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Care-Work Arrangements of Parents in the Context of Family Policies and Extra-familial Childcare Provision in Switzerland

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Introduction

In recent years significant transformations and changes in the social and political economy of care have taken place in Switzerland (compare RR1). During the first decades after the Second World War Switzerland had rates of public expenditure for social protection (compared to GDP) similar to those of the United States (see figure 2.3 in RR1). Since the 1980s these rates have approached those of EU-countries (see figure 2.3 in RR1). However compared to EU-countries, Switzerland still has low public expenditure on families with children (see figure 3.1 in RR1). Recently, there has been increased political and public debates on family related issues, such as maternity insurance, public expenditure on childcare, balance of family life with professional careers of women and on the situation of working poor parents and lone parent families. The aim of this study is to examine the specific characteristics and changes in the political and social economy of care with regard to families and childcare in a country with a high standard of living.

In the first part of this report we present a brief overview of family policy on a national level and raise the question of how the perception of childcare and family has shifted in recent years. The intense, and at times conflicting public and political discussion and the introduction of different programmes and measures will be documented. Special attention will be given to the public discourses and political debates that underlie structural and institutional changes and policy shifts. The second part introduces extra-familial facilities (and individual services) that provide childcare. After a brief explanation of the Swiss childcare system (pre- and afterschool facilities compared to educational institutions), it investigates the supply, costs and shortcomings of childcare facilities. Then, it highlights an interesting aspect: current debates and (economic) studies focus mainly on cost-benefit analysis of public expenditure on childcare facilities, while questions of gender equality and social justice are rarely included in these approaches. In the third part, we investigate the work-care arrangements available for parents. It explores the different and multiple ways families and particularly women organise the care of their children. It addresses the question of how gender asymmetries in distribution of paid and unpaid work and gendered care/work biographies – as documented and established in RR2 – can be further explained. We will show that most existing studies investigate the role of family policy and childcare facilities in easing the time burden on families and the decision for paid and/or unpaid work particularly of mothers. Attention will be given to the role of economic and class factors (consequences of financial restrictions for care duties etc.). Other studies focus on gendered norms and negotiation processes within families and/or labour market factors (see also RR2). The third part also briefly discusses whether new paid jobs in the (informal) care sector are created in light of increasing numbers of working mothers (also compare RR2). Finally, care factors are linked to the risk of poverty, which particularly affects lone parents.

The report is based on existing documents, research and statistics, and draws these together into a coherent form. The main objective of this research report is to put the already researched and

documented bits and pieces together in such a way that it can provide a survey about the most important existing studies and compile results which are relevant for the UNRISD research programme on the political and social economy of care¹.

Part I Family Policies

1 General Characteristics of Family Policy

This report is based on the assumption that government policy with regard to families is an important element in shaping care-work arrangements of families with children. Therefore, family policies will be documented and analysed in this first part. In Switzerland, family policies² can be characterized by three crucial features: a) the non-sectoral approach to family issues, b) the federal political system, and c) changing and conflicting discourses on family, gender and care.

In the Swiss Federal Constitution (article 116, para. 1) family³ policy is explicitly defined as a cross-sectional task. The Confederation must consider the needs of the family in all political areas (article 116, para. 1), i.e. for example education policy, labour market policy or welfare policy all include family issues. In consequence, the organisation and competences are distributed within the public administration: there are a total of 19 different federal offices, and a similar number of centres in the seven federal departments that are involved in the establishment and implementation of family policies and programmes. Hence the organisational structure is highly fragmented. Furthermore, there are several expert commissions that are engaged in family issues, such as the Federal Commission for the Coordination of Family Issues (Eidgenössische Koordinationskommission für Familienfragen), the Federal Commission for Women's Issues (Eidgenössische Kommission für Frauenfragen) and the Federal Commission for Youth-Related Issues (Eidgenössische Kommission für Kinder- und Jugendfragen). These commissions are not part of the federal administration, but their secretariats are integrated at this level, and are closely involved due to their advisory role.

Family policy at a national level is defined in the Constitution as a “general supporting task” (generelle Unterstützungskompetenz, Art. 16, para. 1). That means the Confederation defines the general guidelines and backs the development and implementation of measures in the Cantons or institutions, but rarely initiates actions on its own (Vatter, Ledermann et al. 2004: 68). Thus, family policy is structured by the federal state system of Switzerland, whereby the Cantons and municipalities enforce the majority of legislation adopted at a federal level (see also RR1). Due to its federal nature,

¹[http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/\(httpProjects\)/37BD128E275F1F8BC1257296003210EC?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/(httpProjects)/37BD128E275F1F8BC1257296003210EC?OpenDocument)

² In their report, the federal office for social insurances (Sozialversicherungen 2004) defines family policy as „the activities of federal and non-federal institutions that aim at supporting the work and contribution of families, at easing their burden and at reducing structural inconsiderateness“ (translation N.B.).

³ It is important to note that there is no standardised definition of the term family, as Vatter et al (2004: xiii) note: „the Constitution understands ‚family‘ in its widest sense, namely a community of adults with children on the one hand; on the other, it guarantees the right to marriage and the rights to have family. This implicit contradiction is also evident in family policy measures“.

family policy is fragmented and differs according to Cantons and municipalities. It is the latter which usually finance these policies. However, some (additional) subsidies are federal, other costs are paid by the families themselves. The federal system for example explains the distinct differences in public services and benefits for families and the uneven distribution of childcare facilities between Cantons and municipalities, which will be discussed in more detail in part II. Vatter et al.'s (2004) analysis of the current approach to families on the national level highlights significant gaps and inconsistencies and concludes that family policy in Switzerland lacks a comprehensive national framework and a coherent set of objectives.

Another important characteristic of family policy is Switzerland's low public expenditure targeted at families with children compared e.g. to EU countries (see figure 3.1 in RR1). In the year 2005 social protection benefits amounted to 27.1% of the GDP (BFS, Gesamtrechnung der Sozialen Sicherheit; BSV, Schweizerische Sozialversicherungsstatistik, for details see RR1, fig. 3.1). Only a small amount of this expenditure was invested in support of families. We explain the low public spending on families, particularly on childcare facilities such as nurseries and all-day schools (both of which have been requested by some left-wing political forces and feminists since the 1970s), with the prevailing view among influential political forces, such as most of the major political parties, as well as the majority of voters (q.v. Bühler 2004) of the family as a primarily private matter. However, in recent years there has been an increase in at times conflicting political and public debates on issues related to families with children. Discourses on family can be seen as being informed by important changes in family structures, such as the decline of marriages and fertility rates and – although limited in international comparison – an increase in the number of divorces and lone parents (compare RR1 and Bauer, Strub et al. 2004: 3). These social and demographic changes have been accompanied by an increasing poverty of families. In addition, discourses on childcare are informed by the rise of a new generation of women who want to combine children and a career (they form a comparatively larger group than twenty years ago, compare RR1/2).

These changes and debates have led to claims for the expansion of public expenditure on childcare, for actions to fight family poverty – in particular targeting lone parents – and for policies to achieve gender equality. Tangibly, in the last decade central measures, which were discussed at national and cantonal levels include claims for the increase in family allowances (Familienzulagen), a reform of the fiscal system for families (Familienbesteuerung), an increase in family income supplements (Familienergänzungsleistungen), the introduction of a maternity insurance (Mutterschaftsversicherung) and, the expansion of extra-familial childcare facilities (Familienergänzende Kinderbetreuung). These areas of family policy will be presented in more detail in the following sections focussing mainly on the national framework (for an encompassing overview

of communal and cantonal family policies and care models see: Binder 2004; Lucas und Giraud 2006a; b).⁴

2 Central Claims, Policies and Programmes

Vatter et al. (2004: 2) identify four types of government intervention in relation to families: financial, social, pedagogical and family-internal interventions. The first type includes child allowances, income supplements and benefits for families as well as measures that aim at easing the burden of taxes and (health) insurance premiums. These measures form a big part of family-related aid-money (Bauer und Hüttner 2003: 11). The instruments will be discussed below. The second form contains the support of childcare facilities, the encouragement of family-friendly working environments and school systems as well as the integration of immigrant families and family-friendly urban planning. Childcare facilities will be discussed in more detail. The third type includes advisory and educational services for families, whereas the objective of the fourth is child protection and combating domestic violence (for an overview see: Vatter, Ledermann et al. 2004). The third and fourth types of intervention will be neglected in this report, as they are not central to care arrangements.

2.1 Financial Support of (poor) Families and the Role of Place of Residency

A central objective of measures such as child allowances is to financially support parents. Child allowances consist of a per child supplement for all employees, irrespective of income. Until recently, implementation took place on a cantonal level⁵, thus resulting in various systems of organisation and financing with monthly benefits varying between 150 and 444 Swiss francs (Vatter, Ledermann et al. 2004). However, in recent years different actors have urged to reform the child allowance system by defining a standard minimal amount. As a result, a new legislation that aims at harmonising the current system at a national level was accepted by 68% of the Swiss people in a popular vote on 26.11.2006. The new law will be enforced on January 1st in 2009. It guarantees parents 200 Swiss francs for each child below the age of 16 and 250 Swiss francs monthly for a child in education. It applies to both, full-time employees and part-time employees as well as to unemployed parents.⁶ The new law includes low-income parents outside the workforce (these child allowances will be paid by the Cantons). An additional improvement of the new law is the clarification of who is eligible for the allowance, particularly in cases of double income parents. If parents live together, the person working in the Canton of residence will be eligible. If both parents work and live in the same Canton, the allowance will be paid on the higher income. Finally, if parents do not live in the same household, the

⁴ See also study of Dietmar Braun and Olivier Giraud in the frame of the National Research Programme 52. The authors found three different models of care practiced in Swiss cities and Cantons. A summary can be found under: http://www.nfp52.ch/d_die_projekte.cfm?Projects.Command=details&get=6 (26.8.2008).

⁵ Family allowances in the agricultural sector, of government employees and jobless people are regulated at the federal level.

⁶ <http://www.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/va/20061126/index.html>

allowance will be given to the parent who lives with the children. The allowances are very small compared to the costs for childcare facilities (see next part of this report and also compare RR2 (Tab. 4.5) for amount that people have to work to cover the costs for childcare/care of the elderly).

There are several other benefits, which are of specific importance in relation to poor families. They include among others supplementary benefits according to financial needs (if the income is insufficient to cover the living costs of a family), supplementary maternity/care benefits (implemented in some cantons as a compensation for loss of salary due to care duties) or reduction of health insurance premiums.⁷ Supplementary benefits are guaranteed by the national Constitution (article 12: the right of support in financial emergencies), but enforced by the Cantons. In consequence, cross-cantonal differences can be observed. Similarly, the system of compulsory health insurance is based on legal guidelines of the Confederation, but enforced by the Cantons. The guidelines obligate every citizen to contract insurance. Insurances are private (not public) and consist of a per capita premium for every family member, and are independent of income. Reduced premiums apply to children up to the age of 18 and some insurances give reductions up to the age of 25. Despite these reductions, many families are faced with a high financial burden. Again Cantonal differences can be observed: in 2008 an average health insurance premium for adults in the Canton of Geneva is 418.91 Swiss francs and the reduced premium for children is ca. 99.21 Swiss francs. In contrast, in the Canton of Nidwalden (Central Switzerland) they amount to 218.75 for adults and 53.74 Swiss francs for children respectively (source: Bundesamt für Gesundheit 2008)⁸. The federal law on health insurance compasses public expenditure for reductions in premiums for low-income families.⁹ However, the definition of who counts as a beneficiary, the rate of reductions and the procedures are incumbent on the Cantons.¹⁰ The study by Balthasar et al. (2001) has shown the scope of cantonal differences in the criteria applied. These differences in legal practice were criticized and led to the discussion on the revision of the health law in the national parliament. Most importantly, left-wing politicians suggested premiums according to income and family situations. However, the reform was rejected in parliament in December 2003. The federal government still adheres to the objective of a social reform (Vatter, Ledermann et al. 2004: 11).

The underlying aim of the above mentioned financial measures is to alleviate the financial

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