



News

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Letter

Observatory for the Development of Social
Services in Europe

Introducing Home-Start: How volunteers can make a difference for families

A woman arrives outside the door to the apartment. From inside she can hear a mother, Marine, desperately trying to make herself heard. From the shouting and door-banging it's clear that the children are over-excited. She takes a deep breath and rings the bell. Once inside, the chaos continues. The three children, all under school-age, find it very difficult to stay calm, running all over the flat and fighting one another violently while their mother hides in the kitchen. Another deep breath, and she tries to get the children to play together calmly, but it takes a lot of her energy to keep them focused. This is the first of many visits over

a period of several months. Over time, Marine will begin to tell the visitor about her life, a life where domestic violence is added to a childhood and youth spent in foster homes. She is looking for someone who will listen without judging; she has the impression that people have decided things for her all her life instead of empowering her to make her own decisions.

This scenario was not described by a social worker or a government official, a counsellor or someone from the housing department, but a volunteer at a Home-Start scheme in France. Like thousands of other volunteers all over the

world, she was visiting a family with young children – a family in trouble – to offer her friendship and support until they were strong enough not to need her any more.

What is Home-Start?

This is the simple idea behind Home-Start, a charity that began 35 years ago in the UK. Volunteers – almost always parents themselves – are given training in the skills they need to help support struggling parents and give them the confidence and strength to be the best parents they can be to their children. Home visits usually take place once a week and can last from between six months to a year, and volunteers need to be ready for anything. Their first job when being placed with a family is to listen; only by listening they can help parents to work out what might help them, and for many parents being listened to is key to helping them feel better. Volunteers are trained to listen with respect and without judging. The second priority is to help the family make links with the local community so that they will gradually feel more confident in their environment. This might involve attending a playgroup together, or simply talking to other people in the park. Flexibility is vital; one week a volunteer might be helping with the shopping and making sure the children are involved, another week cutting out pictures with the children while their mother gets some much needed sleep. Support might be emotional – letting a parent talk about how hard it is to cope with their partner's addiction for example – or practical, such as making an appointment for the children to see a dentist. The volunteer's job is largely dictated by the family themselves, although volunteers will suggest activities if they think they will help.

Editorial

DEAR READERS,

THIS ISSUE OUR NEWSLETTER TAKES AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT FAMILY POLICIES IN THE EU. IN THE EDITORIAL ARTICLE, MELISSA JO SMITH PRESENTS THE VOLUNTEER ORGANISATION HOME-START INTERNATIONAL, WHICH OFFERS A WIDE RANGE OF PRACTICAL HELP AND ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES. GUEST COLUMN AUTHOR WILLIAM LAY, DIRECTOR OF COFACE (CONFEDERATION OF FAMILY ORGANISATIONS IN THE EU), COMMENTS ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE PACKAGE PUBLISHED BY THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN NOVEMBER 2008. HE PARTICULARLY CRITICISES THE FACT THAT THE PACKAGE IS A PIECEMEAL EFFORT AND THAT NONE OF THE MEASURES ACTUALLY AIMS AT HELPING MEN DO BETTER JUSTICE TO THEIR FAMILY OBLIGATIONS. THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE PACKAGE IS ALSO THE TOPIC OF AN ARTICLE IN THE "NEWS UPDATE" SECTION OF THE NEWSLETTER, CONTRIBUTED BY JOHANNES EISENBARTH FROM THE GERMAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WELFARE.

THIS NEWSLETTER'S COUNTRY REPORT EXAMINES THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN DENMARK. AASE MYGIND MADSEN DESCRIBES THE DANISH WELFARE MODEL AND ITS ADVANTAGES.

IN THEIR ARTICLE, ANNETTE ANGERMANN AND SABRINA STULA LOOK AT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EXPANSION OF CARE SERVICES AND IN THE QUALITY AND AVAILABILITY OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR FAMILIES. KATHRIN LINZ' ARTICLE ON FAMILY-FRIENDLY STRUCTURES AT LOCAL LEVEL COVERS THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL SERVICES THAT ARE ENCOURAGED TO CREATE LOCAL NETWORKS AND DEVELOP EFFECTIVE SERVICES.

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THE EDITORIAL TEAM



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Homestart volunteer in Tromsø, Norway

The local coordinator supports the volunteers, guiding and helping them in turn. This job is pivotal, ensuring the volunteers can cope with what they are hearing and are not feeling overwhelmed, guiding them and providing them with information, resources and training. The coordinators are always locals themselves, with a broad understanding of – and strong links to – the community. They will understand the importance of working with local social services and be able to convince support service workers to refer cases to the Home-Start scheme. Ideally they are warm and caring as well, and

Evidence of Success

Home-Start has 35 years of experience, and Home-Start schemes have been springing up in new countries since 1988, using the same model but with local leadership, local knowledge and local volunteers. There are now national associations in 11 countries in Europe, including Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania and the Czech Republic; schemes have been established recently in Denmark and France, and two of the world's largest national Home-Start associations are Home-Start Norway, which supports over 500 families and 1,000 children each year, and



Homestart volunteer in Tromsø, Norway

able to understand the subtleties involved in placing the right volunteer with each family.

The Home-Start model has been replicated globally in twenty countries on five continents, each national association run by locals and with local volunteers. Home-Start is not a programme for social workers, it is more akin to a community organisation. Government services can refer families and government, both national and local, often provides the financial support to run schemes. However, Home-Start volunteers are people from the neighbourhood offering friendship with the aim of improving the lives of families in their community, they are not paid professionals with government targets. Home-Start volunteers make home visits, and one of the advantages of this is that the family is in their own environment and in control. It also means that many people who are unable to access local services have the opportunity to get Home-Start support – Home-Start has a track record of finding and supporting hard-to-reach families in difficult communities.

Home-Start Netherlands, which has 95 schemes and more than 1,500 volunteers. In the UK, the government is thoroughly convinced of Home-Start's effectiveness – Home-Start was the only non-governmental organisation mentioned in the UK government report "Every Child Matters".

Several studies have examined evidence of Home-Start's success, and schemes have co-operated with teams of academic researchers in countries including the Netherlands, Australia and the UK. One of these studies with a good general approach was undertaken by Dr. Jessica Asscher of the University of Amsterdam¹ and looked at improvements in parental wellbeing after Home-Start visits. Having first assessed whether there was a need for support in a non-clinical or 'grass-roots' community-based setting, the researchers then collected observational data and questionnaires from 54 mothers and children aged between 17 months and three years who participated in this early-intervention programme. The results indicated significant improvements in parental wellbeing (an increase in per-

ceived parenting competence and a decrease in depressive moods), in some parenting behaviours (an increase in positive parenting and a decrease in negative parenting behaviours), and a decrease of child behaviour problems.

Community Benefits

One of the other positive aspects of Home-Start as a community organisation is what we call the 'snowball effect'. Often parents who once needed support later become volunteers themselves once their own personal crisis is over. Some volunteers apply for jobs with Home-Start and occasionally doctors and teachers who referred parents to our management committees. This 'added value' means that Home-Start schemes benefit their communities both directly and indirectly, not only by helping to prevent social problems through early intervention in family crisis.

Starting a Scheme

Home-Start International was formed in 1999 to support the many national Home-Start Associations all over the world, providing guidance and training as well as facilitating the exchange of information and ideas between worldwide associations. The small staff team is skilled, equipped and always ready to help people interested in setting up new Home-Start schemes throughout the world. Although Home-Start associations have been established in 20 countries around the world, it has not yet taken root in any German-speaking nation.

Melissa Jo Smith
Communications and Development Officer
Home-Start International

If you or your organisation are interested in Home-Start, take a look at <http://www.homestartinternational.org> or send a mail to info@home-startinternational.org.

¹ Dr. Jessica Asscher (2005): *Parenting Support in Community Settings: Parental Needs and Effectiveness of the Home-Start Program*.

The family dimension of EU policies: From addressing the demographic challenge to combating the economic crisis

While the treaties contain no legal basis on which to build a European family policy, many EU policies have an impact on the daily life and well-being of European families. The Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) has been working relentlessly to influence these policies, whether consumer protection, free movement of people, social protection and social inclusion (including gender equality and inclusion of people with disabilities), health, energy, transport, education, new information technologies, youth, or citizenship policies.

In the recent years, the European Union has shown a clear awakening to the importance of family policy, as the demographic challenge has become a growing concern. The observation that all Member States are suffering from alarmingly low birth rates and that Europeans are experiencing difficulties in founding families and ensuring a good standard of living for them has led to the establishment by the European Council in 2007 of the European Alliance for Families.

Better support for families has also been identified by the European Commission as a key instrument for combating child poverty, in the framework of the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

Finally, in the framework of its Roadmap for equality between women and men, the European Commission has launched, in October 2008, a package of initiatives on reconciliation between family life and professional life. This package includes mainly two directive proposals concerning maternity leave for waged workers, self-employed workers and assisting spouses; negotiations of the social partners on parental leave, paternity leave and leave to care for dependent relatives; and a report on progress towards the Barcelona targets on childcare services.



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While welcoming this package, COFACE believes that a single framework directive on reconciliation would have been much more efficient than these piecemeal initiatives. In particular, gender equality in the workplace cannot be achieved without greater involvement of men in family responsibilities¹. Therefore, better maternity leave should always go hand in hand with better paternity and parental leaves. As the social partners negotiations seem to achieve little result, COFACE will call on the next Commission to take its responsibilities and make a proposal with regard to paternity leave and leave to care for dependent relatives. COFACE also argues that leave schemes must be open to all categories of workers irrespective of their professional status or activity, and that they must encompass employment protection, adequate pay, continuity of social security and employment rights, and flexibility.

Besides leave schemes, quality employment, flexible working time arrangements, coordination of public times, eradication of gender stereotypes and quality childcare and long-term care services are all key measures for work-life balance. Such a holistic approach of reconciliation policies is essential if wider policies to tackle and prevent poverty and social exclusion are to deliver².

COFACE believes that the current economic crisis is an additional

reason for the EU to sustain its interest for family policy. It is clear that families are being hard hit by the crisis through rising unemployment, falling purchasing power, increasing debt, poverty and social exclusion. COFACE has recently called on Heads of State and Government to further measures in support of families, targeting in particular the most vulnerable families (i.e. lone-parent families, large families, families with disabled and/or dependent persons, migrant families, ...)³. These measures (investing in social services, supporting low income, preventing over-indebtedness and financial exclusion, ...) are to be considered as investments, as they are, one way or another injected into the economy.

William Lay 
Direktor of COFACE

COFACE is a pluralistic organisation, at the heart of civil society, which aims at promoting family policy, solidarity between generations and the interests of children within the European Union. COFACE advocates a policy of non-discrimination and of equal opportunities between persons and between family forms, and specifically supports policies aiming at equality between women and men. COFACE links together 54 general and single-issue national family organizations across 20 Member States.
<http://www.coface-eu.org>.

¹ COFACE's brochure 'Men and Families' (2006): <http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/docs/PERES/brochureEN.pdf> (also available in German: <http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/docs/PERES/brochureDE.pdf>).

- ² COFACE Position on reconciling family life, private life and professional life to prevent poverty and social exclusion (2008): <http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/WG%20SOCIAL/WG1-2008-PositionCOFACE-reconciliation-EN.pdf>.
- ³ COFACE Open Letter to the Heads of State or Government on the occasion of the Spring Summit (2009): <http://coface-eu.org/en/upload/docs/19-20.03.09Spring%20SummitEN.pdf>.

Main Reports

Balancing family and professional life in Europe – social services for families

In the last few years, family policy has found itself increasingly in the focus of European interest. The Observatory, too, has been actively monitoring the family policy debate as it has evolved across Europe. As early as 2007, the Observatory hosted an international conference on "Current developments in European family policy – Service concepts and policy approaches in new and old Member States", and a follow-up conference is planned for 2009. The bottom line: in view of demographic change and changes in social and employment structures, families are now forced to face burdens that need to be addressed by policy-makers everywhere in Europe.

Reconciliation of professional and family life

In many countries, women and men continue to be confronted with the difficulty of balancing their family life with gainful employment. Women, particularly highly educated women, often decide against having children if they find that their professional life is difficult to reconcile with raising a family. At the moment, about six million EU women between the ages of 25 and 49 claim that they are unable to work, or at least to work full time, because of their family obligations; the lack of childcare facilities, or the cost of childcare, constitutes the main problem for more than a quarter of them.¹

At European level, the Commission once again addressed this issue in October 2008 with its so-called work-life balance package. The package includes an interim report on the implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children² and shows that European countries are still a long way from achieving the set objectives, particularly for the under-3s.³

Both the need and the demand for social services support have risen in all EU Member States over the past decades. In the last few years, special efforts have been made to establish or expand these types of structures, particularly in countries where childcare infrastructure had been least developed.

At the moment, the most important challenge for European countries in the area of childcare is to ensure access to high-quality and affordable childcare with opening hours that suit the needs of families.⁴ The great variety of approaches taken by welfare policy makers in the Member States has led to differences in the quality and availability of supporting services. In view of the particularly low birthrates in the new Member States, special efforts are being made in these countries. In Latvia and Estonia, for instance, quantitative and qualitative expansion of childcare currently has high political priority. Slovenia has been paying special attention to expanding childcare services for children under three, and Romania has announced that increased efforts will be made to expand social services for families and children at community level within its government programme for 2009–2012.

Reconciliation of professional life and care for the elderly

The debate on achieving a better balance between family and professional life generally refers to the reconciliation of childcare and employment. However, demographic trends and changes in family and employment structures have been creating important challenges for European countries in the field of support and care for the elderly as well. The "middle generation" often finds itself having to care not only for their own children but also for older relatives who need nursing care or other forms of support. In other words: not only does family life need to be reconciled with work in terms of childcare, but support or nursing care for the elderly also has to be provided. As this type of care continues to be primarily the responsibility of women, and in view of increased female employment across Europe, more flexible working time arrangements and high-quality options for elderly relatives who need care are particularly important issues. European family associations therefore demand that family policy

concepts should be broadened so that policy considerations include more services for the care of older people.

Looking beyond our own horizon

As all European countries are affected by the demographic and social trends outlined above, individual Member States are increasingly seeking solutions for this and other family policy problems by looking beyond their immediate horizon. The European Alliance for Families, which was established in 2007, is a platform where European countries can exchange information on forward-looking, family-friendly measures. The objective of the initiative is to encourage various groups to learn from each other by exchanging information on family policy activities. Interaction takes place between many political and social stakeholders in European, national and regional forums. Experts can meet within the scope of the High-Level Group on Demography. A web portal has been set up to present family policy information and best-practice models⁵. It includes country-by-country information on family policy approaches and measures adopted in the individual Member States. In addition, it provides information on current studies and events as well as examples of good practice and tried and true family-friendly procedures. As the national contact for Germany, the Observatory is currently gathering up-to-date family policy information and processing this material so that it can then be presented on the web portal.

Annette Angermann, DV e.V.

Sabrina Stula, DV e.V.

- 1 cf. EUROFOUND 2009: *Childcare services in Europe* (<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef0895.htm>).
- 2 The Member States should "remove disincentives to female labour force participation and strive, taking into account the demand for childcare facilities and in line with national patterns of provision, to provide childcare by 2010 to at least 90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age" (Conclusions of the Barcelona Council, 15 and 16 March 2002).
- 3 For children under three the highest percentages were registered in Denmark (73%), the Netherlands (45%) and Sweden (44%), the lowest in the Czech Republic and Poland (2% each) (EUROSTAT 2008).
- 4 cf. EUROFOUND 2009.
- 5 For further information cf. http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/families/index_en.html.

Family-friendly structures at local level: opportunities and challenges for social services

Since 2000 there has been fresh impetus at European level to encourage the development of national policies aimed at achieving a well-balanced participation of women and men in work and family life¹. In the area of gender equality and family affairs, the 2007 spring summit and the informal meeting of Ministers for Gender Equality and Family Affairs in Bad Pyrmont (Germany) in May 2007 established the principle that national family policies should aim at achieving equal rights between men and women with regard to family care and gainful employment². Any successful implementation of these objectives, however, depends to a large extent on the existence of family-friendly infrastructure elements and on their expansion. We must remember that the mechanisms that help people achieve a better balance between family obligations and work in their everyday life vary not only from country to country, but also from region to region. Useful structures to support families therefore need to address a wide range of requirements of families and have to be provided where families actually live and work.

For welfare federations, non-profit institutions and private providers in the social field, this offers both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand these bodies are called upon to create local and regional networks that will allow them to put into place effective services suiting local circumstances and adapted to the needs of families. Developing a holistic approach to structural improvement requires not only

dialogue but also the creation of partnerships between various social operators as well as with representatives of politics and business.

On the other hand, these cooperation structures offer an ongoing opportunity for exchanging information, views and experience on the structure of services offered to families. Dialogue with lobby groups, committed citizens, representatives of regional political and administrative structures and local enterprises can help develop ideas that take into account special regional circumstances and resources as well as the wishes of the families themselves³. In addition to developing new concepts, successful dialogue also lays the foundation stone for cooperation with various operators whose actions affect the lives of families and who can participate in the implementation of the new ideas.

Within the scope of the strategy for sustainable family policy in Germany, the German federal government is also hoping to encourage the development of local and regional infrastructure. Its nationwide "Local Alliances for Families" initiative aims at bringing existing resources together under a single umbrella and encouraging the formation of networks of local operators committed to the creation of family-friendly structures. The programme seems to be successful: indeed, since its inception in January 2004, some 500 "local alliances" have been created in Germany⁴. Good examples of strategies to improve the compatibility of family and career by networking government authorities, businesses and civil society at local level can also be found in other countries of the EU. Initiatives in other countries differ less from the point of view of their content than in terms of their organisational structures and the operators that coordinate op-

erational practice. In 2005, the "Austrian Family Alliance" on the model of the German initiative was founded. Cooperation within this national project is coordinated by "Familie & Beruf Management GmbH"⁵. In Spain the "pactos locales por la conciliación" – social and cultural projects where various non-profit organisations and for-profit suppliers cooperate with local authorities to facilitate compatibility of work and family life – are supported by women's rights and gender equality organisations in Spain's autonomous regions⁶. In Great Britain, a government programme called "Sure Start" fosters local networking for early education, childcare, health and family support services with the ultimate objective of promoting a better work-life balance⁷. Although this programme is an initiative of government authorities, it is designed and operated locally by local entities. The programme is also implemented in North Ireland, Wales and Scotland, which act independently in matters relating to early childhood education and childcare.

Kathrin Linz, ISS e.V.

1 Cf. Council of the European Union and Ministers for Employment and Social Policy meeting within the Council (2000), Resolution of the Council and of the Ministers for Employment and Social Policy meeting within the Council on the balanced participation of women and men in family and working life. C 218/02.: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2000:218:0005:0007:EN:PDF> (Retrieved on 1 May 2009).

2 Cf. Council of the European Union (2007), Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council, 8 and 9 March 2007. 7224/1/07 REV 1.

Cf. German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2007), Presidency Conclusions: Informal Meeting of Ministers for Gender Equality and Family Affairs, 15 and 16 May 2007 in Bad Pyrmont.: <http://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/generator/RedaktionBMFSFJ/RedaktionRatspraesidentschaft/english/PDF-Anlagen/schlussfolgerungen-imt.property=pdf,bereich=eupresidency,sprache=en,rwb=true.pdf> (Retrieved on 1 May 2009).

3 German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth: Fact-Sheet: Zahlen, Daten und Fakten zu den Lokalen Bündnissen für Familie. In: http://www.lokales-buendnis-fuer-familie.de/pdf_pressemappe/presse_620090427112458.pdf (retrieved on 30 April 2009, available in German only).

4 German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth: Fact-Sheet: Zahlen, Daten und Fakten zu den Lokalen Bündnissen für Familie. In: http://www.lokales-buendnis-fuer-familie.de/pdf_pressemappe/presse_620090427112458.pdf (retrieved on 30 April 2009, available in German only).

5 For further information cf. <http://www.familieundberuf.at/>.

6 For further information cf. http://www.navarra.es/home_es/Temas/Igualdad+de+genero/Politic+de+igualdad/Entidades/PactosLocales.htm and <http://ie.juntaex.es/?mod=xnocont&num=402>.

7 For further information cf. <http://www.surestart.gov.uk>.



Social Services in Europe

Social Services in Denmark – Universal Principles chal- lenged by new Public Management Measures and Marketisation

The social service system in Denmark is best understood in the context of the universal welfare system as such, including also the provision of cash benefits. After eight years of liberal-conservative government, both social services and cash benefits are still 1) primarily organised by the state, 2) tax financed and 3) characterised by the principle of universalism¹. Furthermore, almost all social services in Denmark are not only still provided on a flat-rate basis (everybody gets the same irrespective of income), but also overwhelmingly free.

The health system is universal and flat-rate, in the sense that hospital and medical treatment is free for everybody and medicine subsidized according to a system where you pay less per unit the more medicine you purchase. Medicine for life-threatening diseases and severe disabilities are free for everybody. The educational system from primary school to university is also free. Childcare institutions are free for low-income parents and payable according to a graduated system of income for others. However, no parents pay more than 1/3 of the cost of having their child looked after. Although attempts have been made to introduce private providers of childcare, none of them have been successful. Moreover, the current government has maintained the 100% childcare coverage introduced by the former Social Democratic government. Hence, social expenditures have not been reduced over the last eight years, and most cash transfers and services are still organised by the central state or the municipalities. In terms of both public childcare and care for the elderly, analysts have even argued that there have been improvements. This, however, does not mean that no changes have taken place. In Denmark like in the rest of the western world, new public management measures as well as elements of marketisation

have been introduced within the last two decades.

Changes within the public sector

New public management measures involve changes within the public sector as well as changes that challenge the private-public balance towards more marketisation. In both senses 'quality improvement' has been part of the argument for change. In the international debate 'quality improvement' has been translated into words such as 'better accessibility', 'free choice of providers', 'efficiency' etc.

Within the public sector in Denmark, efficiency in terms of quantitative cost-benefit measures has been boosted through deinstitutionalisation. The first sector to experience this was psychiatry, where small community-based dwelling entities, close to the client, replaced 'hospital-like' institutions. Subsequently, the same closeness philosophy was displayed with regard to childcare, care of the elderly and placement of criminal youngsters. These changes were backed by a budget and appropriation reform that handed decision-making power and financial responsibility to the last link in the chain, for instance the management of a specific kindergarten. Although these changes have been announced as decentralisation of decision-making power and enhancement of personal responsibility, all professional groups involved in services provision such as teachers, pedagogues and social workers claim that they have lost the autonomy and free choice of methods they had earlier on.

More competition between public institutions and more professional management have been implemented throughout the public system as well as enhanced free users' choice of public service, especially in the health system, the educational system and with regard to kindergartens.

A final general change within the public sector has been an increased effort to clarify citizens' rights vis-à-vis service provisions of the welfare state. Since 1998 it has been statutory to have both individual clients and interest groups participate in their case treatment. There is an increasing demand for service declarations to ensure that citizens can choose between different offers.

Marketisation of social services

In spite of the political colour of the government and influence from the EU and globalisation, clear-cut privatisation or outsourcing of service provision has so far taken place to a remarkably low extent in Denmark. Development has gone furthest in terms of activation of unemployed receivers of social assistance. Since 2008, private companies have had authority not only to implement public decisions, but also to make decisions themselves – in this case about clients' work capacity, the so-called match grouping of persons, which is decisive for the social assistance category an individual should be placed in. In all other respects, the quality of the service provision of private companies is monitored by the public authorities and the final decision as to which companies to choose among is left with the public authorities. Free choice between public and private home help is probably the most successful example of private companies' entry into the public social service sector. Private for-profit institutions are also found operating live-in institutions for young people with behavioural problems and as catering companies for the elderly. Private companies also act as suppliers of remedies for physically disabled people. However, as the municipalities or the centralised state pay for it all, these types of services are still universal and free of cost from the citizens' point of view.

The same link between public and private is seen with regard to private hospitals. After a slow start in the 1980s, there are now a number of private for-profit general and specialized hospitals. However, most of them would not have existed had it not been for the public treatment guarantee according to which a patient can receive treatment, paid by the public system, at a private hospital if the public hospitals cannot treat the patient within a month after the patient has received his diagnosis. The private hospital earns its profit, but for the patient it is still free treatment. The treatment guarantee was suspended in the summer of 2008 because a strike among nurses had created long queues at the hospitals. To avoid the queues a considerable number of people have since then taken out private health insurance. This

might slowly undermine the hitherto basic idea of a social policy system where services and cash benefits are paid for by tax money.

In terms of increased marketisation, public-private partnership in several fields is perhaps the most important deviation from a more clear-cut state approach to social intervention. It is displayed in terms of job allocation, in terms of matching qualifications of the job-seeker with the demand for labour in the private sector and with regard to financially supporting the employment of persons with some work capacity reduction. Through the so-called flex job arrangement, 50–75% of employees' minimum wages are subsidised by the municipalities. Through protective job arrangements, the private sector is further encouraged to employ or keep workers who have been granted early retirement pension. In this way the employer gets free labour in return for a labour force assessed as having little work capacity, which promotes inclusion and maintains a certain level of income for the individual.

How much "quality improvement is there – and why is the welfare model still very much universal?

As illustrated above, universalism is still very much a characteristic feature of the Danish welfare system, both in terms of cash benefit and social services. Social sector spending, of which 2/3 involves cash benefits and 1/3 social services, still accounts for 1/3 of GNP. The public sector, including health and education expenditure, accounts for 2/3 of GNP. Why is it that this welfare system has been so resilient? Path dependency is one explanation. The Danish welfare system was constructed in the late 19th century as a deliberate deviation from Bismarck's German insurance model, and it also covers those who have never had an occupation. It has proven remarkably resilient, not only because everybody benefits from it, but also because it has been a proof that growth can very well go hand in hand with a large public sector and an equitable distribution of income. This is basically why few are convinced that it is really about quality improvement when the government brands new initiatives as 'quality improvement measures', as the system has already been both generous and accessible for many decades. During his



Copenhagen – Nyhavn quarter

eight-year term, even the liberal prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who in his younger days had argued for a minimal state, not only defended the current universal system as an important factor of cohesion among the Danish population but indeed even sold the concept abroad as the unique Danish Flexicurity Model according to which enterprises can easily sack people, as there is always a social system to pick them up.

Role of NGOs

It follows from the huge role still assigned to the state provision of cash benefits and services in Denmark that, unlike in the leisure time sector, voluntary organisations and NGOs have a less important role to play in the social services sector than in most other EU countries. That is probably due to a general understanding that NGOs can be very good, but compared to the accessibility of the universal system they can never be more than ‘dots on the map’ – good only for those lucky enough to be close to them. However, church organisations like the YMCA do play an important supplementary role as organisers of social work among the weakest population sector, mostly partly financed by the public sector.

Aase Mygind Madsen

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1 Rights- and citizenship-based general arrangements securing comprehensive, adequate transfers and services. (Goul Andersen, Jørgen, 1999 "Den universelle velfærdsstat under pres – men hvad er universalisme?" in GRUS nr. 56/57).

News from the Observatory

Boundless civic engagement: cross-border conference on volunteering in Germany, Austria and Switzerland

Constance, with its unique geographic location, was just the right framework for the first conference on volunteering in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, which took place in February 2009 under the title “Grenzen-Los”, in German a play on words which means both “boundless” and “free of borders”. The event was hosted by the Baden-Württemberg State Office for Political Education in cooperation with representatives from all three countries: from the Austrian “Lebensministerium” [Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management], the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, and the “Schweizerische Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft” [Swiss charitable organisation]. Social scientists, politicians and practitioners from the field came together for the two-day meeting not only to exchange ideas about common positions and differences, but also with the objective of encouraging cross-border networking.

In each country’s introductory presentation, the speakers explained that all three countries

now have instruments in place to measure volunteering. A Swiss survey of volunteer activity, the “Schweizer Freiwilligen-Monitor”, was implemented for the first time in 2006, and in Germany volunteer work will be surveyed this year for the third time. Austrian data on volunteer work was collected within the scope of the 2006 micro-census, the initial results of which were presented at the conference. The presentations showed that there are differences in how the three countries interpret the concept of volunteer work. The German survey of volunteers measures mainly commitment within the scope of formal structures such as organisations and associations, while in Austria so-called informal involvement is also taken into consideration alongside formal work. Neighbourly help, for instance, is a type of informal volunteer commitment that does not take place within the scope of regulated structures like associations. The Swiss approach is even more differentiated: here too, a distinction is made between formal and informal volunteering. However, formal commitment in organisations and associations is subdivided once again, so that the monitor distinguishes between general involvement within formal structures and the assumption of honorary duties, for instance special elected positions. Moreover, in Switzerland money and other donations are also counted as civic engagement. In addition to these differences of definition, many common problem areas were also discussed at greater depth in the various workshops. For instance, the working group “Equal opportunities? Prerequisites

and access to volunteer engagement” discussed, among other issues, the possibility of raising the interest of people of migrant backgrounds in volunteer work. The group came to the conclusion that there is a variety of different commitment cultures. In many cultures, volunteer work takes place mostly at the level of the family and not within the scope of organisations. This type of involvement can therefore assume a variety of different forms, and this is a factor that should be taken into account when assessing the willingness of migrants to get involved.

The “Three-Country Contact Exchange”, which provided a forum for lively interaction between representatives of participating organisations from all three countries, gave participants the possibility of organising cooperation and commitment agreements.

A follow-up conference is planned for 2010. It will take place in Switzerland and be hosted by the Schweizerische Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft.

Information on the other workshops and a summary of all presentations (in German only) can be found on the Internet site of the Baden-Württemberg State Office for Political Education at: <http://www.lpb-bw.de/veranstaltungen/grenzenlos/abstracts.php>. For further information on the event, please visit: <http://www.lpb-bw.de/veranstaltungen/vernetzungskonferenz.php>.

Birgit Sittermann, ISS e.V.

Staff News



In January 2009, Eugénie Kowalski replaced Daniela Scheetz as research assistant for the Berlin project team of the Observatory.

Ms. Kowalski is studying law at the Berlin Free University and currently preparing for her final examination, which she will be taking in 2010. The focus of her interest is the “internationalisation of the legal system” (European and international law, international private law). Alongside her studies and in addition to her position at

the Observatory, Ms. Kowalski also works as a volunteer for a European student organisation.

News Update

Book Review: "Voneinander lernen – miteinander handeln: Aufgaben und Perspektiven der Europäischen Allianz für Familien" [Shared experience, concerted action: Ideas and perspectives in the European Alliance for Families]

Edited by Dr. Ursula von der Leyen, Dr. Vladimír Spidla
Nomos 2009,
ISBN 978-3-8329-3650-1,
303 pages, paperback, approx.
€49 with contributions in
German and English

The book *Voneinander lernen – miteinander handeln*, edited by the German Minister for Family Affairs Dr. Ursula von der Leyen and the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities Dr. Vladimír Spidla, examines the reasons behind declining birthrates in many EU countries and presents some of the strategies adopted by various EU Member States in reaction to this development.

Declining birthrates and childlessness in connection with increasing levels of education have been causing severe problems in several European countries. And yet, Europeans' desire to have children is greater than might be assumed on the basis of current birth statistics. Lower numbers of children are the expression of a variety of social, individual and economic factors. In order to prevent overageing, most European societies are faced with the need to counteract a continued decline in birthrates with specific political measures.

Despite their various family policy traditions and individual national circumstances, the Member States of the European Union share the common objective of making work and family life more compatible. During its EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2007, the German federal government therefore

launched the European Alliance for Families, a forum intended to promote the exchange of innovative family policy strategies in the Member States and to encourage dialogue.

In *Voneinander lernen – miteinander handeln* [Shared experience, concerted action], the editors have invited contributors from various EU Member States – some writing in English, some in German – to present their information and points of view. The issues raised include childcare, (early childhood) education, family support services as well as the role of employers in creating a family-friendly society. It is not the authors' intention to dictate a *single* model of family policy that might apply to all Member States. Instead, the book's aim is to present innovative approaches and strategies that take into account the various historical backgrounds and sociopolitical contexts in the Member States.

On the one hand, for instance, examples of good practice are presented from countries like Sweden and France, whose family policies have long been considered path-breaking. At the same time, the book also shows what opportunities might open up for countries willing to overcome outdated concepts of family and roles. It introduces recent developments in countries whose family policies had until now been oriented to a more traditional understanding of family life. It also describes the sociopolitical challenges of the economic upheavals that have affected central and eastern Europe.

In addition to the contributions from the Member States, the book starts off with six short articles by government representatives who are responsible for family policies in their respective countries. These articles give a short overview of family policy in the country concerned and underscore the European dimension of the discussion. The main articles then examine the concept and the role of the family from the point of view of social change, and present new family policy approaches in various countries of the European Union. And finally, five additional articles examine the interaction of work and family life in various countries of the EU.

One of the objectives of this publication is to seek ways of allowing societies to profit from forward-looking

developments in other countries without having to give up their individual characteristics and values.

Veronika Pfeifer, ISS e. V.

The work-life balance package – Is it really what we need?

In addition to the interim report on the implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities for pre-school-age children (COM (2008) 638 final), the package of initiatives published by the European Commission in early November 2008 to address the reconciliation of private, professional and family life also includes two directive proposals to improve the protection of employed women in case of pregnancy and motherhood (COM (2008) 637 final) and of self-employed women and "assisting spouses" in family businesses (COM (2008) 636 final). The proposals are intended as amendments or replacements for existing directives. These initiatives are to be seen in the same context as the negotiations started by the social partners in July 2008 regarding a restructuring of the framework agreement on family leave. Undoubtedly, the Commission hopes its package will improve reconciliation of professional and family life. However, we should critically ask ourselves whether the proposals will indeed constitute an effective instrument to achieve this goal.

Achieving a better balance between private, professional and family life is a key instrument for the attainment of important policy objectives. Specifically, the initiatives being proposed here are intended to reduce the gender gap on the labour market and increase the female employment rate to 60%. It is also hoped that an improved balance between work and private life will have positive effects on demographic renewal and on efforts to combat poverty and exclusion.

One of the proposals involves extending maternity leave to a continuous block of at least 18 weeks, six of which must be taken after childbirth. Women could then choose freely whether the non-compulsory portion of the leave should be taken before or after childbirth. Self-employed women and "assisting spouses" should have the choice of taking advantage (or not) of the same maternity leave as

Dates

2009

16–17 September/Paris, France
Santé Social Expo, fair held in connection with the UNCCAS congress: L'action sociale au cœur des changements
Hosted by: Union Nationale des Centres Communaux d'Action Sociale UNCCAS
http://salons.groupemoniteur.fr/sante_social_expo/visiter

17–19 September/Urbino, Italy
7th Annual ESPAnet Conference 2009

The future of the welfare state – Paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities
Hosted by: The Network for European Social Policy Analysis
<http://www.espanet-italia.net/conference2009/>

24–26 September/Dortmund, Germany

Bundeskongress Soziale Arbeit
Hosted by: Initiativkreis Bundeskongress Soziale Arbeit
<http://www.bundeskongress-soziale-arbeit.de/>

29–30 September/Gothenburg, Sweden

Active Citizenship and Adult Education
Hosted by: Swedish Association for Adult Education (SAEA) and the European Association for Education of Adults (EAEA)
<http://www.eaea.org/events.php?aid=16595&d=2009-09>

8–11 October/Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Families in Europe between the 19th and the 21st Centuries. From the traditional model to contemporary PACS.
Hosted by: Romanian Centre for Population Studies, Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Sociology and Social Work
http://www.nordkalender.org/nikk_en/arrangement.html?id=4767&back=index.html

30 October/Lisbon, Portugal

International Workshop on the Socio-Economics of Ageing
Hosted by: ISEG, Technical University of Lisbon
<http://www.movisie.nl/eCache/ENG/1/23/657.html>

5–6 November/Dublin, Ireland

Eurofound's 2009 Forum
Hosted by: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/events/2009/forum%202009/index.htm>

10–12 November/Nuremberg, Germany

11. ConSozial und 78. Deutscher Fürsorgertag, joint congress with fair
Hosted by: Bavarian Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs, Family Affairs and Women, and the German Association for Public and Private Welfare
<http://fuersorgertag-consozial.de/index.php?section=1>

4–5 December/Berlin, Germany

15. Kongress Armut und Gesundheit
Hosted by: Gesundheit Berlin e. V.
<http://www.gesundheitliche-chancengleichheit.de/?uid=580f59bc13d74ebf88197e77fbc1fb5e&id=Seite8038>

employed women. The entire maternity leave period should be coupled with special compulsory dismissal protection: any termination of employment during this period would then have to be justified on the basis of compelling reasons that must be duly substantiated in writing. This duty of the employer would be extended to cases where a woman is dismissed within six months of the end of her maternity leave, if the woman requests such a written motivation.

The package proposes payment of a maternity allowance equivalent to the worker's wage; this amount would, however, be subject to any ceiling laid down under national legislation but in general could not be lower than the amount paid in the event of absence due to sickness. After their maternity leave, women should be guaranteed their old jobs or an equivalent post.

Maternity leave regulations are quite different around Europe. Only three countries, one of them Germany, offer only the minimum of 14 weeks. The United Kingdom, Ireland and the Czech Republic provide for maternity leave of 26–28 weeks. On the other hand, only a few countries in addition to Germany pay maternity allowances to replace lost wages. Overall, it is doubtful whether the proposed measures can actually help achieve a genuinely better balance between private, professional and family life and reduce the gender gap. Whereas parental leave can be claimed by workers of both sexes, extended maternity leave does not offer this option for a better distribution of family tasks. Nor is there sufficient evidence offered to support the idea that longer maternity leave is necessary from a medical point of view. Unfortunately, the package may turn out to be of little help to young parents, whose main need is in the area of support services.

The report on the implementation of the Barcelona objectives concerning childcare facilities concludes that although results differ widely from country to country, most Member States will fail to reach the set targets. With the aim of increasing employment, especially for women, the 2002 Barcelona European Council had set target objectives for the provision of childcare facilities: by 2010, childcare should be available for 90% of all children between three and school age as well as for 33% of all children under three.

Many Member States will fail to achieve these availability and accessibility targets, especially for the under-3s. In this regard, Germany finds itself in the middle field in comparison to its European neighbours. Improvements are expected to result from an expansion in facilities and from the professionalisation of informal care (quality standards, better training and payment). For many parents, the affordability of childcare services constitutes a significant barrier. Social integration of low-income households can only be achieved if free or inexpensive childcare is guaranteed. While lack of childcare facilities is still an important factor preventing the successful reconciliation of family and participation in the labour market, the Czech EU Presidency has announced its intention of reviewing the fundamental orientation of the Barcelona objectives. The new aim would be to stress childcare at home as an equal alternative to professional life and possibly to set new childcare objectives.

*Johannes Eisenbarth, Policy Officer,
Department of International Affairs,
DV e.V.*

Conference on "Strategies against Child Poverty in Europe"

On 7 May 2009, the Ministry of Employment, Health and Social Affairs of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) hosted a conference in Brussels on the topic of "strategies against child poverty in Europe". The aim of the half-day event was to provide an overview of the topic and to look at child poverty from the point of view of various European Member States.

After the words of welcome of Hans H. Stein, head of the permanent representation of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) in Brussels, Manfred Feuss from the NRW Ministry of Employment, Health and Social Affairs presented the problem of child poverty in his state. Although the number of children and adolescents living in low-income households in NRW declined from 811,000 to 776,000 between 2005 and 2007, there are still nearly one quarter of all children in the state who are at risk of poverty. Mr. Feuss stressed that his state government had taken a number of measures to combat child poverty and its consequences, including the expansion of all-day

childcare, special language programmes, the establishment of a Round Table and a programme called "Kein Kind ohne Mahlzeit" – no child without a meal.

Dr. Petra Hoelscher (UNICEF, Geneva) then spoke about child poverty in the European Union. At the latest since the "EU High Level conference" held in Luxemburg in 2005, child poverty has become one of the central European issues. It is increasingly being looked at from the point of view of a child's overall well-being. This means that not only material poverty but also aspects such as a child's education and health are taken into consideration¹. In spite of a number of national success stories, Europe continues to be plagued with a child poverty ratio of 19%², putting it a far cry from achieving the Lisbon Strategy objective of eliminating child poverty by 2010.

In the third and final part of the event, short lectures were presented and discussed on child poverty in Germany (Gerda Holz, ISS, Frankfurt am Main), Poland (Dr. Grazyna Mikołajczyk-Lerman, Institute of Sociology, Lodz), Slovenia (Mateja Nagoe, Institute of Social Protection, Ljubljana) and the United Kingdom (Dr. Paul Dornan, Child Poverty Action Group). Both speakers and participants hope that the European Union's 2010 campaign, the "European year for combating poverty and social exclusion", will provide a further impetus for the struggle against poverty among children and young people.

*Dr. Jörg Dittmann, Research Officer,
ISS e.V.*

¹ Cf. *Child poverty and child well-being in the EU 2008*: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/spsj/docs/social_inclusion/2008/child_poverty_en.pdf (retrieved on 13 May 2009).

² Cf. *EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2005 (EU-SILC)*: http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/living_conditions_and_social_protection/data/database (retrieved on 13 May 2009).



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