

Is the access to activation programs still gendered? Welfare recipients and public employment services from 2008 to 2019

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Welfare states tend to reproduce gendered patterns despite gender mainstreaming and policymakers' effort to institutionalize an adult-worker model (e.g., Hook, 2010; Lewis, 2001). As in other welfare states, recipients of welfare benefits in Germany can (or must) participate in "activation" programs to improve their chances of finding employment. While activation policies have usually been studied from an androcentric perspective (Kowalewska, 2016), a few studies have focused on women's participation in programs. Kopf and Zabel (2017) found that women's access to programs was far lower than men's access during the late 2000s. This reflects a rather traditional work division within households, where women are not as available for job search as men due to childcare responsibilities, and that public employment services (PES) do not promote much labor-force participation among women (Knize, 2022). Thus far, however, we do not know whether participation in activation programs has changed over the last years amid normative changes in gender roles (e.g., Preisner et al., 2020) and the rise of individualistic policies. This paper attempts to fill this research gap investigating whether, how, and why program participation in Germany changed from 2008 to 2019. Although at first sight the gender gap in program participation seems to have remained unchanged, preliminary findings show that the gap has actually declined when excluding refugees (a high number of whom arrived in Germany in 2015).

Because women's reduced program participation translates into lower chances of (re)training and employment for them, a real decline in the gender program participation gap would be an advancement toward gender equity. I shed light on whether the change is due to quantitative changes in welfare recipients (e.g., since mothers are less likely to participate in programs, women's participation would increase if relatively fewer mothers collected benefits than non-mothers) or due to qualitative changes. Are today's parents of young children more gender egalitarian than in the late 2000s, meaning that being available for job search is no longer as gendered? Are PES more gender egalitarian in what they promote? I consider the dimensions family and individual as well as PES. As for the programs, I selected training programs because they are product of high social investment.

Empirically, this study consists of two parts. First, I focus on the family and individual dimension. I draw an inflow sample from administrative data from the Federal Employment Agency every year from 2008 to 2017 and apply a non-linear decomposition analysis and linear probability models (Mood, 2010) on each year to analyze program participation within the two following years. These methods help assess whether the gap changed due to compositional changes in welfare recipients and how different factors have affected participation over time. To deepen understanding of normative change, I include regional indicators of gender-role attitudes from the German Socio-Economic Panel. Second, I study the PES dimension. Using a novel dataset containing aggregate data from job centers, I investigate whether changes within job centers and on the regional level affect women's inflow into activation programs with fixed effects. Ultimately, this paper studies whether gender is becoming less definitive in the welfare state.