

## **Family Policy**

### **1. Concepts & Goals of Family Policy**

- Concept: Policies by which state provision affects the situation and role of the family as an economic and social institution, and/or well-being, relationships and roles within families
  - Basically, it means intervention on family lives through financial support, services or regulations to change their norms and behaviours
  - Direct policies: Cash benefits or tax credits for children/parents, childcare, child protection (from abuse, etc...), parental leave
  - Intervention on domestic violence, China's one-child policy
  - Implicit or indirect policy: employment support, anti-poverty policy, childcare credits in public pension entitlement
- Origins & motivations: dates back to late 19c & early 20c Europe
  - Improving health & well-being of children & families (Children Act & UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)
  - Financial support for families with children
  - Maternal health, population reproduction & fertility concerns (France)
- New concerns: monitoring and policing gender relations & family norms or behaviours (e.g., fathers' involvement in family life), supporting families against new social risks (benefits & services), raising female employment, fertility rates (Eastern Europe, Asia)

### **2. Policy Instruments & International Variations**

- Classic family policy: cash benefits & taxation, mainly financial support
- Modern policies: measures for children's rights & well-being, parental leave from employment (paid & unpaid), family-friendly employment measures (work hour limits/flexibility, remote working)
- Last 20 years (from early 21c): extensive expansions of family policies across high-income countries in Europe & Asia

- Child Benefits & tax credits: financial support for families with children, the oldest family policy (from early 20c), become more generous over time
  - Universal benefit (Nordic countries, UK, Ireland, Canada)
  - Child tax credits (work-based): USA, Germany
  - Employment-based subsidies: Austria, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy
  - Income tested: universal credit, child tax credits
  - Generosity (benefit level) varies hugely across countries
  - Reduces child poverty & improve family well-being, but potentially reproduce existing gender relations (“cash for care”)
  - Does not consider within-household power dynamics
- Family-related leave: maternity leave is the traditional policy, expanded to parental leave, now paternity leave & father’s parental leave
  - Duration & income replacement rate (financial compensation) matters
  - Varies hugely across countries & over time (recent expansions)
  - ‘Daddy quota’ in Nordic countries (certain shares have to be used by fathers) to address gender inequality in work and childcare → promotes dual-earner-carer model
  - UK Shared Parental Leave (since 2014) → failure to address gender inequality (Atkinson, 2017): no period reserved only for fathers, low compensation while on leave, employer has a veto on discontinuous periods of leave → low take-up rate among fathers
  - Sufficient financial compensation and workplace gender norms supporting fathers taking parental leave is crucial (Kaufman 2018)
  - It’s impact on women’s employment maintenance is contested (too long parental leave have a negative effect)
- Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC): preschool education & childcare services for children below 3 or 5 years of age
  - Services can be public or private (with subsidies or price regulation)
  - Childcare vouchers in the UK (support purchasing care services)
  - Public spending and enrolment rates varies across countries
  - Expansions in the last 20-30 years (convergence across countries)

- Impact on child development, educational inequality, well-being, women's employment, family finance...
- Regimes of family policy (Daly 2010): Nordic, Mediterranean, liberal, continental Europe (but France, Belgium vs. Germany, Austria)
  - French model: pro family & pro-natalist, supporting families as basic social entities, generous in both financial support & childcare services
  - Mediterranean/German: strong male-breadwinner/female-homemaker model, selective support to families, principle of subsidiarity (state support should not undermine the functioning of family) → but massive change in Germany since 2000: parental leave & childcare expansion
  - Nordic model: employment support for both parents, high quality public childcare services, principle of individual independence & autonomy
  - Liberal model: UK, US, Australia – focus on anti-poverty, family policy conventionally underdeveloped, market-based childcare provision, emphasis on independence & autonomy

### **3. Actors & Politics of Family Policy**

- Main actors: states/governments, social partners (unions & employers), charities & churches, civil society, family associations, feminists/activists
- Recent convergence of work-family policies across welfare states
  - Expansion of childcare, child benefits, paid parental and maternity leaves since the late 1990s (Fleckenstein & Lee 2014; Morgan 2013)
  - Work-family reconciliation, promotion of female employment → convergence to the Nordic model?
  - Significance of women in political parties, women's policy preferences towards supporting labour force participation and balancing work and family → women as new "power resource" (Morgan 2013)
  - Party competition in latecomer countries (Fleckenstein & Lee 2014)
- Politics of 'social investment': New Labour's explicit commitment to ECEC services and Sure Start (Third Way)
  - response to new social risks (Wincott 2006)

- investment in (cost-effective) future human capital (than well-being)
- lifting mothers out of poverty by making them work (Lister 2006)
- Also divergence between countries: low-income targeting in the UK, more universal policy expansions in Germany
  - Differences in business support (Fleckenstein & Seleib-Kaiser 2011): British employers seeking low-skilled female workforce

#### 4. Family Policy in the UK

- Main characteristics
  - Cash support and tax credits prioritised: child tax credits (CTC), working tax credits (WTC)
  - Insufficient childcare & elderly care services: private actors dominate, high childcare costs
  - Tax system indifferent to families (individualised income tax)
  - Gendered assumptions and perceptions in work-family law (Busby & Weldon-Johns 2019): Little encouragement or incentives for father's involvement in family life
- New Labour: child-centred social investment state → supporting & promoting working parents & responsible parenting
  - Generous tax credits for families (working tax credits for parents, child tax credits), increased child benefit
  - Policy aims to eradicate child poverty – low-income families received additional income support
  - Child trust funds and educational maintenance allowance (aiming to support low-income young people aged 16-18)
  - Early childhood intervention (Sure Start, Maternity Grant, Children's Centres)
  - Introduced unpaid parental leave (13 week), increased maternity leave allowance & duration, introduced two-weeks paternity leave & pay
  - Right to request flexible working for parents (but not guaranteed)

- Massive expansion of childcare and other family services (universal childcare guarantees), subsidizing about 80% of childcare costs
- But the UK family policy model did not change fundamentally – market-oriented, employment-centred, promoting individual autonomy, strong elements of targeting, not intervening on gender norms (Daly 2010)
- Coalition/Conservative Government: austerity and cutbacks
  - Reductions in income support for children and families
  - Focus on targeting low-income families: Child Tax Credit became eligible only for household incomes under 40,000, Working Tax Credit also restricted access
  - Infant payment withdrawn, child benefits made taxable & frozen
  - Reduced funding for children's services (local Children's Centres)
  - Still committed to early childhood education and care, but focus shifted from child development to mothers' employment (Lewis & West 2017)
  - Free childcare for 15 hours p.w. for 3-4 year olds, 30 hours for disadvantaged & disadvantaged 2 year olds
  - Encourages the entry of cheaper childcare (marketised) services
  - Two-child for family payments in Universal Credit
  - Parental leave amended (unpaid, 18 weeks), and paternity leave introduced (paid flat-rate, 1-2 weeks), also shared parental leaves