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## **Different regimes, converging trajectories? Constructions of poverty policy target groups and policy instruments in Finland and Germany**

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## **DIFFERENT REGIMES, CONVERGING TRAJECTORIES?**

### **Constructions of family poverty, target groups and policy instruments in Finland and Germany**

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#### **Abstract:**

Finland and Germany are traditionally conceived of as being members of different welfare regimes with rather different approaches to family policy as well as poverty policies. During the last decades, however, anti-poverty policies have become more visible in both countries as an intrinsic sub category of family policy. The objects for these policies have been different constellations of 'poor' families, such as single-parent families or families with low incomes. Interestingly, most of the recent family policy reforms conducted in Finland and Germany have entailed some notion about the relationship between families and poverty. But how are these 'risk' groups constructed and what policy solutions are suggested? How do the discourses in Finland and Germany relate to each other; are there similarities, differences or a growing convergence over time? This paper explores how anti-poverty policy target groups have been constructed on an elite level and what policy instruments have been recommended in order to fight poverty among families in Finland and Germany. The overall aim is to understand the rise and development of anti-poverty policies within family policy, and to assess the impact of path dependency and influential ideas descending from European or international processes like the EU Lisbon process. The paper starts with an overall description of main characteristics of the two family-policy systems and their commitment to anti-poverty objectives on a general level. Thereafter, an analysis of the construction of target groups and policy instruments is made by scrutinising policy documents produced since the 1980s by governments and leading parties. The paper argues that there has been a growing convergence in anti-poverty policy constructions over time and that this development can be largely explained by the diffusion of influential ideas from the EU.

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## 1. Introduction

The concern for poor families has always been an inherent element of European family policies. In the dawn of modern family policy, poverty amelioration constituted the very bulk of family concerns shown by governments, churches and charity organisations. However, during the heyday of welfare state expansion, the role of poverty amelioration was successively topped up, and even over-shadowed, by more far-reaching state ambitions to secure well-being of families and provide some degree of equality between poor and well-off families (Ferrarini 2006; Gauthier 1996; Wennemo 1994). In some countries, like the Mediterranean and Anglo-Saxon states, poverty policies retained a prominent role, whereas Nordic and Continental family policy systems developed in a more egalitarian direction. Today, however, family-related poverty has once again started to constitute a major policy challenge for most European countries. This concerns not only rudimentary family policy regimes but also countries with extensive social rights for parents. At the same time, family and child poverty has become one of the most ardent policy topics of our time, not least within the EU. Allegedly, single-parent families, families with many children and households with low labour-market affiliation are considered most vulnerable to poverty (Marlier et al. 2007; Atkinson et al. 2002; Esping-Andersen et al. 2002).

How then are we to understand this increasing political focus on family-related poverty? On the one hand, it can be viewed from a functionalist angle, as being related to changes in household structures and labour market participation (Wehner & Abrahamson 2006; Taylor-Gooby 2004). On the other hand, however, it could also be understood as being related more to changes in the ways that families and family policies are constructed discursively than being a simple (causal) outcome of socio-economic changes. The ways we make distinctions between 'well-off' and 'poor' families as well as evaluations of what the state should do for the well-being of families in general and 'poor' families in particular are seldom arbitrary nor self-evident, instead they are outcomes of discursive processes shaped within certain institutional frames and (changing) paradigms (e.g. Schmidt 2008; Fisher 2003). It is fully plausible then that the recent focus on poverty among families can also be seen as a part of a shift away from a policy paradigm focussed on the incidence of 'old' (and stable) social risks to 'new' paradigms tailored for regulating the incidence of 'new' (and increasingly unstable) social risks and focussing more visibly on the provision of some modicum of social security for families in need than on wide-scale state commitments to equality (cf Lister 2006; Karoly

2002; Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Daly 2004). It is also fully possible that what we witness today is an amalgamation of these both scenarios. Either way, the discussion above raises a number of questions: How are we to understand the relationship between family policies and anti-poverty policies? Is there evidence of a more prominent role of anti-policies within European family policies? How has the problem of family-related poverty been construed and what policy remedies are presented? Are there similarities in the ways that different countries have related to this issue or are the discourses to be seen as country-specific?

The *aim of this paper* is to contribute to the understanding of these questions. More specifically, the paper investigates how family-related poverty, target groups and policy recommendations have been constructed on an elite level in Finland and Germany since the 1980s. We focus on *three research questions*: a) How has family-related poverty been constructed in Finland and Germany over time, i.e. to what extent is it construed as a social problem or risk, what kind of families are considered as most exposed to poverty and how should poverty best be combated? b) Is there an increasing accentuation of poverty issues and anti-poverty measures in national family policy discourses over time, and if so, can these accentuations be seen as related to the impact of influential ideas on family policy? c) Have these discourses developed in distinct country-specific ways or has there been a growing convergence over time?

The paper is structured in the following way. In the next section the relation between family policy as a whole and anti-poverty policies is discussed. Thereafter we set the context by shortly describing the Finnish and German family-policy systems as well as the recent policy developments regarding families and poverty. In the fourth section some theoretical suggestions on constructivist policy analysis and the connection to institutional theory are presented. This section is followed by a document analysis where we scrutinise elite constructions of family-related poverty in Finland and Germany since the 1980s. Ultimately, we sum up by comparing the developments in both countries and discussing possible explanations of the observed developments.

## **2. Family policy and poverty**

It is well documented that public spending on families have a reducing effect on family-related poverty (e.g. Ferrarini 2006; Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; UNICEF 2005; Forssén

1998). Family policy does not however refer to a coherent unit of policy instruments; rather it can be regarded as a varying set of different measures and objectives with respect to families with children (Kaufmann 2002; Hantrais and Letablier 1996; Kamerman and Kahn 1981).<sup>1</sup>

Likewise, there is little consensus regarding how concepts like poverty and social exclusion should be defined. Despite the broad agreement on the pernicious consequences of poverty (e.g. Marlier et al. 2007; Esping-Andersen et al. 2002, UNICEF 2005) there is considerable debate as to whether the focus should be placed on financial poverty, i.e. lack of financial means, or the capability to participate in society (ct Sen 2006). There is also debate about whether relative measures or absolute poverty lines should be employed (e.g. Pimpare 2009; Kangas and Ritakallio 2005). In a European context, the emphasis of the contemporary debate is largely placed on poverty and social exclusion, which can be said to express an ambition to address the deeper meanings of deprivation and exclusion insofar as these concepts invoke not only the relative lack of pecuniary means but also the lack of capabilities to take part in the life accustomed to the majority of the community (ct. Marlier et al. 2007; Atkinson et al. 2002).<sup>2</sup>

Family policies can have poverty-reducing effects in several ways. First, the costs of children can be compensated by the state through cash benefits or tax reliefs.<sup>3</sup> This strategy, which could be referred to as a ‘transfer strategy’ (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002: 60-61; ct Linder and Peters 1989), adds to the disposable income of family households through direct or indirect transfers. Instead of needs-tested rights, welfare entitlements are based on some notion of social right or some idea of social justice (such as equality of income) (ct Cox 1998, 3). During the post-war period, the introduction of (universal) child benefits and breadwinner-related family wages or tax reliefs are perhaps the best examples of the implementation of this conception (Ferrarini 2006; Montanari 2000; Gauthier 1996; Wennemo 1994).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we define family policies broadly as those measures that convey some kind of income transfer directed to families with children, irrespective of whether they are allocated as money transfers or through the tax system (ct Ferrarini 2006; Henderson and White 2004).

<sup>2</sup> The most common poverty definition used by the EU is the relative income definition whereby a household is considered poor if its disposable income that falls below 60 percent of the median income (Marlier et al. 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Tax reliefs can be conducted tax deductions that reduce the income subject to tax, or as tax supports (which reduce the amount of tax due (Hiilamo 2002: 87). The redistribution, in turn, can take form as a horizontal redistribution between tax payers and families with children, or as a vertical redistribution between *different* types of families with children, (e.g. between poor and well-off families or between multi-children and one-child families) (ct Hiilamo 2002: 18-19).

Another option is to support paid employment of parents by, for example, providing (public) social services, such as day care for children or services for elderly, and by counteracting in-work poverty. This strategy, which could perhaps best be labelled as an ‘employment’ approach (e.g. Nygård 2007; Lewis 2006) or a ‘servicing strategy’ (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002: 61) is mostly associated with Nordic welfare states (Castles 2004: 62-72; Esping-Andersen 1990, 28). It requires that social needs like child care or elderly care is regulated in some way, either through publically financed social services or private solutions, and that the taxation system facilitates paid work. A third option is to use targeted benefits based on needs testing, a strategy often associated with ‘implicit’ family policies in the Anglo-Saxon world (e.g. Castles 2004: 67; Kaufmann 2002, 473; Daly 2000: 85). Since these policies contain a high degree of selectivity by focusing on the ‘residual’ that do not receive their livelihood from the market, they can also be labelled ‘liberal’ policies (Taylor 2007; Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2008; Titmuss 1974). Accordingly, the welfare entitlements associated with this policy strategy follow another logic than entitlements installed through citizenship: not only is the scope of beneficiaries narrower (‘poor families’), the welfare entitlement can also be viewed as ‘negotiated claims’ that contrast the need or ‘deservedness’ of recipients to public opinion and socially shared norms (Kaufmann 2002, 473; Cox 1998: 11-12). Consequently, targeted measures are to be directed to the neediest while employing some idea of last-resort amelioration. A fourth, and final, strategy would be to invest in (future) human capital rather than providing well-being in the present, by for instance using the education system or social service as ‘social ladders’ (cf. ‘Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Karoly 2002; Lister 2006)

These policy options are not mutually exclusive and are often used next to each other. In Finland, for example, all four strategies have been used from time to time although the main focus has been on the two first (cf. Kuivalainen et al. 2005). In Germany, by contrast, the focus has been more on income transfers and tax reliefs than on social services promoting employment of mothers (cf. Hauser and Voges 1998). To the EU, family policies have generally been viewed as a part of the general agenda for growth and employment (Lewis 2006).<sup>4</sup> This means that EU lacks an own explicit family policy agenda and that anti-poverty measures in this sense refer mainly to measures that facilitate paid employment of parents and that mitigate the balance between work and family. But also income transfers to families such

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<sup>4</sup> Especially the European Employment Strategy introduced in the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997, the Lisbon strategy from 2000 and the Social Agenda 2005-2010 strongly emphasised measures against poverty and social exclusion by advocating both improvements in cash benefits but also improvements in public care systems as a way of facilitating paid employment of parents (e.g. Marlier et al. 2007, Lewis 2006).

as child benefit have been acknowledged as having poverty-reducing effects (e.g. Marlier et al 2007; Fourage 2004; Esping-Andersen et al. 2002:59-63). They have even been argued to be more effective in the fight against child poverty compared, although their feasibility as policy instruments today are becoming increasingly hampered by demographic and social transformations, higher degrees of international competitiveness and policy recommendations that emphasise fiscal austerity and temperance as to state expenses (ct Taylor-Gooby 2004; 2001; Pierson 2001, 1996; Huber and Stephens 2001; Palier and Sykes 2001).

Apart from purely descriptive ambitions, this paper also aims at testing whether the analysed elite discourses express signs of change as to strategies outlined above. We are here mainly interested in the possible incidence of ‘liberal’ family policy ideas that embrace the principle of targeting and needs-testing as well as the possible incidence of an employment approach and the influence of so-called social investment ideas. Allegedly, the increasing focus on anti-poverty measures could be seen as an expression of a gradual downsizing of wide-scale transfer or ‘hand-out’ strategies in favour of selective measures for the neediest and actions aiming at rising employment levels and improving future life chances of children. Embedded in these strategies seems to be an implicit claim for a more ‘activating’ reinterpretation of the concept of social rights and citizenship (e.g. Jensen and Pfau-Effinger 2005; Johansson and Hvinden 2007; Bonoli 2004; Cox 1998) as well as a commitment to state cost containment (e.g. Taylor-Gooby 2001).

### **3. Contrasting the Finnish and German family policies**

#### *3.1 The Finnish and German family policy regimes*

In the literature on family policy regimes, the Finnish model has been labelled as a member of the Nordic family policy (Bradshaw and Hatland 2006; Hiilamo, 2002), the dual-earner (Korpi 2000) or the individual family policy regime (Sainsbury 1999). The German model, on the other hand, has been categorised as a corporatist/catholic (Bradshaw and Hatland 2006), a general family policy (Korpi 2000) or a male breadwinner model (Sainsbury 1999). The categorisation of the German system is complicated by the fact that different *Länder* have slightly different traditions of pursuing family policies. Moreover, the German reunification meant that the West German system with a high degree of familisation was merged with the East German system with significantly higher degrees of de-familisation (Leitner et al. 2008;

Clasen 2005). Especially in the case of child care for very young children and the employment rate of mothers there are still big differences between these regions.

The Finnish model is characterised by, among other things, individual social rights for parents and a relatively comprehensive income transfer and public service system to families with children (Forssén et al 2008; Hiilamo 2002). This system has been considered as relatively effective, as it has contributed to low degrees of family poverty (Moisio 2006; Forssén 1998) while at the same time securing gender equality in the form of dual-earner households and high levels of female employment (Hiilamo 2002; Anttonen and Sipilä 2000). The German family policy model, on the other hand, is personified by a stronger emphasis on family-related social rights, relatively generous income-related income transfers to families (breadwinners) and high reliance on subsidiary and non-public care giving (Leitner et al 2008; Clasen 2005; Hantrais 2004). The system has traditionally been associated with high numbers of male breadwinner households, lower female labour force participation and relatively higher degrees of family poverty due to restricted coverage of social protection schemes (cf Gauthier, 1996; Cornia 1997). Lately, however, the German system have taken several steps towards de-familisation by inducing, for instance, the introduction of public day care and other instruments for reconciliation of work and family life (Leitner et al. 2008; Clasen 2005). To Hagemann (2006: 240) these recent developments represent a transformation from a strong male-breadwinner model to a 'breadwinner/housewife-supplementary income earner family model'.

### *3.2 Earlier and recent policy developments with respect to family poverty*

Although the universal child allowance was introduced already in the 1940s, the Finnish family policy system not fully developed until the Early-1990s. In the 1960s, the income-related parental insurance system (with paid leave) was established, providing also basic benefits for parents without work history. In the 1970s, public day care for children was instituted as a municipal obligation and in the 1980s the child home care allowance was created which gave parents the right to choose between public or home day care (Hiilamo and Kangas 2006). By securing the economic well-being for families through extensive transfers based on universal coverage, and by facilitating parents' participation in paid work through public child care and elderly care systems, the system has effectively served as a route out of poverty for the vast majority of Finnish families (e.g. Hiilamo 2002; 2006; Forssén et al. 2008; Anttonen and Sipilä 2000). Also targeted measures have been used to fight poverty,

such as child supplements to single parents, ‘scaled’ child allowances (siblings supplements) for families with many children and income support as a ‘last resort’ support for families with financial problems. All in all, together these programs effectively reduced family poverty until the Mid-1990<sup>5</sup>.

However, in the Early 1990s Finnish family policies became severely hampered by the economic crisis that hit the country. Due to increasing social expenditures, skyrocketing unemployment and state fiscal problems, several cutbacks had to be made (e.g. Nygård 2003; Timonen 2003), which also led to a devaluation of cash transfers to families. At first these cutbacks did not affect basic income transfers; instead they were made mainly in the parental insurance system (Hiilamo, 2006). In 1995, however, the Social Democrats coalition also made child allowances and home care allowances targets for cutbacks (Kosunen 1997). Beside the direct cut-backs in income transfers during the 1990s there were also significant indirect cut-backs made, since none of the basic income transfers to families with children were adjusted to inflation during the period 1996-2002 (Hiilamo 2006). It has been estimated that the real net values of income transfers for families with children declined by roughly 15-19 per cent during the period 1990-2002, depending on the way of calculation (STM, 2006). Despite a number of piecemeal improvements of family transfers during the 2000s, including three so-called ‘poverty packages’ (ct Kuivalainen et al. 2005; Kuivalainen and Niemelä 2008) and a strong political emphasis on higher employment among parents (through work/family reconciliation measures), the income development of families continued to fall way behind the incomes of other households, causing a rise in poverty especially among single parents and families with many children (Salmi et al. 2009; Moisio 2008; Hakovirta 2006).

The policies pursued in West Germany during the first decades after the WWII aimed mainly at consolidating the traditional family institution by insuring the male breadwinner and his family against standard social risks (Bleses and Seeleib-Kaiser 2004). In 1954 a child allowance system was introduced that provided economic support for families with an employed parent and three or more children. The benefit represented the idea of a ‘family wage’ by raising the wage for employees with a family. In the following years the system was

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<sup>5</sup> During the period 1971-1994, the child poverty rate fell from approximately 16 per cent to 4 per cent respectively (Salmi et al. 2009). By the Mid-90s, the child poverty rate was among the lowest in the world and the income distribution among families one of the most equal (after taxes and transfers).

extended to all parents and finally in 1964 a state financed allowance was introduced (ibid.). In 1975 the system was extended also to first child and over the years the benefit was increased considerably.<sup>6</sup> The dominant forms of family support have thus been cash support, such as child allowances (*Kindergeld*) and different forms of tax deductions (*Kinderfreibeträge*) for (male) breadwinners with dependent children (Leitner et al. 2008).<sup>7</sup> By contrast, the organisation of social insurance for care-givers within the family has remained unchanged: married men or women outside paid labour are automatically insured through their spouses (Clasen 2005).

The first big change in the traditional family policy model occurred in 1979 as a four month maternity leave and an earnings-related maternity benefit were introduced. Over the years the parental leave has been extended up to three years and in 2001 the right to part-time parental leave was introduced. In 1986 the Christian Democrats, after having reclaimed government power, introduced a new universal transfer (*Erziehungsgeld*) that had the ambition to recognise care work provided within the family (Kolbe 2002). This universal child raising benefit was combined with an extended leave option and an employment guarantee for parents. In 1994 the benefit became means-tested and there were no increases of the benefit level – not even adjustments to inflation - until its end in 2006.

In 2007 the child raising benefit (*Erziehungsgeld*) was replaced by a new income-related parental allowance system (*Elterngeld*) that aimed at distributing child rearing responsibilities more evenly between parents and tackling poverty risks caused by child rearing, especially among young families (Deutscher Bundestag 2006). In order to prevent in-work poverty a new need-tested and income-related child allowance supplement (*Kinderzuschlag*) was introduced in 2005 as a part of the reform of the social assistance scheme. This benefit aimed at enabling low-wage parents to provide for their children<sup>8</sup> (Bäcker et al 2008: 303f.). Lately, increasing efforts have been made to increase the provision of childcare for children under the age of three and by 2013 the child-place ratio is to be raised up to 33 % granting every child

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<sup>6</sup> Today the child allowance accounts for the first two children 164 €, the third child 170 € and the fourth child 195 €.

<sup>7</sup> This represents the dual character of the German family benefit system. According to a ruling of the German Constitutional Court, the child tax allowance for each child has to correspond to the needs level that is defined in the social assistance law. This means that parents can no longer receive both benefits simultaneously. They only receive the option considered to be more financially beneficial to the family.

<sup>8</sup> In 2008 this entitlement was extended also to other than low-wage parents.

between the age of one and three right to public child care. Also a ‘home care allowance’ will be introduced for parents caring for their children at home.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.3 Changes in families and poverty

Both in Finland and Germany, the concept of family is becoming increasingly difficult to define due to the rising number of divorces, single-parent households and “atypical” family forms, such as stepfamilies or cohabiting couples with children (see table 1).

*Table 1. Changes in the family institution in Finland and Germany*

	Year	Finland <sup>2</sup>	Germany
Married couples with children (% of all families with children)	1996	69,1	81,4 <sup>3</sup>
	2006	61,9	74,0 <sup>3</sup>
Divorces (per 1000 inhabitants)	1985 <sup>1</sup>	1,8	2,3 <sup>4</sup>
	2006	2,6	2,3 <sup>4</sup>
Single-parent families (% of all families with children)	1996	17,0	13,8 <sup>3</sup>
	2006	19,9	18,4 <sup>3</sup>
Cohabiting couples with children (% of all families with children)	1996	12,9	4,8 <sup>3</sup>
	2006	18,0	7,6 <sup>3</sup>

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Only former Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) included; <sup>2</sup> Source: Statistics, Finland 2009a and 2009b, <sup>3</sup> Source: Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2009; <sup>4</sup> Source: Federal Statistical Office, Germany 2009.

As these phenomena become more widespread, they create ‘new’ social needs that claim state recognition, for example in form of maintenance allowances, tax deductions or single-mother supplements (ct. Wehner and Abrahamson 2006; Häusermann 2006). As can be derived from table 1, both countries have been subject to transformations in the family structure. In both countries the share of typical nuclear families have diminished, whereas the number of single-parent or atypical families have increased (ct. Finch 2006; Daly 2005; Hantrais 2004; Kaufmann 2002). Over time, these changes are likely to influence discourses on family

<sup>9</sup> The child care coverage rates differ between East and West Germany. In 2002 East Germany had a coverage rate of 37 % for children under the age of three, whereas the corresponding rate for West Germany was only 2,8 % (Leitner et al. 2008: 193)

policies alongside policy recommendations emanating from the EU or other influential transnational organisations.

The recent reforms in family policies in Germany combined with the relaxation of the Finnish government's commitment to equality among families have to some extent started to bridge the gap between the two nations with regard to poverty rates. According to table 2 the trend seem to be that poverty rates among families with children have climbed in Finland while they have decreased in Germany since the Mid-90s.<sup>10</sup>

*Table 2. Income poverty (in %) among varying households with children in Finland and Germany 1996, 2001 and 2007 (source: Eurostat 2009)*

Household type	Country (region) and year								
	Finland			Germany			EU 15 (average)		
	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007	1996	2001	2007
Single parent with dependent children	8	17	22	51	36	34	37	32	34
Two adults with one dependent child	3	7	6	10	9	10	11	11	11
Two adults with two dependent children	3	4	5	10	7	8	13	14	14
Two adults with three or more dependent children	4	12	13	19	21	12	26	27	22
Children (under 16 years of age)	5	9	10	15	14	14	19	20	19

Note: Poverty levels are here showed as the share of persons (%) with an equivalised disposable income below the risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60 % of the national median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers).

According to the table, there has been a decline in poverty among German single-parent households since the Mid-90s whereas the downward trend for two-adult households has been somewhat more moderate. In Finland, by contrast, we witness an overall exacerbation of

<sup>10</sup> In the German case, however, these trends become less clear if SOEP data is used instead of EU-SILK data. For example, in 2005 the income poverty risk of children (under the age of sixteen) was 26 % according to the SOEP data and only 12 % according to EU data using the *Laeken* indicator (cf Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales 2009: 25, 91-92, 305-306). According to another report (Statistisches Bundesamt et al. 2008: 167), the poverty rate for children under the age of seventeen rose from 15,2 % in 2001 to 16,5 % in 2006, at the same time as the national poverty rate rose from 11,4 % to 13,9 %. By contrast, the poverty rate for single-parent households fell a bit (from 36,7 % in 2001 to 35,4 % in 2006) as did the poverty rate for families with three or more children (from 23,3 % in 2001 to 13,9 % in 2006). However, during the same period the poverty rates for families with one or two children rose more than four percent (Statistisches Bundesamt et al. 2008: 169). Thus it seems that the poverty risk rose for the "normal" population and fell a bit for the traditional risk groups (single parents, families with many children etc.). On the basis of this, it is not possible to talk of a general trend in reducing poverty of families.

household incomes, notably the incomes of single-parent households and households with three or more children. The poverty rate of single-parent households and multi-child households have almost tripled during the period 1996-2007, from 8 to 22 percent for single parents and from 4 to 13 percent for multi-child families respectively. The EU-15 average shows a slight increase of poverty only among single-parent and two-adult households with two children, otherwise the trend points downwards. The most likely cause to this development is the cuts that were made in family transfers during the 1990s (Salmi et al 2009; Moisio 2008; STM 2006). In Germany, the reduction of poverty among single-parents and multi-child families can be attributed to higher employment levels, steady investments in transfers and services as well as a lack of cuts in family benefits (ct. Leitner et al. 2008; Bleses and Seeleib-Kaiser 2004).

In sum, the development in Finland and Germany display both similarities and differences. In both countries the family institution is becoming increasingly manifold at the same time as poverty issues have become more accentuated. But there are also diverging trends; whereas the recent state commitments to families in Finland have been somewhat hesitant and focussed on a piecemeal repairing of gaps in the social protection schemes, the German policy development has been characterised by continuous efforts to strengthen the public commitment to families, both in terms of transfers and services. There is also diverging trends in poverty developments: in Finland we can observe a clear and rapid increase in poverty among families since the 1990s, whereas the poverty changes seem to have been more modest in Germany. To what extent, then, can these developments be related to changes in elite discourses on family policies and family poverty? Before moving on to an analysis of the role of anti-poverty measures in elite discourses we will shortly address the role of ideas and discourses for welfare state change.

#### **4. Ideas and poverty policy constructions**

Traditionally, studies of welfare state development have emphasised the role of structural change (Wilensky 1975), power-resources of political actors (e.g. Korpi 1983; Esping-Andersen 1985) or institutions (e.g. Skocpol 1992; Pierson 1994). These explanations have usually been considered as pertaining also to family policy change (Wennemo 1994). However, lately there has been an increasing focus on ‘other’ explanations as to institutional

changes in family policies.<sup>11</sup> Among these, the role of ideas and discourses have come to play a special role. For example, Henderson and White (2004: 516), in their study of North American and European welfare states, found that ‘ideational factors, particularly the specific decisions that governments make about how to construct the relationship between the state, the family and the market, as well as policy learning, may play a bigger role in determining the size of the state in these policy areas, rather than societal, political, or institutional patterns.’ Likewise, in a number of influential studies of welfare state adjustments, Schmidt (2008; 2002a; 2002b) showed that ideas embedded in institutional discourses play a significant role for welfare state change by creating an interactive consensus for change. (see also Schmidt 2008; 2002a). She also argues that ideas and discourses, in fact, constitute the very core of policy making since it is all about generating ‘ideas about what should be done and then communicate them to the general public for discussion and deliberation.’ (Schmidt 2008: 305). An example of this is Kuebler’s (2007: 235) study of recent expansions of Swiss family policies. According to this study the expansion ‘can be explained by ideational processes that framed and changed the perception of problems and possible policy solutions in the family policy subsystem’ (Kuebler 2007: 235). Thus, ideas and discourses can have an impact on how policy problems are constructed and what should be done in order to solve these problems (cf. Taylor-Gooby 2005; Béland 2005; Blyth 2002; Schmidt 2008; 2002a; 2002b; Campbell 1998; Hall 1993).

The studying of ideas and discourse builds on constructionist ontology rather than an empirical, neo-positivist, tradition as the main point is to scrutinise how reality is constructed, how these constructions are expressed in communicative processes and what effect the constructs have on policy goals and instruments (Fisher 2003; Hacking 1999; Burr 1995). The point is not to describe reality as such, but to describe how reality is being construed through discursive practices. This means that reality and the conceived problems therein are dynamic, ever contestable and subject to continuous renegotiation (e.g. Hacking 1999; Rochefort and Cobb 1994). Methodologically, it implies that one’s focus must lie on representations of meaning, such as policy documents, programs, protocols etc, rather than on physical objects.

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<sup>11</sup> As an example, Gauthier (1999: 963), in a study of historical trends in state support for families in Europe, readdresses the role of functionalist or conflict theory by arguing that family policies ‘appear to be driven by different forces than other components of the welfare state’.

Ideas can be defined in different ways.<sup>12</sup> Schmidt (2008) differentiates three different types of ideas as to their generality: the level of specific policies or “policy solutions”, the more general programs that underpin the policy ideas and the even more basic level of “public philosophies” or “world views” (Schmidt 2008: 306). She further distinguishes between normative and cognitive ideas. Whereas cognitive ideas refer to a certain situation or phenomenon and also provides recipes or guidelines for action, normative ideas involve some kind of evaluations of the situation at hand as well as prescriptions on “what should be done” (ibid.). In this paper, the focus is on the second generality level, i.e. ‘programmatically ideas’ that ‘define the problems to be solved by such policies; the issues to be considered; the goals to be achieved; the norms, methods and instruments to be applied; and the ideals that frame the more immediate policy ideas proposed to solve any given problem’ (Schmidt 2008: 306. Cf. Béland 2005; Campbell 1998; Hall 1993). We also use cognitive ideas as the main focal point, inasmuch as we seek to unravel how the issue of poverty among families is constructed in policy documents. This does not mean, however, that we deny normative ideas as they are important for legitimating policy constructions. Consequently, the main objective is to show how constructions of poverty among families have altered over time and what role this particular topic has played in relation to more traditional topics within family policy.

Also discourse can be defined in many ways. Put bluntly, a main distinction can be made between discourse as communicative interaction and discourse as a struggle for precedence of interpretation. Whereas the first notion refers to what is said, by whom and to whom, the latter notion conveys a critical understanding of communication which pays attention not only to interactive facts but also to the prevalence of hegemonic discourses, power or ‘false consciousness’ (cf. Fischer 2003; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002). As an example of the first, Schmidt (2002b: 169) labels discourse as ‘whatever policy actors say to one another and to the public more generally in their efforts to construct and legitimate their policy programs’.

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<sup>12</sup> For example, Béland (2005: 2) defines a *policy idea* as ‘specific policy alternatives ... as well as the organized principles and causal beliefs in which these proposals are embedded ...’. Hall (1993: 279), on the other hand, uses the concept *policy paradigm*, which refers to system of ideas ‘that specifies not only the goals of policy and kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing’. Paradigms thus offer policy makers pragmatic ‘world views’ that both influence the problem construction in itself and the choice of suitable policy instruments (cf. Haas 1992 and ‘epistemic communities’). To Campbell (1998: 377) *ideas* refer to theories, norms, and values that influence policy-making. On the one hand they can represent underlying and sometimes implicit assumptions residing in the background of policy debates. On the other hand they can also refer to concepts and theories explicitly articulated by policy-makers. Moreover, he makes a distinction between cognitive ideas, which mainly refer to descriptions and theoretical analyses, and normative ideas that consist of values and attitudes.

Building on this, we here define discourse as what governments and leading parties have ‘said’ about poverty among families, that is, (official) textual utterances containing constructions of family policies and poverty such as government programs or party programs. We thereby concentrate on official communication that is as product of political deliberation and legitimating. We do not, however, analyse the political bargaining and negotiating processes behind these documents as the aim of this paper is to get a tentative impression of the construction of poverty among families in Finland and Germany during the last twenty years. This means that we cannot describe if and how a certain idea has influenced the actual policy-making process, unless the documents contain clear references to such influences.

## 5. Changing constructions of poverty among families - Finland and Germany compared

In order to assess the (changing) construction of poverty and anti-poverty policies in relation to family policies, we studied documents released by the governments as well as the leading parties in both countries.<sup>13</sup> The government-level documents consisted of government programs (Finland)/coalition contracts (Germany) as well as NAPs from both countries (see the appendix).<sup>14</sup> The party documents consisted of election programmes and special programmes touching on families and poverty issues. The main idea was to depict how poverty among families has been constructed as a problem on the elite level in terms of documents launched by governments and parties.<sup>15</sup> Methodically, we used qualitative text

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<sup>13</sup> The Finnish party sample consisted of the four most influential parties during the actual period, both in relation to parliamentary strength and voter support (e.g. Nousiainen 1998). These are: the National Coalition (conservatives), Social Democrats, the Centre Party (rural/conservative), and the Left Alliance (red/green/left socialists). The German party sample consisted of the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) while these have formed the major power axis of German politics during the actual period (Seeleib-Kaiser et al. 2008: 9-11). Due to time considerations and sheer volume, we omitted the Green League and Christian Democrats in Finland as well as the Green Party and the Liberal Party in Germany.

<sup>14</sup> The government programs/coalition contracts cover the period from the Late-80s to present date, whereas the NAPs (National Action Plans against Poverty and Social Exclusion) originate from the 2000. The NAPs are here categorized as ‘government-level’ documents although they are in fact published by the Ministries concerned in respective countries, in Finland by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and in Germany by the *Bundesministerium für Arbeit und Soziales*. They are therefore likely to reflect views of experts and bureaucrats as much as politicians.

<sup>15</sup> Obviously, also other actors would be of interest here, for example NGOs related to family affairs, bureaucrats and expert affiliated with the civil administration (e.g. Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Family Affairs etc.), labour-market organisations, the media etc.). We were however compelled to limit the focus of this paper only to the government arena and the leading parties due to scarcity of time. Moreover, the focus on only official documents of governments and party programs only succeed to draw a superficial picture of the family-related poverty discourse and its development. However, this data material allows us to monitor the development of textual focus and space that poverty has received over time, which enables a tentative understanding of how the

analysis with a deductive approach (e.g. Hsieh and Shannon 2005) in order to grasp the occurrence and textual construction of poverty issues in relation to families (and children). After an initial reading of the text as a whole, we categorised the contents based on whether it pertained to poverty among families, target groups or policy recommendations.

The following empirical inquiry seeks to answer the following questions. First we concentrate on the construction of family-related poverty in each country, i.e. when and how have poverty issues become highlighted in governmental and partisan discourses, who is labelled as poor or being in need and why, and what should be done in order to combat poverty? Second, we concentrate on comparing the developments of poverty discourses in Finland and Germany as a way of assessing the magnitude of possible convergence over time. Thirdly we discuss possible explanations of the discursive changes.

Table 3 offers an overview of the textual space and attention that family-related poverty has received in Finnish government programs and NAPs since the 1980s. The table shows that family-related poverty, as well as poverty on a general level, was a non-issue in government documents until the Late-90s. From this point on the topic became a continuous theme with ever increasing emphasis.

The first government to officially address poverty was the second ‘rainbow’ coalition led by the Social Democrats (1999-2003). The program however only mentioned poverty in a general way by depicting as a consequence of the recession and growing unemployment during the 1990s. Families were not pinpointed as a problematic category in particular, although the text indirectly did refer to increasing social problems among families, such as social exclusion and ill-being among adolescents and children. The best remedies were believed to be higher employment, more ‘activating’ social transfer systems as well as concentrations on preventive social work and child protection. In the programs from the 2000s, by contrast, economic aspects of poverty were increasingly highlighted alongside different aspects of social exclusion, such as mental problems or alcoholism.

*Table 3. Overview of family-related poverty constructions in Finland from the 1980s to the Late-2000s ('government' level)*

	TIME PERIOD		
	1980s	1990s	2000s
<u>Gov. progr.:</u>			
Poverty:		Poverty, marginalisation (1999)	Income poverty, marginalisation (2003), economic poverty, growing inequality, ill-being and marginalisation (2007)
Target groups:		Families with children, young people (1999)	Families with children, young people, single parents (2003), families with children, young persons, adoption families, single parents (2007)
Policy measures:		EP, PSW, reform of transfers and services (1999)	EP, WFB, CHA, SPS, HCA, reform of social protection system, PIA (2003), EP, reform of the social protection system, CHA, SPS, PIA, HCA and PCA (2007)
<u>NAPS:</u>			
Poverty:			Relative income poverty, marginalisation, homelessness, over-indebtedness (2001), relative income poverty, marginalisation, need of social assistance (2003), relative income poverty, need of social assistance (2005), relative and fixed income lines, social exclusion (2006), social exclusion (2007), low income, need of social assistance, child poverty, over-indebtedness, social exclusion (2008)
Target groups:			Single parents, unemployed and over-indebted families (2001), single parents, families with many children (2003), low-income households, receivers of social assistance (2005), single parents, over-indebted families, homeless families (2006), children and young (2007), single parents, unemployed parents, children and young, over-indebted families (2008)
Policy measures:			EP, activating measures, CHA, PSW (2001), EP, CHA, SPS, HCA, PIA, activating measures, TR for housing loans, EICW (2003), HA, CMA, CDA, HCA, PSW, EICW (2006), EP, EICH (2007), PSW, EICH (2008)

Notes: EP=employment policies, PSW=preventive social work, WFB=Work/Family balance, CHA=child allowance, SPS=single parent support, HCA= home care allowance, PIA=parental insurance allowance/leave, PDA=Private day-care allowance, EICW=early intervention through child welfare, TR=tax reliefs, HA=housing allowance, CMA=child maintenance allowance, SCA=special childcare allowance, CDA=child disability allowance.

Compared to earlier programs, the programs from 2003 and 2007, now with the Centre party as leading coalition party, put more emphasis on the state of families. The economic situation of families with children, especially single-parent families was seen as alarming due to previous cuts in income transfers to families, persistent unemployment and rising food and housing costs. Also the problems of ill-being and risk of exclusion among children and youth were now highlighted. The best way of handling these problems was still believed to be

employment policies as well as more effective measures of reconciliation of the work and family spheres. The family policies of the earlier governments were seen as inconsistent and inefficient, which calls for long-term and stable policies and improvements of main transfers to families, such as raises of child allowances, single parent supports and home care allowances.

In relation to the government programs, the National action reports on poverty and social exclusion (NAPs) give a very detailed and elaborate account of the aggravated conditions of families. In the reports, poverty is constructed as a lack of material means, both relatively by contrasting poor households to the median disposable income, or by using a politically determined income line such as the entitlement to social assistance. The rapid rise in child poverty since the midst of the 90s is seen as especially alarming. Also homelessness and over-indebtedness of parents are described as an increasing form of poverty. Alongside these constructions, different types of social exclusion and ill-being are addressed.

Single parents and families with many children are pointed out as important target groups. In order to reduce poverty among these categories improvements of transfers such as the child allowance are recommended. Poverty is however also closely connected to levels of education as well as labour market status. Therefore the creation of jobs and activating unemployed parents are seen as high-priority policy measures. Beside the visibility of child poverty, the NAPs also highlight the risk of increasing child-related social problems and marginalisation among young people. The increasing number of child protection interventions is partly connected to the growing impoverishment of families, but also partly to instabilities in the family institution. Not only do families need more economic support in order to prevent child poverty from continuing to rise, there are also increasing need of early intervention in families with social problems and more effective child welfare efforts to safeguard the well-being of children.

The analysis of Finnish election programs and special programs on family and poverty tell a quite similar story about the politicisation of family poverty as government document (table 4). There is an increasing focus on the economic hardships of families over time as well as more frequent claims for public measures against poverty. There are some brief mentions of increasing economic hardships of families already in the beginning of the 1990s, but the issue

is not consolidated on the election manifesto agenda until the end of the 1990s. The first party to address this problem first was the Centre party (CEN) in its family policy program from 1998. According to the party, the groups being most exposed to poverty were single parents, families with unemployed parents and households with high housing costs.

*Table 4. Overview of family-related poverty constructions in Finland from the 1980s to the Late-2000s (party level)*

	TIME PERIOD		
	1980s	1990s	2000s
<u>Elect. progr.:</u>			
Poverty:		Weak economic situation (SDP 1990), marginalisation (SDP 1998), poverty traps (CEN 1995), increased economic uncertainty, need of social assistance (CEN 1998)	“Poverty” (SDP 2003), weak economic situation (LA 2002), low purchasing power, ill-being (CEN 2003), “poverty and marginalisation” (SDP 2006), “poverty” (LA 2006), weakening economic situation (CEN 2007)
Target groups:		The family (SDP 1990), families (SDP 1998), families with children (CEN 1995), jobless and low-income families, single parents, over-indebted, families with high housing costs (CEN 1998)	Small-income families, poorest families, single parents (SDP 2003), families (LA 2002), families with children, single parents (CEN 2003), families (SDP 2006), single parents (LA 2006), families with many children, single parents, student families, young families (CEN 2007)
Policy measures:		CHA, skip tax reliefs, PIA (SDP 1990), EP (SDP 1998), CHA (CEN 1995), TR (CEN 1997)	CHA, SPS, reform of social protection system, social services (SDP 2003), CHA, PIA, social housing (LA 2002), PIA CHA, HCA (CEN 2003), CHA, SPS (NC 2003), EP (SDP 2006), CMA (LA 2006), CHA (CEN 2007), CHA, SPS (NC 2007)
<u>Spec. progr.:</u>			
Poverty:		“Poverty traps” (NC 1994), “poverty” (LA 1999), “relative poverty, need of income support” (CEN 1998), growing inequalities between families, marginalisation, ill-being (CEN 1999)	“Poverty” (SDP 2002), relative income poverty, child poverty (LA 2002), economic poverty (CEN 2002), “poverty” (NC 2002), “poverty” (SDP 2005), increasing livelihood problems (CEN 2006), impoverished purchasing power of families (NC 2006)
Target groups:		Families with two or more children (CEN 1998), families with children, over-indebted families, children and young (CEN 1999)	Families with many children, families renting their homes, single parents (LA 2002), families with children, unemployed families, student families (CEN 2002), young and small-income families (CEN 2006), families with (many) children, single parents, adoption families (NC 2006)
Policy measures:		Overhaul of social protection system (CEN 1998), PSW, reform of financing structures (CEN 1999)	Public services (LA 2002), predictable family policy, CHA, PIA (CEN 2002), PIA, CHA, support to student families, housing and tax policies (CEN 2006), CHA, reform of day care services (NC 2006)

Notes: SDP=Social Democrats, LA=Left alliance, CEN=Centre Party, NC=National Coalition, EP=employment policies, CHA=child allowance, SPS=single parent support, PIA=parental insurance allowance, CMA=child maintenance allowance, HCA=home care allowance.

Also the problems of young families and adoption families were highlighted to some extent. In the 2000s both material and immaterial aspects of poverty were addressed by all parties; poverty was not only depicted as a lack of economic resources but also as a problem of exclusion and child-related problems. The increasing poverty was mostly seen as a consequence of the economic recession during the 1990s, but also as an outcome of more unstable labour markets, the increase of atypical jobs and unanticipated fluctuations in public policies. There are however some noticeable differences between parties as to the way that family poverty is addressed. First, parties on the left wing as well as the CEN have given poverty among families much more programmatic attention than the National Coalition (NC). From the 2003 election on, the NC programs contain claims for improvements of family transfers, but these are not related to poverty in any visible way. In fact, the few times the NC programmes address poverty, they do not describe the problem in terms of “poverty” but in terms of “incentive problems” or “poverty traps” (NC 1994) or “reduced purchasing power” (2006). To the CEN, SDP and LA, on the other hand, the problem is viewed in a more direct way, as an impoverishment of the economic situation of families, child poverty or increasing marginalisation. Second, the causes of the problem as well as the remedies to fight poverty are constructed in slightly different ways in different party programs.

To the SDP and LA poverty is mainly seen as a product of rising unemployment among parents, therefore the remedy is seen as lying in a higher employment rate and a preservation of the existing network of social services that enable parents to take up jobs. In the 2000s, however, there was a sharper contrast between the two parties as the LA also started to address poverty among families as well as child poverty in a more direct way than the SDP. To the NC and CEN, by contrast, the massive unemployment was not the only problem, nor was the problem solvable only through a social services or piecemeal improvements of social transfers to families. What was also needed was an overhaul of the whole social protection system in order to increase the incentive to take up jobs, to diminish overlapping of different transfers and to increase the overall effectiveness of the system. During the end of its period as the main opposition party (1995-2003), the CEN sharpened its criticism against the government for its cutbacks on basic family transfers as the child allowance and the home care allowance. Accordingly, when the party regained government power in 2003, it did so by demanding rapid improvements of the basic transfers to families.

Table 5 presents an overview of German government-level poverty constructions. It resembles the Finnish overview in many ways. First and foremost, we can see a similar beginning and increase of poverty-related attention in government contracts during the late-90s as in Finland. Second, the ways that family poverty is constructed resemble each other. Moreover the policy recommendations are more or less the same, save the higher emphasis that the German federal government has put on so-called ‘social investment’ strategies and child care services. The problem of family and child poverty was first addressed in the coalition contract between the SPD and the Greens in 1998. Poverty was both constructed as a problem of limited financial resources and as different forms of social exclusion. In the contract, families in general and children were portrayed as main target groups. Employment policies were seen as the best way to fight poverty. But there was also a need for improvements of tax reliefs and child allowances as well as improvements of long-term “Rahmenbedingungen” for families. In the coalition contract from 2002 much of the problem diagnosis from 1998 was still present, but there was also a stronger emphasis on work-family balance measures (such as public child care) as well as targeted measures to activate low-income parents and especially single parents to take up (low-paid) jobs through child allowance supplements (*Kinderzuschlag*).

There was also a strong focus on the role of early education as a way of equalising opportunities of children and for improving the future odds for ‘poor’ children. In the coalition contract from 2005 between the CDU and SPD, much of this rhetoric was still present. Poverty was described predominantly as income poverty, but there was also an increasing focus on marginalisation among children and young people. Alongside claims for improvements of tax reliefs for children, child allowance supplements for single parents and parental insurance (*Elterngeld*) there was also a strong standpoint in favour of an expansion the public child care rights (TAG) as well as improvement soft early education system as a means of social inclusion.

In the German NAPs family poverty in general and child poverty in particular was constructed in both relative terms and as the number of social assistance receivers. There was also a strong accentuation of immaterial aspects of poverty, such as unemployment and marginalisation, antisocial behaviour etc. As in the government documents single parents (predominantly lone mothers), families with many children were pointed out as the main target groups.

Table 5. Overview of family-related poverty constructions in Germany from the 1980s to the Late-2000s ('government' level)

	TIME PERIOD		
	1980s	1990s	2000s
<u>Gov. progr.:</u>			
Poverty:		"Poverty", child poverty, child marginalisation, increasing inequality (1998)	Economic poverty, need of social assistance (2002), economic and social problems, "poverty and marginalisation", insufficient means, material child poverty, poverty risk (2005)
Target groups:		Children, families (with children), single parents, families with disabled and dependent members (1998)	Families (with children), children, (single) parents, (2002), families (with children), (single) parents, low-income or unemployed parents, families "under risk", children, young people (2005)
Policy measures:		EP, TR, CHA, PIA, "bessere Rahmenbedingungen", poverty reports (1998)	EP, WFB, CCS, EE, TR, HA, SH/HP, tax reform (2002), EP, TR, PIA, CHA supplement (Kinderzulage), HP, free last year in Kindergarten, activation of unemployed parents, WFB, CCS, EE (2005)
<u>NAPS:</u>			
Poverty:			Relative income poverty, need of social assistance, social exclusion (2001), relative income poverty (risk), need of social assistance, social exclusion, child poverty (2003), income poverty, social exclusion, child poverty, need of social assistance (2006), income poverty, child poverty, social exclusion, social disadvantages (2008)
Target groups:			Single parents, families with many children, women, children, young people (2001), families with (many) children, women, unemployed parents, single parents, immigrant families, "precarious" families (2003), children, women, single parents, families (with low incomes), families with social risks, young people (2006), single parents, children, women, parents, unemployed households, uneducated low-income households (2008)
Policy measures:			EP (women), part-time employment, EE, CHA for poor families (Mainz model), CHA (2001), EP (women), activation, WFB, CCS (TAG), HCA ("Bavarian" model), EE, SW, "child bonus", TR, family-friendly infrastructure" (2003), EP, EE, WFB, CCS, PIA, TR, SW, EICH (2006), family-friendly work, WFB, CCS, EP, good infrastructure of care and assistance, targeted financial assistance, EE, childcare allowance (2008)

Notes: EP=employment policies, WFB=work/family balance, CHA=child allowance, HCA= home care allowance, PIA=parental insurance allowance/leave, TR=tax reliefs, HA=housing allowance, SH= social housing, HP=housing policies, CCS=child care services, EE= early education, SW=social work, EICW=early intervention through child welfare.

Moreover, families living in precarious situations, being under the risk of marginalisation were depicted as particularly vulnerable. The policy repertoire recommended to curb poverty consisted, as was the case in the government programs, primarily of employment policies and

work/family reconciliation measures in order to facilitate work among parents (especially women). But also a variety of income transfer improvements were put forward, such as higher tax reliefs. What is interesting to note both in the German government programs and NAPs is the strong claim for an expansion of child care services and the strong accentuation of early education as a levelling spring board for children from “disadvantaged” families.

Also the documents analysed on the party level reveal a successive increase of focus on poverty among families (see table 6). In the party programs from the 1980s poverty relating to families was more or less ignored. The SPD regarded unemployment as a condition that creates new poverty but there was no direct link to poverty and families. The only direct statement was that in times of economic recession and bad financial situation there should be a primacy of supporting families with low income (SPD 1983), indicating that poverty was constructed more in terms of unfair distribution than a problem of financial deprivation. Although the Christian Democrats raised the “new social question” and demanded targeted measures to the ‘really needy’, there was no direct link to poverty among families, save the portraying of single mothers and families risk groups (CDU 1983, 1978). In effect, main line of argumentation in both parties related more to social justice between different population groups than to poverty as such. In this way family measures are thought to decrease the special burden of families with children. Moreover, family poverty was first and foremost seen as an aspect of the wider question of gender equality and the position of mothers within the traditional German male-breadwinner model.<sup>16</sup>

During the 1990s and the 2000s the SPD addressed poverty issues in their election manifestos to a somewhat higher degree than the CDU. In 1994 children were recognized as a poverty risks and continuous national reports on poverty were demanded (SPD 1994). Poverty was predominantly described as lack of financial means or shortage of proper housing. Families with (many) children and single parents were pointed out as main target groups by both parties.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> An important point of discussion was the old age poverty of women and the recognition of care-work in the pension systems. Especially the CDU aimed at a better recognition of family and caring work in the social insurance system.

<sup>17</sup> One topic that is present all the time is the question of adequate housing. Although families, especially lone parents and families with many children, are portrayed as main target groups, no special measures for these groups are mentioned and the policy claims are targeted at the whole population as well as families with no financial problems. This suggests that the aspect of horizontal justice is placed in the foreground whereas questions of vertical justice receive only marginal attention.

*Table 6. Overview of family-related poverty constructions in Germany from the 1980s to the Late-2000s (party level)*

	TIME PERIOD		
	1980s	1990s	2000s
<u>Elect. Progr.:</u>			
Poverty:	Low income (SPD 1983), “real need“ (CDU 1983)	Shortages of decent housing (SPD 1990), children as poverty risks, “degrading” living conditions (SPD 1994), “low-income” (CDU 1994), “poverty”, unacceptable financial burdens” (SPD 1998)	Family and child poverty (SPD 2002), need of social assistance, lack of affordable housing (CDU 2002), Child and family poverty, poverty risks (SPD 2005), family and child poverty, need of social assistance, social exclusion (SPD 2009), need of social assistance (CDU 2009)
Target groups:	Low-income families, pupils/students (SPD 1983), “the really needy (families)”, care-givers in the family (CDU 1983)	Single parents, families with children, young families (SPD 1990), low-income families, families with many children, single parents (SPD 1994), low-income families, families with many children, single parents (CDU 1994), families, children, parents, care-givers in the family (SPD 1998)	Families (with children), children, mothers (SPD 2002), families (with children) (CDU 2002), families with children, (single) parents (SPD 2005), families (with children), low-income families, single parents, children and young persons (SPD 2009), families with (many children), single parents (CDU 2009)
Policy measures:	Education assistance (Bafög) (SPD 1983), TR, Erziehungsgeld, pension entitlement for care-givers, (CDU 1983)	EP/shortening of working time, HP/SH, CHA, CCS (SPD 1990), CHA, HP, poverty reports (SPD 1994), EP (part-time, women), TR, WFB, HP (CDU 1994), pension entitlement for care-givers, CHA, CCS/WFB, PIA, poverty report (SPD 1998)	TR, EE, EP (low-income jobs), WFB, CCS, CHA supplements (Kindergeldzuschlag) (SPD 2002), Family benefit (Familiengeld), SH/HP (CDU 2002), EE, CCS, WFB, EP (women), PIA, refinement of CHA supplement (Kinderzuschlag) (SPD 2005), HA, EE, TR, EP, WFB, CCS, CMA (SPD 2009), EP (women), EE, PIA, CCS, CHA, CHA supplement, TR, HCA (CDU 2009)
<u>Spec. progr.:</u>			
Poverty:		Need of social assistance, restricted life chances of children, inadequate housing (CDU 1999)	Child and family poverty, loss of life chances/social exclusion (SPD 2006), poverty risk (SPD 2007), economic child poverty, inadequate life standards, social exclusion, restriction of life chances (CDU 2007)
Target groups:		Families with children, single parents (CDU 1999)	Single mothers, children (SPD 2006), single mothers, children, mothers, working parents with low income (SPD 2007), low-educated parents, single parents, families with many children, young persons (CDU 2007)
Policy measures:		CCS, CMA, HP (CDU 1999)	EE, EP, CCS, PSW, “qualification “, “investments in infrastructure and targeted measures” (SPD 2006), “new family policy”, EP (mothers), CCS, “care infrastructure and time politics”, EE, PIA, targeted measures (PSD 2007), EP, EE, PSW, CCS (CDU 2007)

Notes: SPD=Social Democrats, CDU=Christian Democrats, EP=employment policies, CHA=child allowance, SPS=single parent support, PIA=parental insurance allowance, CMA=child maintenance allowance, HCA=home care allowance, PSW=preventive social work.

Similar to the discourse in the 1980s, though, the party discourse on families in the 1990s focussed mostly on the question of social justice, especially the just distribution of burdens between families with children and childless families. Accordingly, improvements of child benefits and child tax credits were high on the agenda. This changed at the end of the century when an activation strategy came at the forefront, especially within the Social Democratic party (SPD 1998). In line with this, parents were expected to take up low-paid work at the same time as a higher employment rate of women became one of the most important political aims (SPD 2002). A child supplement allowance (*Kinderzuschlag*) was recommended for parents with low earnings as this was believed to create work incentives for single mothers (SPD 2002). In the following years the Social Democrats regarded unemployment and low-income of parents as the main reasons for family and child poverty. Poverty was increasingly constructed also in immaterial terms beside definitions of income poverty, for example poverty was described as unequal opportunities, health problems and social exclusion that could endanger the development of children. A shift towards to children and their future developments can thus be observed in the party programs from the 2000s, since there is an increasing emphasis on improvements of child care infrastructures and early education. Also the chance of improving work possibilities of mothers is closely linked to this issue. As a consequence of the idea that employment is the best protection against poverty, targeted support for single parents in finding jobs is placed in the centre, but also the strengthening of incentives for parents to take up employment are accentuated (SPD 2005, 2009).

In their election programs the Christian Democrats retained much of their traditional argumentations referring to adequate recognition of care work and horizontal equity among different family types, but in their special programs they recognize poverty in a more complex way and (like the Social Democrats) display lone parents, people with low education and, unemployed parents as the main targets groups. Poverty is not only seen as material poverty but also as the absence of opportunities and participation in social life. Like the Social Democrats, a strong focus is put on early education as a means to prevent poverty (CDU 2007). But in contrast to the Social Democrats this discourse is not at the centre of the CDU programs as can be seen in the election program 2009 and the basic program 2007. Regarding the direction of family policy the Christian Democrats are divided and only some general

remarks are made in the newer programs.<sup>18</sup> On the whole, however, there does not seem to be any decisive ideological differences between the two parties, regardless of whether we speak of election programs or special programs. Both parties seem to address the question of family poverty in a rather similar way, albeit some differences in pronunciations. For example the SPD tend to advocate targeted poverty measures for working parents, such as the *Kinderzuschlag*, and activating policies to mothers and especially single mothers to a higher extent than the CDU. The CDU, by contrast, is unique with its idea of a family benefit (*Familiengeld*) (CDU 2002) that implicitly seeks to safeguard the traditional family institution by claiming more extensive transfers to families with many children. By large, though, there is an increasing emphasis on extended child care rights in the programs of both parties as well as a strong pronouncement of the role of early education and other educational measures for the future life chances of children. The gainful employment of parents with small children is also put forward as ways to combat poverty by both parties.

### **Summary and discussion**

The aim of this paper was to contribute to the understanding of recent family policy developments in Finland and Germany by scrutinising how family-related poverty, target groups and policy recommendations have been constructed on an elite level since the 1980s. On the basis of the findings some tentative conclusions can be made. First, family poverty constructions on the political elite level seem to come in three main ways: as constructions of relative income poverty, as poverty related to some politically defined or absolute criteria or as some form of social exclusion. According to the first, a household with an equivalised disposable income under 40, 50 or 60 percent of the median household is defined as poor. The second define poverty on the basis of whether or not the members of a household receive social assistance. It can also imply lack of financial means to afford decent housing or over-indebtedness etc. The third construction implies a varying set of situations or problems whereby families, parents or children have been or are under the risk of being excluded from such life arenas that can be seen as normal element of the life style of that particular society.

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<sup>18</sup> Although the data analysed for this paper does not reveal any internal division of the Christian Democrats regarding the future and present direction of the family, expert interviews conducted within another project (not reported here) suggest that the question of child care caused some friction within the CDU camp. Especially the position of women groups within the CDU as well as the family minister (Ursula von der Leyen) in the current cabinet is opposed to some traditional groups of Christian Democrats mainly in the south of Germany. Especially the notion of a child care benefit that is laid down in the last party manifesto (CDU 2007) became a reason for heated debate and caused conflict.

As for target groups, single parents, families with many children, and households with unemployed or low-educated parents have been increasingly viewed as the main risk groups in both countries. There is also an increasing focus on children as policy objects, both in terms of income poverty and in terms of ill-being. Especially in Finland, the recent increase of public child protection interventions has brought with it new and ‘policing’ discourses on governance within child protection, social work and youth services (e.g. Harrikari and Satka 2006). As to the recommended policy measures recommended by Finnish and German political elites, the analysed documents contain a spectre of different policy recommendations from targeted measures to day care services for children and investments in early education. In both countries a stronger pronouncement of so-called employment measures (containing also elements of a ‘servicing’ strategy in Germany) can be detected over time, while measures that relate to an ‘investment’ strategy or a ‘transfer’ strategy seem to be more visible in Germany than in Finland.

Second, the analysis shows that family related poverty did not become a political theme in Finland until the late 1990s, whereas some first notions of poverty relating to families were present in the German debate already in the 1980s. These early manifestations however drew attention to the need of targeted measures to families with low income (SPD 1983) or the really needy (CDU 1983) without explicitly addressing poverty as such. Consequently they can be said to reflect wider concerns for social justice rather than specific poverty constructions. In both countries the poverty debate has grown considerably over the years, both as government-level documents and party documents are concerned. In Germany, however, much of the 1980s debate concentrated on old-style poverty issues pertaining to the question of women’s position within the traditional male-breadwinner institution and the question of pension entitlements for care-givers. Compared to the CDU, the SPD has addressed the question of deprivation among families in a somewhat more frequent way. In Finland the political debate on family poverty became especially lively in the 2000s as it was noticed that the incomes of families had become polarized and that the share of families with incomes under the poverty threshold had nearly tripled since the Mid1990s (ct Moisio 2006; Kuivalainen et al. 2005). This caught the interest of most parties.<sup>19</sup> The problem was addressed most frequently in the programs of the Centre party and Left Alliance and

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the economic deprivation of children and families has received a wider political attention in Finland than for example the poverty of single persons or elderly retired singles, although the risk of poverty among families with children has been demonstrated to be lower than among these groups (STM 2003, 94).

somewhat lesser in the programs of SDP. In the programs of the National Coalition, family poverty received only scant attention, other than indirect and general mentions about the economic situation of families. On the whole, however, it seems that family poverty has received somewhat more attention in Germany than in Finland, which is interesting considering the fact that there was no ‘official’ poverty problem or poverty discourse in Germany until the end of the 1990s due to effective social insurance systems that allegedly prevented extreme material poverty from emerging (Kröger 2007).<sup>20</sup>

By the end of the twentieth century poverty had thus become a firm element of elite family policy discourses in both countries. Moreover, and as a consequence of this, the conceptualisations of what should be done for families had also undergone clear changes as the emphasis of so-called employment strategies and the accentuation of targeted measures to families had become stronger. To what extent, then, can these developments be regarded as paradigmatic shifts and to what is the influence of dominant ideas? In the Finnish case, we can detect an increase of the number of claims for targeted measures to poor or needy families, such as support for single parents, targeted raises of child allowances (the first child or the third child) or preventive measures within child protection. This does not however provide evidence for a shift to a ‘liberal’ family policy paradigm with predominantly targeted and selective social rights, since there remains a clear rhetorical embracement of the ‘Nordic model’ with its extensive (and predominantly universal) income transfers to families and a wide range of publicly financed social services. Moreover, the targeted measures implemented so far has not changed the institutional setting of Finnish family policies by redefining universal welfare entitlements to families, although this could very well become the case in the future.

As to the possible influence of ‘employment/servicing’ or ‘social investment’ ideas on the Finnish document, the data offers an equivocal picture. It shows no visible increase of ‘social investment’ ideas, although the pre-school and primary education systems are viewed as having beneficial outcomes for children’s future life chances. There is also strong governmental accentuation of the role of the “knowledge society” for future growth and international competitiveness, but these claims are not related to family policies or poverty

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<sup>20</sup>This can also perhaps explain why policy measures like higher benefits and tax credits to families with children and single parents have been favoured. because the German insurance system does not consider many children and caring parents so special measure are needed for this group and to ensure a horizontal justice.

issues in any visible way. The possible impact of ‘employment strategy’ ideas is also hard to evaluate. On the one hand, there is undoubtedly a strong and increasing emphasis on employment policies as well as measures aiming at the facilitation of parents’ paid work, but on the other hand this is hardly something new in Finnish social policy. A high employment rate among both women and men, alongside an extensive network of public day-care services have been trademarks for Finland since the 1970s and have been an important prerequisite for economic sustainability and well-being (ct Saari 2006; Anttonen and Sipilä 2000; Kosonen 1998). Nevertheless, the increasing accentuation on employment policies and work-family balance since the 1990s in combination with the incidence of policy claims for targeted measures can perhaps be interpreted as a consolidation of ideas pertaining to the virtue of gainful employment deriving from the European Employment Strategy and the OMC process. Although there are no explicitly references to the EES or other influential policy sources, the Finnish government-level policy recommendations and problem constructions bear a clear resemblance to the EES objectives and recommendations deriving from the OECD (see OECD 2007), especially as far as the discursive constructions and legitimating of work/family balance is concerned (ct. Kosonen 2004). Higher employment is also widely legitimated by referring to the need for future economic sustainability, state financial prudence and competitiveness of the welfare state. The conclusion that influential ideas referring to the employment/servicing strategy has been consolidated within the Finnish elite discourse and that this has started to question, and possibly also crowd out, the traditional discourses on family policies thus not seem to be so farfetched (ct Nygård 2007).

A paradigmatic shift in this respect seems to be more closely at hand in the German case. This is especially true when discussing the employment/servicing strategy. Accordingly, measures intended to raise the employment level among (unemployed) parents as well as providing targeted support to ‘needy’ families outside the labour market are seen as the principal remedy for poverty. Not only do our data show a clear increase of employment-related claims since the 1990s, also the recent policy development in Germany, such as the extension of child day care rights, support the conclusion that a new policy paradigm is present in family policy. This paradigm is closely connected to the notion of targeted measures to poor, as illustrated by the *Kinderzuschlag*. By reading the German coalition contracts and notably the NAPs, it also becomes quite clear that the policy objectives of the EES correlate with the ways that poverty problems, target groups and policy solutions are constructed discursively on the political elite level. There is also an increase of claims for targeted measures, but these

seem to constitute elements of a wider employment/servicing strategy rather than freestanding entities which hardly qualify for any paradigmatic changes. Nevertheless, 'liberal' notions of social justice and poverty seems to fit neatly into the employment/servicing strategy construction upheld by the EU and the EES; not only is the way of defining poverty in relative ways an implicit normative manifestation of the principle that a 'poor' household's financial resources should not be unacceptably lower than the median income of all households, it also serves as an inducement for governments to pursue policies that aims at ensuring an adequate income among the poorest of families (Sallila 2009). This kind of 'Rawlsian' notion of equality ensures that those in the residual also benefits from an overall increase of income, while at the same time refraining from pursuing far-reaching egalitarian ambitions as to the horizontal or vertical income distribution among families (ct Kangas 2000). Thus, put bluntly, if the bulk of families can get an acceptable income from work, the welfare efforts of government can be concentrated on targeted support to poor families outside of the market.

Alongside the increasing susceptibility to employment-related ideas, the German government as well as the leading German parties have also embraced ideas pertaining to social investments in a much higher degree than their Finnish counterparts. This notion of family-related equality, according to which the *Kindergarten* system alongside the primary education system can serve as a 'social ladder' for children from poor or disadvantaged homes and thereby provide future equality in terms of opportunities, has a strong position in government programs, NAPs as well as party programs. In Finland, by contrast, with its long tradition of free education, this topic is hardly visible at all.

Thus, judging from the vocabulary and argumentations used in the analysed documents, an impact of ideas related to the EES and the OMC process does not seem too unlikely. Although some authors consider the actual impact of the EES on the German policy development to be trifling (e.g. Fleckenstein 2006), others are convinced that these kinds of influential frameworks do influence national policy discourses (e.g. Salais 2007: 371). For example, the OMC can play a pivotal role because of its monitoring system and the ongoing processes of meetings and discussions with its "development of a common vocabulary and cognitive framework for understanding and describing the labour market" (Jacobsson 2004: 90). Not only can these "technologies of performance" create a system of surveillance and common understandings, they also create a hegemonic discourse that member states are likely to internalise (Jacobson 2004: 93). This does not mean that similar ideas have to similar

outcomes. Rather ideas should be seen as forces of change, whereas their outcomes are contingent or shaped by institutionalised policy legacies (Schmidt 2008; Hudson et al. 2008). Similarly, decision makers can act on such ideas, intentionally or non-intentionally, by bringing about policies and policy outcomes that are consistent with the idea, irrespective or irrespective of its correspondence with reality (Hay and Rosamond 2002: 148).<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the EES can be said to provide dominant discourse on how well-being should be achieved, a discourse that is transferred to member states and implemented on their family policies (ct. Hulme 2005; Christensen 2006; Dolowitz et al. 2000). But it is, admittedly, equally possible that different constructive imperatives can originate from elsewhere; for example it is conceivable that countries adopt ‘best practices’ or policy experiences from ‘model’ countries (ct Kvist and Saari 2007: 242-244; Börzel 2005). An example of such a policy transfer could be the transfer of so-called work/family balance policies from Nordic countries to continental welfare states (ct Leitner and Wroblewski 2006). Hence EU member states are to be understood as actors in a wider policy and learning network, with their own history, legacies and political importance. Consequently, they both influence and are influenced by other actors through mutual and continuing processes of interactions.

Finally, what can be said about the relation between the family-poverty discourses in Finland and Germany over time? Have they developed in distinct, path-dependent and country-specific ways or has there been a growing convergence over time? Although the constructions of family poverty are strongly influenced by country-specific structural and policy changes and conditioned by regime-specific institutional as well as cultural settings, there is little doubt that policy processes taking place on the EU level, such as the EES, the Lisbon Strategy and the OMC, influences national policy actors by offering a uniform epistemological frame and a platform for discussing common problems such as globalisation, demographic changes or notions of social justice and poverty (ct Kvist and Saari 2007; Kröger 2007). Ideas such as the primacy of paid employment over transfer strategies, ‘Rawlsian’ conceptualisations of social justice as well as policy recommendations appealing to financial prudence, cost containment and competitiveness of welfare states have thus ‘come to provide a cognitive filter, frame, conceptual lens or paradigm through which social, political and economic

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<sup>21</sup> This means that the degree of veracity of a certain idea or policy recommendation is not the only factor determining the receptiveness of such ideas, another important factor is the degree by which politicians believe these ideas to be true, or if it is in their strategic interest to present them as true. Consequently, the question of intentionality is essential here; influential ideas on family policies and the role of anti-poverty measures can thus have a filtering or an impregnating effect on national politicians bringing about a behaviour substantiating evidence for such ideas and, indeed, attributing to an indication of the inevitability of such policy developments.

developments might be ordered and rendered intelligible' (Hay and Rosamond 2002: 151). The results thus tend to offer some tentative support for the conclusion that both Finnish and German discourses on family policies in general, and family-poverty in particular, have been strongly influenced by the idea of family policy as a productive factor. Allegedly, family policy is no end in itself, rather it is subordinated to the general aims of growth, competitiveness and sustainability by focussing more squarely on employment promotion of parents than social rights (cf Nilssen 2006; Lewis 2006). On the basis of the registered similarity in discursive framing or employment/servicing strategies as the first and foremost recipe against poverty, we can therefore conclude that there are signs of increasing discursive convergence over time. This convergence relates primarily to the way that family poverty is perceived and policy solutions are evaluated. The actual problem constructions on the other hand are still very much characterised and conditioned by country-specific developments and welfare-institutional factors. The family-poverty discourses thus seem to be firmly rooted in national welfare state settings although the trajectories of such discourses seem to point in a similar direction.

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## Appendix - analysed documents

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