

The impact of family policies in europe. A reflection on the need to approach work-family balance policies from a family perspective.

Marta Ortega-Gaspar (University of Málaga); Ana María López Narbona (University of Málaga)

In modern societies it has been noted that quite often families find it really difficult to carry out their expected tasks, such as dedicating sufficient time to the upbringing and education of their children, caring for sick or dependent relatives, or simply building a space for coexistence that allows them to live an interpersonal and intergenerational lifestyle of solidarity. Families perform essential social functions for which there is no substitute or functional equivalent. Families continue to bear the primary responsibility for the care and socialization of children and the transmission of the values of citizenship and sense of belonging to a community. It is the family that provides the primary material and non-material care and support to its members. But families are not alone in this responsibility. The theoretical reasoning must consider that policies oriented toward family life engage with highly complex phenomena -moral, economic, political, and social (Daly, 2023, 699). In this sense it is very important to take the whole picture in consideration when analysing Family Policy.

Unprecedented changes are taking place in European societies, affecting different aspects of family life: living arrangements, the rhythms and circumstances in the formation of households, the negotiation of the distribution of tasks by gender and generations, decisions regarding offspring - whether or not to have children, when and how many, as well as strategies for their care and education - and, in relation to the care of elderly or dependent relatives. In the specific case of Southern European countries, it should be added to this scenario an excessively low birth rates and a growing process of population ageing.

In this context of constant change and great uncertainty, Reconciliation Policies should be at the “core” of social/family policies as they will serve as a guide and contribute to balance. They affect children, adults, and old adults, in that sense it is important to keep in mind that it affects the individual and the family in their different stages of the life cycle.

The main aim of this paper is to offer a reflection about the different EU policy practices as a support in relation to work-family balance. In order to achieve this goal, firstly, it has been developed a descriptive analysis of the families/parent's current situation through some Second Demography Transition and Work-Family Policies in Europe. Secondly, it has been presented an approach to the interest of thinking on Work-Family Life Balance Policies in the framework of the Second Demography Transition. Thirdly, it has been made a reflection about Work/Family Life Balance Policies aims

evolution. Fourth, an approach to Family Policy impact has been offered with a special reference to the case of South Europe countries. Finally, some Best Family Policy Practices has been analysed with a special reference to the pioneer cases of Italy.

This work allows us to observe the objectives and values that have inspired the European Conciliation Policies in recent years in a way that have been promoting individuals as the focus of inspirations and units of analysis and, a mean to reach other structural objectives such as a higher GDP, a higher level of employment of both sexes, a higher level of gender equality,...) or promoting families as the first agencies providing essential needs. It has been observed that the former has been the predominant way of acting and the latter seems to be a new tendency.

Based on the data related to the government support through Work-Family (w-f) policies and the socio-familiar indicators (SDT) it is offered a reflection about the position place to family by W-F Balance Policies in Europe and their impact on family institution. In sum, this contribution offers a reflection about Work-Family Policies in Europe in the context of the Second Demography transition from a comparative perspective with a special focus on Southern European countries, Italy and Spain.