds. The growth continued during the sixties and seventies: in 1976-1977, the number of children in pre-schools reached 1.9 million, almost all in public institutions. At that time, all the 4- and 5-year olds had a place in a pre-school. At the beginning of the 1980s, 90% of the 3-year olds and already a third of the 2-year olds (30% of the children aged 30 months) attended pre-school. The decrease of the level of fertility slowed down this evolution, but pre-schools were completely established as a public/state - almost free of charge - response to the needs of parents (see Martin & Le Bihan, 2009).

These different elements justify the “décrets-lois” of 1938 and 1939, institutionalising French family policy as a pro-birth policy. Even the Vichy government (1940-1944) had not fundamentally affected this basic ‘natalism’, despite the strengthening of a familist ideology,

i.e. the development of a political rhetoric, of conservative normative statements concerning family institution and the mothers' role. The French Social Security Act in 1946 finalized this institutionalization process by creating a "family branch" of this Bismarckian welfare system, giving a central role to social partners (trade unions and family associations). Since this period, family policy has become an explicit and independent sector of public policies and an element of French public administration.

The perimeter: a controversial issue

Such a strong and long-term investment by the State on family issues since the end of the 19th century raises the question of the perimeter of this public policy. In 1993, Jeanne Fagnani, then an expert at the European Commission observatory on family issues, proposed the following definition of family policy: "All the measures taken by public authorities (whatever the level, national, regional or local) which affect, directly or indirectly, the way of life, the living standards and more generally, the well-being of families" (Fagnani, 1993, p. 87). Such a definition is problematic, as it may lead to include almost all the public policies in the field of family policy. The instruments are indeed diverse (civil law, universal and means-tested benefits, public services, part of the housing policies, but also of the fiscal, income support, health care, pension and educative policies, etc), as are the actors engaged in the decision -making and/or in the implementation of these policies (Governmental bodies, local authorities, social security civil servants, family associations, enterprises, and even more and more, European institutions). This diversity is such that Julien Damon prefers to use the plural: 'family policies' (Damon, 2006).

The level of public intervention in family policy obviously depends on the definition of its perimeter. Eurostat regularly ranks European member states in terms of public spending on family policy. Two main sources are taken into account: family benefits and maternity benefits. With this definition, France spent 2,6% of GDP on family policy in 2003 and belongs to the more generous member states after Luxembourg, Denmark (around 4%), Sweden, Germany, Austria and Finland (around 3%).

But the definition of this perimeter is controversial. In a report delivered in 2003 to the *Haut Conseil de la Population et de la Famille*, Valéry Albouy and Nicole Roth, two experts at the Direction of Research in the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, suggested another definition (see figure 1). In their evaluation, the main core of the public support to families with children represented 40 billion € in 2000, or 2,8% of GDP. In their report to the Prime

Minister in 2005, two other experts, Michel Godet and Evelyne Sullerot (2007), suggested reducing the family policy perimeter to this first main core. Nevertheless, Albouy and Roth extend this perimeter to other connected measures (maternity and housing benefits, anti-poverty measures but also some tax deductions and specific pension advantages), which raises this public investment to 100 billion euros.

Figure 1

Many experts (Thélot & Villac, 1998; Commaille et al., 2002; Damon, 2006) adopt this broad definition and thus propose to take many other public costs into account: part of the income support and social housing policies (0,5% of GDP in 2003); part of the fiscal policies linked to tax deductions and in particular the “quotient familial” created in 1945 in order to reduce the level of taxes depending on the number of children in the household (0,8 of GDP); part of the pension policy (increase of the level of pension for families with 3 children or more created in 1945, pension insurance for housewives created in 1972) (0,7% of GDP), not to mention the public investment in pre-schools, which is a crucial dimension of the French child care policy. Considering these different dimensions, Damon estimates that France devoted 73 billion euros to its family policies in 2003 or, in other terms, 4,6% of GDP (Damon, *ibid*). In a recent official report to the National Assembly, Marie-Françoise Clergeau, Député (M.P.), confirms this conception: “France dedicates 90 billion euros to its family policy, corresponding to approximately 5% of its GDP” (Clergeau, 2009, p. 9)

This perimeter issue is not only crucial in assessing the public investment in this field, but also understanding the process of change. It seems better not to delimit it *a priori*, in order to catch the changes that can occur depending on the (explicit or implicit) objectives of the reforms. As the frontiers are blurred, family policies are sometimes used as an adjuvant of some other sectors. In other words, the challenges of other public policies overlap with family policies.

The matrix of tensions to explain French family policy shifts

Family policy goals have diversified since the Second World War. New public issues have appeared on the political agenda. This has affected the family policy sector. The changes look like a progressive accumulation of new priorities. Looking backwards, it is tempting to distinguish four main periods according to the main priorities:

. 1945-1965: the French family policy “Golden Age”, with strong incentives to promote fertility and compensate the cost of children. This is the period of the “baby-boom” with a universal and intense family policy based on family benefits, which represented in the mid-1950s more than half of social security expenditure. A family model was predominant: nuclear family or the “male breadwinner” model, supported by civil and social laws.

. 1965-1975: During this second phase, new issues appeared on the family policy agenda: “women’s rights” claims, which have led to fundamental reforms in Civil Law concerning marriage (*réforme des régimes matrimoniaux* in 1965), parental rights and obligations (*réforme de l’autorité parentale* in 1970), descent (*réforme de la filiation* in 1972), divorce (in 1975), and sexuality (contraception in 1969 and abortion in 1975). All these reforms correspond to a strong movement of emancipation.

. 1975-1985: this third phase is centred on an equity issue, with the “rediscovery of poverty”, as Lionel Stoléru (1977) stated, and the development of means-tested benefits in order to support the more disadvantaged households. During this phase, fertility did not disappear as a public concern, but became relatively secondary in the family policy debate, compared to social and economic inequalities.

. Since 1985, confronted to a high level of unemployment and serious cost containment challenges, family policies became progressively an adjunct of the employment policy. The main family policy issue concerns work/life balance and the reforms have mainly contributed to regulate female employment.

Do these changes correspond to what Peter Hall calls “third order change”, associated with “paradigm shift”? Or to “normal policymaking process”, that is to say a process that adjusts policy and/or instruments without challenging the main objectives of a given policy paradigm, which defines first and second order change (Hall, 1993)? In this perspective, can these changes be defined as a ‘path dependency process’ (Pierson, 2004)?

The answer is complex. On one side, incrementalism and path dependency are two main components of the evolution that occurred since the Second World War in this public policy area. Pre-school, created at the end of the 19th century in order to prepare all children for the “republican school”, is a very good example of path dependency in the field of childcare policy in France (Martin & Le Bihan, 2009). The “print of origin” does not disappear and the new objectives are piled up on the old ones. In that sense, change looks progressive and incremental and it may be quite artificial to argue that we can identify complete turning

points. Nevertheless, changes correspond also to the definition of new public priorities that contribute to the addition of new instruments and sometimes new goals. To synthesize these shifts, we propose to distinguish two main paradigmatic orientations or polarizations:

-a first opposition between two different priorities: universality versus selectivity. In other words, supporting *all* families with children, in order to promote fertile couples *versus* giving priority to the households in need, considering that family life is risky and needs to be supported by public authorities to compensate inequalities. This alternative opposes a universal family policy and a “familialized” social policy.

-The other fundamental opposition refers to familialism versus individualism. In other words, giving priority to the individuals inside the family, and in particular to women and/or children, *versus* considering that a family policy defends the family institution in itself, which presupposes a normative definition of this institution.

These oppositions have been the basics of the political and ideological debate concerning family policy in France since the very beginning. Shifts are the result of ideological struggles on the political scene, directly connected with the political agenda. But these changes are reversible depending on the power struggle and economic background. They could also be interpreted as paradigm shifts, as the normative definition of family as an institution is at stake. We argue that these two systems of tension help to understand the family policy reframing over time. It also helps to identify the role of the different protagonists of these changes, which is developed below. We synthesize this matrix of tensions in table 1.

Table 1

Following our perspective, the first period (1945 – 1965), or the “family policy golden age”, is characterized by a strong familialism (defending the nuclear family model) and universalism (to support all fertile families to care for their children, whatever their level of income). The second period (1965 – 1975) is characterized by women’s claims and the recognition of their universal rights in the different fields of family civil law (marriage, divorce, descent, parental responsibility, sexuality), which means a combination of universality and individualism or a universal recognition of the legitimate emancipation of woman, as an individual. The third period (1975 – 1985) is characterized by the equity issue or the priority given to the more disadvantaged families, which means a combination of selectivity and a weak familialism. To take a better account of the families more in need, the new benefits created during this period are means-tested. The target of family policies is more

and more families in need of support, and in particular lone parents and poor families. Of course, the definition of the family is quite different from during the first period and now widens towards pluralism. Nevertheless, even if this third period's familialism is reformed and recognizes diversity of the family structures, the target of the family policy is still families. The last period (1985-2005) is characterized by a new policy issue: conciliation between work and family. The main reforms concern childcare and parental leave and have the objective to regulate female employment under the umbrella of the "free choice" ideology. This period combines individualism (promotion of "free choice" and individualization of the benefits) and selectivity, which is the recognition of a dual social treatment of the mother's needs.

Dynamics of change

This presentation of the main phases is, of course, too simplistic. This model needs to be completed in two ways: first, to present the dynamics of change or the process of reframing; second, the role of the different protagonists in this process.

Towards more selectivity

Concerning the dynamics, one could first consider the progressive "socialization" of the family policy goals. This process shows that if selectivity ever was one of the orientations of French family policies, it became progressively the priority. It seems as if decision makers could use a cursor between these two main frames of reference (universality vs selectivity) depending on the political and economic context.

In 1948, when almost half of the French territory was destroyed, the creation of the social housing allowance ('allocation logement'), distributed under a means-test to the more disadvantaged families depending on their number of children, is a first example of this selectivity logic which developed alongside the universal family allowance delivered to all families with at least two children. But the real intensification of this "social" dimension of family policy corresponds to the definition of a new political project: the « New Society » of Jacques Chaban-Delmas in 1969. In this project, this Prime minister suggested a redeployment of all the social transfers towards the more disadvantaged. At that period, some high-ranking civil servants were "rediscovering poverty" and underlining the limits of the Welfare state (Lenoir, 1974; Stoléru, 1977). In the family policy sector, this political agenda resulted in the creation of new means-tested benefits like, for example, the *Allocation orphelin* in 1970⁶ or the *allocation de rentrée scolaire* in 1974 to help disadvantaged families

to face the cost of the beginning of a new school year, but also the creation of different minimum incomes, and in particular, the single parent allowance (*Allocation de parent isolé*) in 1976.

From that period, the proportion of spending in means-tested benefits compared to the total amount of universal family benefits has grown from 13.5% in 1970 to 45% at the end of the 1980s, and even to 60% in the 1990s, if we take into account the new minimum income created in 1988 and paid by the *Caisses d'allocations familiales* (RMI - *revenu minimum d'insertion*). The « new poverty » issue and the emergence of a “new social question” (*nouvelle question sociale*) (Rosanvallon, 1995) in the mid-eighties has led simultaneously to a problem of financing, a questioning about method and a crisis related to the goals of the Welfare State and has accelerated the process of “socialisation” of the French family policy⁷.

One of the last episodes of this process, which completely turned family policy into social policy, is the extension of means-testing to all family benefits, introduced by Lionel Jospin⁸ in 1997. This decision was implemented only during a few months and then abandoned⁹. Considering these different elements, targeting or selectivity within family policy appears as a long term trend, beyond the political orientation of governments (Commaille & Martin, 1998). The main issue that explains the radicalization of this process in the 1990s was the problem of financing or the growing deficit of the family field in the social security system.

Towards more individualized measures and a two-tier system

When we consider the following period (1980 -2005), we can also observe a progressive change towards an individualized family policy. Many reforms were implemented during this period, each time on government’s initiative (box 2).

Box 2: Main family policy reforms since the beginning of the eighties

- The « go and stop » reform at the beginning of the first mandate of François Mitterrand (1981-1982), which corresponds to a 50% increase in the level of the family benefits and then a reduction;
- The 1985 reform, called ‘Plan Dufoix’ (socialist minister in charge of family issues at the time) which created the first paid parental leave (*Allocation parentale d'éducation - APE*) for families with at least 3 children;
- The 1986 reform, called ‘Plan Barzach’ (right-wing minister of Health, in charge of family issue during the first period of political cohabitation¹⁰ 1986 –1988) which created the ‘*Allocation de garde d'enfant à domicile*’, a system which allows parents to contract a childminder to care for their children at home with fiscal incentives;
- The 1994 reform, called ‘Plan Veil’ (right-wing minister of Health and Social Affairs in charge of family issues during the second period of political cohabitation 1993 – 1995) which extended the APE to families with two children;
- The 1997 reform, called ‘Plan Jospin’ (Prime minister during the third political cohabitation 1997 – 2002), which generalizes for the first time the means-test for all the family benefits.
- The 2004 reform, or ‘Plan Mattéi’ (minister of Health, Family and Handicapped people in the

Raffarin Government), which merged different allowances (to support parents to pay for their childminders, on the one hand and parental leave - APE, on the other) in the *prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant (PAJE)*.

Since the early eighties, French governments are facing different major challenges: mass unemployment, a deficit in the social security system and a sociological transformation of family structures. Family trajectories diversify with the growing number of divorces, single parents and reconstituted families and the growing access of women to the labour market. This radical transformation of family life led to new benefits, whose main objective was to satisfy mothers' needs by developing a new childcare policy. The main mechanism consists in moving from a "one size fits all" system (universal) to a "tailor-made" one, that is to say a new system of benefits which fit specific social and economic situations.

In the seventies and the beginning of the eighties, the logic of the childcare system was mainly that of universality (public services based on professionalization and quality). Indeed, the Family fund of the Social Security system and public authorities have made real efforts in favour of an active policy in the field of childcare, and notably care for the under threes (Norvez, 1990; Martin et al., 1998). Together with the extension of full-time female wage-earning activity, a series of measures were introduced in the 1970s in order to promote the creation of different types of collective day care centres (collective *crèches*, family *crèches*, *mini-crèches*, *haltes-garderies*). In 1977, public authorities also implemented an official professional status for childminders and created a first non-paid parental leave in the labour legislation.

The development of public childcare facilities was still a priority during the first term mandate of President Mitterrand (1981-1988). The growth of the number of places in collective 'crèches' was one of the commitments of François Mitterrand as a candidate in 1981¹¹. But the goals were never reached: in 1988, only 20,000 new places had been created, whereas the initial objective was 100,000. During this period, a second childcare policy instrument was also developed, with the creation of a benefit for the payment of childminders (*prestation spéciale assistante maternelle* - PSAM). The objective was to cover part of a registered childcare provider's cost and therefore to encourage the development of individual care for children.

But the reforms implemented between 1985 and 1995 and the attention given to the third instrument, i.e. parental leave, indicate a progressive policy shift. Childcare policy measures became indeed a tool to regulate female labour market participation (Fagnani, 1997; Martin et al., 1998). This regulation is two-fold. On the one hand, the goal is to reduce female

unemployment by the creation of a flat-rate parental leave, which leads to a ‘refamilialization’ of care work for disadvantaged mothers (see box 3). On the other hand, the objective is to promote female employment in childcare and household services and to facilitate work/family balance for working mothers, in particular those having a professional career. Both instruments were surrounded by a global rhetoric of “parental free choice”.

Box 3: French parental leave and its impact

In 1985 (*Plan Dufoix*), a new parental leave benefit was created (‘Allocation parentale d’éducation’ - APE) to facilitate reconciliation between work and care. APE was initially a flat rate, low paid¹², non-means-tested, benefit for active parents with at least three children with the youngest under 3 years of age. The benefit could be received up to the third birthday of the youngest child. In fact, 95% of the recipients were mothers, mainly unemployed or in low paid precarious jobs. A bigger step in the same direction was made in 1994 (*Plan Veil*) with the extension of the APE to families having a second child¹³. This reform has had an important impact on the level of employment of mothers of two children: their activity rate reduced from 70% to 55% (Algava et al., 2005; Piketty, 2005). In other words, between 1994 and 1997, around 150,000 mothers of 2 children withdrew from the labour market, mainly the less qualified. The percentage of unemployment of these mothers also reduced dramatically from 11% to 5%. As a result, between 1994 and 2001, public expenditure on this benefit increased by 213 per cent. So, concretely, APE is a long low paid parental leave benefit which is taken up mainly by mothers on low incomes, most often unemployed or with precarious and unsatisfying jobs. In fact, women make a trade-off between this allowance and a low wage or unemployment benefit (Afsa, 1996, Fagnani, 1996; Algava et al., 2005; Piketty, 2005). Nevertheless, the come-back to the labour market remains a problem. For those who reintegrate the labour market, the working conditions are more precarious than before the leave (more short part-time jobs and short term contracts). The gender impact is also a problem as it reinforces assigned gender roles within households and on the labour market.

The 1990s turning point is also apparent if we consider the offer of services. First, the global expenditure moved from crèches towards cash benefits (‘cash for care’ system). The number of places in crèches has indeed reduced dramatically between the mid-nineties and the mid-2000s. When we had on average 5000 more places per year between 1985 and 1996, it slows down to 1500 new places per year between 1996 and 1999. The decrease is then even more important: for the period 1999-2005, only 3173 new places were created, which means 530 new places on average per year. And between 2000 and 2004, the number of places in crèches has even reduced by 1600 places (Périver, 2003; Bailleau, 2007). And the trend is the same for the two year-olds in pre-school.

On the contrary, financial support to families using individually-regulated childcare facilities was reinforced. First, through the “allowance for childcare in the home” (*allocation de garde d’enfant à domicile - AGED*), created in 1987 for (well-off) parents hiring a domestic employee (without any criteria of qualification) to care at home for their children under three. The incentive is a tax credit which covers a large part of the cost¹⁴. Secondly, the status of childminders was improved and a new allowance, *aide pour l’emploi d’une*

assistante maternelle agréée (AFEAMA), was introduced in 1991 to replace the previous benefit and provide additional financial support to families employing a registered childminder (Martin et al., 1998). This new benefit also covers a large part of the cost¹⁵ and constitutes an incentive for not choosing undeclared childcare providers, who were nearly as numerous as registered ones before the reform. Both measures were part of the effort to increase the number of *emplois de proximité*. Between 1994 and 2001, public expenditure on the AGED increased 54 per cent, and on the AFEAMA, 177 per cent (Leprince & Martin, 2003). In January 2004, these different allowances (AGED and AFEAMA, on the one hand and APE, on the other) were merged and replaced by the *prestation d'accueil du jeune enfant* (PAJE) (see box 4).

Box 4: The 'cash for childcare' system since 2004

PAJE is composed of different elements: a universal basic allowance up to the third birthday of the child, a *complement du mode de garde* (CMG) for the parents of a less than 6 years old child who want to work and the *complement de libre choix d'activité* CLCA (supplement for freedom of choice of activity), for the parents who want to reduce or stop their activity to take care of their children up to their third birthday. The CLCA may be paid after the first birth for a 6 months period after the maternity leave. For a second child (or more), it can be paid up to the third birthday of the youngest. This allowance allows people to stop working or to reduce their activity to a part-time one with a part-allowance. Since July 2006, a new allowance has been added: the *complement optionnel de libre choix d'activité* (COLCA), for families with at least three children. It is 230 euros more than the CLCA and is allocated for only one year, according to the parents' income, the age of the child and the type of childcare. In 2007, PAJE concerned a total of 2.2 millions recipients. The PAJE reform, which was supposed to simplify the system and broaden the offer has been recently evaluated (MECSS, 2009). First of all, the cost is about three times more than expected in 2004 (2,1 billion euros in 2007 compared to the 700 million expected initially). Second, the PAJE reform gives access to 300,000 new beneficiaries compared to the previous system. Third, the development of a part-time parental leave has been a success in the middle class: 80,000 more recipients between 2002 and 2007 who are mainly middle class working mothers, when the number of full-time parental leave recipients reduced on the same period by 47,000. Fourth, the government is announcing a new childcare solution to compensate for the reduction of the offer in pre-school, the insufficient progression of places in crèches: kindergarten, a solution with much less formal constraints, but which will have a higher cost for parents than pre-school. We are still waiting for the implementation of this new offer¹⁶.

This last reform, based on "free choice" rhetoric, did not fundamentally change the global rationale. The priority is no longer quality of services, development of child capabilities, equity or universality. In an employment policy perspective, collective childcare facilities are too expensive in comparison with individual childcare arrangements, notably because of their higher requirements in terms of quality of services (surfaces, cost and qualification of the employees, guaranteed wages, stability of the job contract, etc.). By strongly promoting individually regulated childcare at home (in parents' home or in childcare providers' home) and private enterprise investment in childcare facilities, they have destabilized previous efforts for the development of universal, public and collective childcare facilities. This

diversification of facilities is in practice more and more socially targeted and has very little to do with “free choice”. Formal individual childcare facilities (employee at home, registered childcare providers) cannot be used by low income families who still largely resort to either informal childcare arrangements, or highly subsidized collective childcare facilities (Ruault & Daniel, 2004; Blanpin, 2005). Moreover, low-income parents are also more encouraged than they were in the past to care for their children themselves (Bressé & Galtier, 2006).

The system of actors: the influence of a ‘Welfare elite’

Our last question is: how have these changes happened and who plays a role in this reframing process: political actors, family associations, experts, high-rank civil servants? In 1946, after the institutionalization of the social security system, the configuration of actors was the following: a synergy between some employers referring to social and familialist ideologies, trade unions who were proud to contribute to the management of the social security system, and familist movements (*Union nationale des associations familiales*) who obtained the legitimacy and monopoly to defend family interests (Steck, 2000). It was the time of the “social security system’s activists”.

At the same period, during the 3rd and/or the 4th Republic, appeared some central figures in this sector: some politicians, more well-known for their demographic knowledge than their strict political activism, like Adolphe Landry or Georges Pernot, but also a new administrative elite, like Alfred Sauvy, demographer, director in 1938 of the *Institut de la conjuncture* at the ministry of Economy and founder of the French Institute of Demography (*Institut national d’études démographiques*); Robert Debré, professor of public health and President of the *Institut national d’hygiène*; Pierre Laroque, designer of the French social security system; Arthur Fontaine, *directeur du travail* at the Ministry of Trade; Léon Mirman, *directeur de l’Assistance et de l’Hygiène Publiques*. “It was the time of the *Grands commis de l’Etat*, combining scientific knowledge and bureaucratic skills, often graduates from the *Ecole polytechnique* ... who were recruited to straighten up the country thanks to the creation of a modernized public sector of production, of a secularized and efficient social and health care system, of a developed and universal educational system, etc., in short all the elements that correspond to the Durkheimian ideal of a reformist and regulatory state” (Lenoir, 1995, p. 45). This dual competence, administrative and scientific, together with a deep ideological commitment, was the first matrix of decision in this sector.

But this configuration of actors evolved between the mid-sixties and the early seventies, due to a ‘collapse of the familialist foundations’ of the system. Rémi Lenoir (1985a, b) considers that the frame of references changed radically at this period, due to the decline of a representation of the family as an institution of transfer of means, but also to the decline of Catholicism as a moral reference in this sector and to women’s defamilialization with their access to the labour market. This decline of familialism corresponds also to the reinforcement of individualism; i.e. the recognition of the interests of individuals in the family, and mainly women’s claims.

During this period, a progressive breakdown can be observed between the scientific and administrative actors. On one side, social sciences began to be emancipated from the decision-making sphere and its logic of intervention (with the development of the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique - CNRS* and, in particular, of a feminist sociology). On the other, some high-ranking civil servants developed their own expertise, mainly at the *Commissariat général au Plan - CGP*. It is indeed the time of the creation of the French planning system, where many new technocrats began their careers. Some figures are particularly important like Jacques Delors, *Chef du service des Affaires Sociales* at the CGP, André Ramoff, a high-ranking civil servant at the *Cour des comptes* and *Directeur de l’Action Sociale* in the beginning of the seventies or Bertrand Fragonard, a high-ranking civil servant who played a central role in the framing of family policies during the three following decades (see box 5). This process is sometimes qualified as a *technocratisation* of the social security system. These high-ranking civil servants are younger, more concerned by the technical problems to be solved and less by ideological confrontations. “The State becomes the driving force of action” (Steck, 2000, p. 143).

The family associations had quite a small impact on the reorientations of family policy during the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, they formulate recommendations or react to the projects of the government, they try to mobilize public opinion and the media, and they sometimes represent a veto group, but whether they are really representative of French families is definitely questionable. Furthermore, the UNAF tries to present itself as a homogeneous front, while in fact it regroups very different tendencies and opinions on family issues, ranging from extreme right wing to left wing (socialist or communist) positions (see Martin, Hassenteufel, 1997).

So, the process of change since the mid-seventies relies mainly on a few top high-ranking civil servants, an ‘elite of the family policy’, either in the ministry in charge of family issues,

the social security administration, or in the Cabinets of the government, sometimes moving from one position to another. A very few of them were of particular influence like Bertrand Fragonard, Gilles Johanet, Jean-Daniel Leroy, H el ene Gisserot, Fr ed erique Leprince, Etienne Marie, Philippe Steck (Hassenteufel et al., 1999).

Box 5: An exemplary figure of the ‘elite of welfare’ in family policy sector

Bertrand Fragonard is one of the main actors in this field of policy. After studying at the National School of Administration (ENA) in the middle of the 60s, and working a few years (67-74) at the Ministry of Industry, he entered the social policy section of the administration, and in turn was : « Directeur de Cabinet » of Ren e Lenoir at the *Secr etariat d’Etat   l’action sociale* (1974-1978), *Directeur adjoint de cabinet* of Simone Veil, Minister of Health and Social security (1978-1979), Director of the *Caisse nationale des allocations familiales* - CNAF (from 1980-1987), before heading the *Commissariat general au Plan* (1987-1988) and then the *D el gation interminist rielle au RMI* (1988-1996). He was also *Charg  de mission* of Simone Veil, Minister of Social Affairs, Health and Urban Affairs from 1993 to 1995 and played an important role in the formulation of the *Plan Jupp *. He should be considered as one of the main designers of French family policy over a very long period (from the mid-70s until the end of the 90s, but also as the « father » of the API and one of the designer of the RMI). As Bertrand Fragonard said himself in an interview, commenting on the range of political views of the ministers in charge of family policy during the period 1979-1996: “On family policy, I have experienced the entire range. I began with Simone Veil in 1979. I was there when Simone Pelletier arrived and I worked respectively with Georgina Dufoix, Mich le Barzach, and one more time with Simone Veil (all in charge of the Ministry of Social Affairs at different periods of time)...Afterwards, I worked on the RMI project and implementation and during that period of time almost nothing happened in the field of family policies. And I came back to imagine and achieve the reform of 1994 with Simone Veil... What strikes me is the relative continuity. It’s true that the APE (allocation parentale d’ ducation) of Dufoix is different from the Barzach’s APE, but seen from the planet Sirius, it looks as if there was no difference. This doesn’t mean nevertheless that political change has no influence. It has, of course, but there are also strong continuities, in terms of networks, actors, friendship, etc.” (Hassenteufel et al., 1999; Martin, 2000).

The influence of this ‘welfare elite’ generally operates after a political impetus. Since the mid-eighties, each government has formulated a “family plan”. As family issues are easily invested in ideological terms, political actors generally begin to design new projects of reform. But in each plan, one can observe that this ‘welfare elite’ prepares the reforms, uses this impetus but adapts the projects and even counteracts their more radical dimensions. It was the case, for example, with the *Plan Barzach* in 1986. During this first political cohabitation, marked by a strong right wing thrust and some political compromises with the extreme-right, Mich le Barzach, minister of Social Affairs, decided to lean on the alliance between Jean-Daniel Leroy, her *chef de Cabinet* and Bertrand Fragonard, director of the CNAF, to counteract the projects of her own political party to limit the access to the paid parental leave for immigrants or to abolish the single parent allowance (API). And this mechanism happened once again with the 1994 *Plan Veil*, which proposed an alternative to the very ideological 1993 Codaccioni (right-wing MP) report which was suggesting a “free choice benefit” to

promote a come-back of mothers to the household and to their caring responsibility. As she disagrees with this radical “Male breadwinner model”, Simone Veil leans on two special advisors: Bertrand Fragonard and Frédérique Leprince to suggest a better compromise and a much less radical turn.

During the last period (1995-2008), the *Commissariat au Plan* progressively disappeared as a State ‘think-tank’ (it was replaced in 2006 by the *Conseil d’analyse stratégique*) and a new partner began to play a significant role: European institutions and, in particular, the European Commission (Lewis, 2006). The work/family balance issue received more and more attention at the EU level and the last French official reports reproduce many of the main EU arguments (Pécresse, 2007; CAS, 2007). Nevertheless, this new rhetoric, like the “social investment” strategy (Esping-Andersen, 2002), does not arrive on virgin territory. Although the European institutions write the ‘movement order’ and supply some arguments, it is the French decision-makers who compose their own adaptations. However, it is striking that the new (labour-oriented) family policy goals in France correspond strictly to the European recommendations and legislations (Le Bihan, Martin, 2007; Lewis et al., 2008). The definition of the goals as well as the choice of the instruments, are more and more inspired by benchmarking procedures.

Conclusion

French family policies evolved radically since their first institutionalisation¹⁷. The changes have to do with the global political agenda. As governments face new political challenges, they adapt the objectives and instruments. We argue that two main systems of tensions help to understand this progressive reframing. A first alternative concerns the choice between universality and selectivity. Depending on the political and economical context, decision-makers adjust this cursor and try to find a good balance. But the trend over the past decades, marked by strong financial constraints and cost containment strategy, leads to a strengthening of selectivity and a targeting of family policies. A second alternative concerns the choice between familialism and individualism. The first family policy orientation was clearly a familialist one, defending a unique model of family as an institution: nuclear family or the “male breadwinner model”. Once again, the change that happened over the past decades is clearly a move towards individualization in order to give priority to individual rights and claims. The combination of these two frames of reference helps to understand the phases of this change over the past decades. By looking more precisely to the reforming process, we also identified a small group of high-ranking civil servants who have played a major role

since the seventies. This ‘welfare elite’ was relatively stable until recently and we can wonder whether we are facing a reconfiguration of this system of actors, as we did in the beginning of the seventies. Some elements are suggesting such a change: the disappearance of the *Commissariat au Plan*, which used to be the state think-tank and the source of definition of the main ideas of this elite; the growing role of local authorities which, since the ‘decentralization laws’, received the leadership on childcare initiatives and service coordination, and also the growing role of the European institutions in orienting and framing national policies. All these elements are converging to defend the idea that the French family policy model is vanishing progressively.

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Figure 1 : Public support to families (*Les aides publiques en direction des familles*) (Albouy et Roth, 2003)

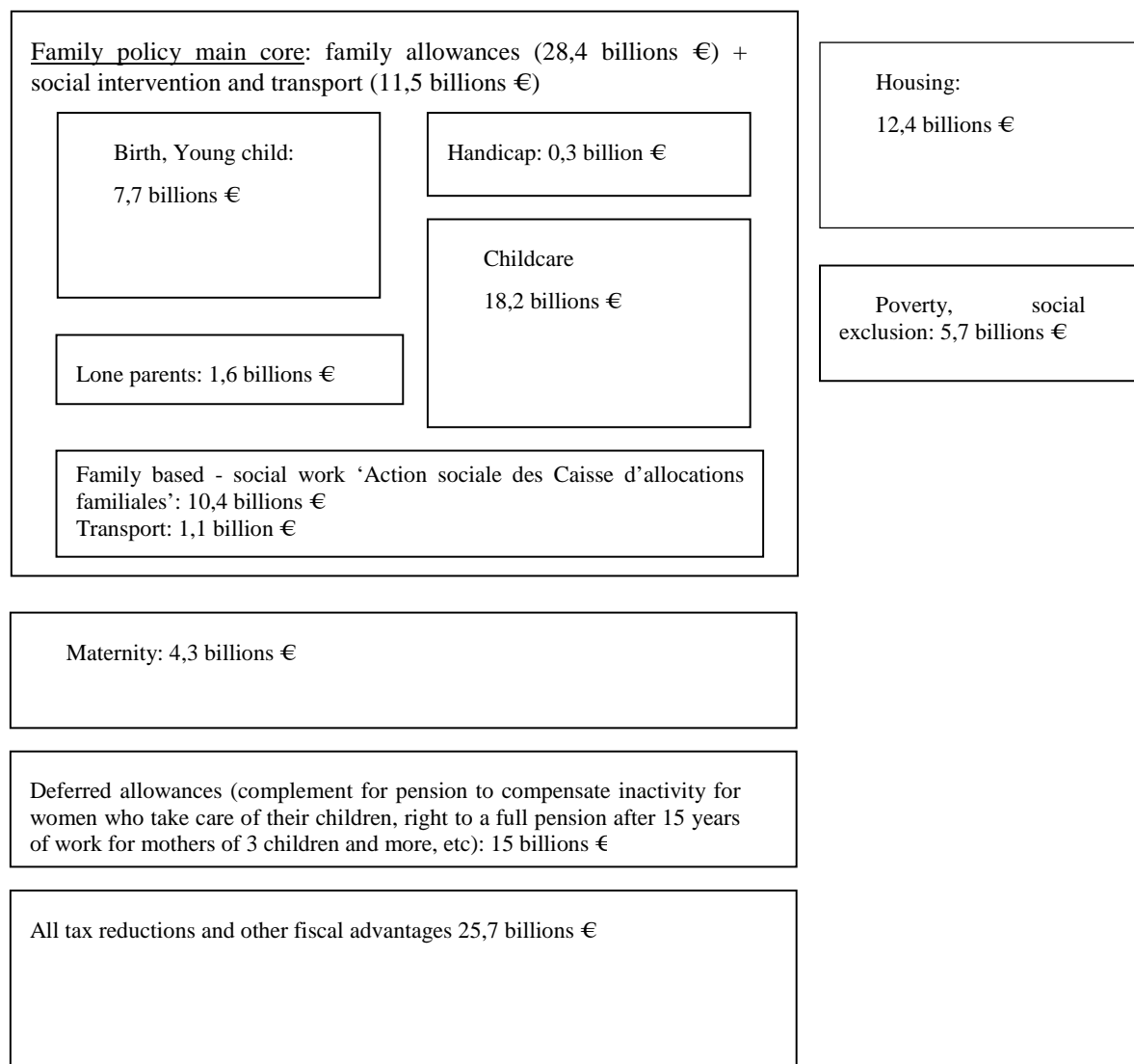


Table 1: The family policy matrix of tensions

| | <i>Familialism</i> | <i>Individualism</i> |
|---------------------|--|---|
| <i>Universality</i> | <i>Strong familialism and universality</i> Family policy golden age: 1945 - 1965 | <i>Strong individualism and universality</i> Recognition of the women's rights: 1965 - 1975 |
| <i>Selectivity</i> | <i>Strong selectivity and weak familialism</i> Priority to the more disadvantaged families: 1975 - 1985 | <i>Strong individualism and selectivity</i> Promotion of free choice, work / family balance and female activity: 1985 - 2005 |

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² Family benefits were originally considered as an extension of the salary towards households and so, as one of the main pillars of the French social welfare system.

³ . Various family associations (catholic and secular, right and left-wing) were recognized as social partners by the State with the Loi Gounot in 1942.

⁴ . The very first official premium for ‘charge de famille’ was adopted in 1854 by the ministry of Navy (Montès, 2000).

⁵ . Pauline Kergomard (1838-1925) is the main instigator of this institution, by a transformation of what was called “salles d’asile” in “écoles maternelles”. In 1881, Jules Ferry appointed her “Inspectrice générale des écoles maternelles”, responsibility that she assumed until 1917 (Kergomard, 1886 and Plaisance, 1996).

⁶ . Extended in 1975 to children whose parent doesn’t fulfil his (her) child support obligation after a divorce.

⁷ . The ratio of pay-roll taxes oriented towards the ‘family branch’ of the social security system, has been reduced from almost 17% in 1960 to 7% in 1988. Since the « loi de finance » in 1991, which has created a new tax: the *Contribution sociale généralisée* (CSG), the financing of the family policy depends more and more on social solidarity, to reduce the contribution of the employers and the cost of work.

⁸ . L. Jospin, socialist, became Prime minister after the dissolution of the National Assembly by the President Chirac in spring 1997.

⁹ . The strong mobilization of the right wing parties by the side of family associations against this decision, was more an opportunity to build an opposition, as a similar orientation had already been suggested by Alain Juppé, the previous Prime minister of the right coalition in autumn 1995. In his own speech at the National Assembly, when he presented his social welfare reform plan, Alain Juppé criticized the system of family benefits, too complex and not fair enough. His own project was also to concentrate public spending on disadvantaged families and to take family benefits into account in the income tax. Most of these Juppé’s projects concerning welfare state were given up, facing a very strong mobilization in December 1995.

¹⁰ In the French political system, there is cohabitation when the President and the government belong to opposite parties.

¹¹ . François Mitterrand, « Les 110 propositions pour la France » (see Jenson & Sineau, 1995). A State Secretary for the family, created in 1981, proposed the development of crèches’ contracts (‘contrats crèches’) between municipalities and ‘Caisses d’allocations familiales’, in order to increase the number of places in collective childcare facilities. At the same time, the new laws concerning decentralization gave municipalities overall responsibility for childcare administration (see Bouyala & Roussille, 1982).

¹² . Half the minimum salary, around 500€.

¹³ . Only a parent who could justify a minimum of two years of activity during the five or ten previous years (depending on the number of children) was eligible for APE.

¹⁴ . The maximum tax credit for an employee at home was boosted in 1994 from 1900€ up to 6700€. The same year, AGED was extended to families with a child between 3 and 6. Since both advantages may be cumulated, the total subsidisation may cover 70% of a full-time employee. Consequently, the number of AGED recipients has more than doubled between 1994 and 1996 (from 25,000 in 1994 to 54,000 in 1996).

¹⁵ . Actually, it corresponds to all (employer’s and employee’s) social contributions, which represent around 40% of the total cost.

¹⁶ . Some other issues are challenging the childcare system: the development of atypical family unfriendly working hours (Le Bihan & Martin, 2004).

¹⁷ . It was not possible in this paper to cover all the reforms. Some other developments could be necessary on the welfare to work orientation that corresponds to the policy towards lone parents (see Knijn et al., 2007; Martin, in press).