

1. Introduction: childcare and democracy in the EU

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The organisation of the family round the period of childbirth and the raising of preschool children not only lies at the heart of the modern welfare system. It is also the source of the most fundamental distinctions between the treatment of men and women in society. How these arrangements are determined and modified are key issues for the democratic process. Since they affect all families in one way or another it is perhaps rather surprising how much discontent there is with the nature of the arrangements that prevail. In many people's eyes, though, these care arrangements are a source of unfairness and injustice in the way that different welfare systems work, particularly with regard to the treatment of women, especially those on lower incomes. The effects of raising children remain profoundly gendered in terms of lost earnings, gender pay gaps, reduced pension rights and delayed career prospects for mothers who spend significant periods outside the labour market providing a vital welfare service – that is, the care of young children.

It is not the purpose of this book to advocate one regime over another, although no doubt the unstated opinions of the various authors will be fairly clear from their analysis of the issues. Instead, it is our aim to explore the variety of childcare arrangements that have prevailed in Europe in recent years, examine the trends and where they might beneficially go in the future in the light of experience. Our particular concern is with the relationship between the different types of regime and the democratic process. Many straight-forward issues arise. Young children have no votes, although of course they have very effective ways of making their views known. Even after the event it is not clear that people think back carefully and ask what would have been best for them (or indeed for their children). Among voters, those facing these problems at the time will be in the minority, although the majority of those voting will have been in the position during their lives. Women outnumber men in European democracies. Yet the nature of participation in the democratic process and the nature of deliberation still seem to be lacking in some regard. At the EU level, discussion of social

policy and its objectives (such as the Barcelona targets to raise formal childcare provision) within the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) appears to lack full democratic legitimacy given the limited role played by national parliaments in OMC deliberations (Michalski, 2011).

In part the problem is simply that the objectives of the welfare regime in respect to this period of childbearing and young child-raising are neither clear nor constant across countries or indeed across groups within society.¹ The picture is further complicated by changes in the labour market (in the type and nature of work available in more service- and knowledge-driven economies) and in family structures and dynamics (where gender roles are less culturally defined although the rise in single-parent households tends to reinforce traditional gender roles). These changes mean that people's experiences of work and family life are increasingly diverse which in policy terms makes achieving a satisfactory work-family balance more challenging.² However, to put this at its most basic, most families would like a reasonable choice over how they should organise their lives in this regard. In practice the nature of the choice may well lead people not to have children at all as they cannot see an acceptable balance between how they wish to run their own lives and the needs of the child being likely within the constraints which they expect to face. Having and raising children is very expensive both in terms of direct costs and opportunities foregone in a modern society and is no longer essential for a specific family to ensure continued survival in old age, although there are clearly other motivations for having children as well as instances where children are unplanned.

Children are of course essential in other ways, not least for the survival of local and national communities and for the future of welfare systems. Welfare state restructuring involves finding new ways to deliver welfare services that are better able to respond to economic, social and demographic pressures facing Europe. This often entails changing the 'welfare mix' (Ascoli and Ranci, 2002) by redistributing welfare provision among the three main welfare providers (family/state/market).³ How different societies are adapting childcare arrangements is a good example, especially as any changes may have profound implications for the welfare of parents and

¹ One of the key challenges facing democracy is how well social policies can accommodate the diversity and plurality of voices in welfare states that, by their nature, are closed and exclusive, and rely on citizens' shared sense of the common good as a basis for distributive justice (Walzer, 1983).

² Here we follow Jane Lewis's preference in her book (2009) for the term 'work-family balance' as a way to narrow the more usual focus on 'work-life balance'.

³ This is not to overlook the important and expanding role of voluntary or not-for-profit organisations too in setting up childcare advice, assistance and facilities (e.g. see 'Children England' at www.ncvcco.org, a body supporting charities, community and not-for-profit organisations that provide services for children, young people or families in England).

children alike. What might these changes mean in terms of Europe's future democratic structures and the wider democratic goals of social inclusion, equality and the welfare of citizens? We include Australia in this collection by way of contrast and to show that these concerns go beyond Europe's borders.⁴

CHILDCARE AND THE 'WELFARE TRIANGLE'

The welfare-triangle approach to classifying welfare systems is quite useful, not least as a heuristic device for seeing where the priorities of different welfare regimes lie. It highlights the constraints of having and raising children, as well as the balance of wishes over how these constraints are addressed (Muffels et al., 2002). The triangle, illustrated in Figure 1.1, suggests that the three main concerns that people have in making choices is over the relative importance of income, employment and full participation in society in achieving their objectives. These three are not of course mutually exclusive but even in the most benign societies time will mean that there is a constraint over choice.

Income is relevant in two respects. First of all a lack of it constrains the choices available. In the face of low incomes parents are forced either to work and find some means of raising children that allows them to do so, or to find someone else to rely on for income, be they a spouse, other relative, friend or the state.⁵ Second, the nature of the choice affects family income not just in the short run but over the rest of the life course. On the whole, the workplace is fairly competitive and it will become relatively clear fairly early on in people's careers who is going to succeed and who is not. Yet this same period when career success is being sorted out is likely to coincide with the prime age for having and raising children. Those who opt to spend more of their time on their children will not only have lower (gross) earnings at the time but it is likely to inhibit their future earning power as well. While this is most obvious if people 'elect' to stay out of the workforce altogether while the children are young, it also applies to those who choose to go home promptly at the end of the working day or take a less responsible job with better hours, working conditions or location – such as being able to work from home.

The link to employment is thus equally clear. If a family chooses that one partner will not work for a while then it will considerably harm their lifetime

⁴ We recognise, of course, that Australia has a deep and influential European heritage.

⁵ People in that age group are likely to have used up their borrowing capacity already in financing their home and its contents.

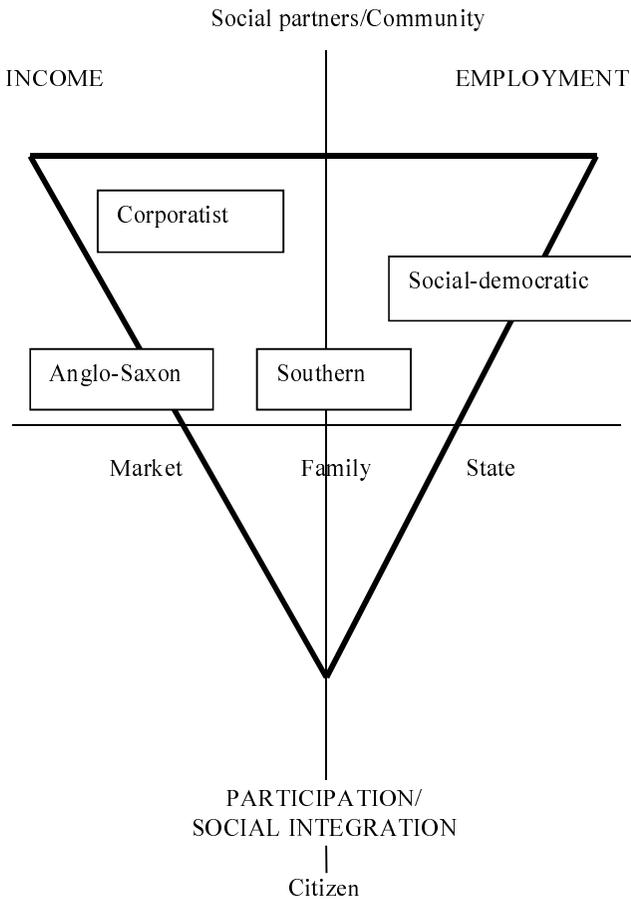


Figure 1.1 Welfare regimes and the Welfare Triangle

earnings and prospects. Although in some countries jobs have to be kept open and indeed a person may be able to recover their position, the chances are that those who did not leave work will have acquired more experience, will be better known to their bosses and customers and hence more able to advance themselves. However, employment is more than a source of income, it can also be an essential part of involvement in society. It expands the linkages that a family has in the local environment to a new group. It also adds variety of interest, although if the employment is in the family firm or on the farm, that element of extra socialisation may be missing. This is

clearly the approach adopted at the EU level through its European Employment Strategy which sees employment as main route to social inclusion. Targets to raise formal childcare are much informed by the objective to raise female employment rates across Europe although less attention is paid to the quality or type of work being promoted (Raveaud, 2007).

This introduces the third dimension of the welfare triangle, namely that the aim is to enable people to participate fully in society, only a part of which is to ensure that people have the capabilities to participate fully in the working environment. Such integration involves not merely building up social capital but having access to the social infrastructure. Being stuck at home looking after children and only going to events where children can be present can represent a considerable reduction in some aspects of the quality of life. On the other hand, it may offer an alternative when employment options are limited to low-paid and irregular work as a result of social or regional inequalities.

Children of course offer many direct benefits themselves and may be a source of income and social inclusion in the future even if they result in lost income, lost employment, reduced inclusion and other opportunity costs in the present. What the welfare triangle illustrates is that different societies have made different choices about where families tend to be positioned in the pursuit of the three objectives or in challenging these three constraints. Thus, the traditional emphasis in the Nordic countries has been in trying to organise the system such that both parents can remain in full-time employment if they wish. This implies the ready availability of childcare at an affordable price that follows on from comparatively generous parental leave entitlements. However, what this book reveals is that this traditional Nordic model is not only changing but is something of a caricature. The family plays an important role in enabling both parents to go out to work and to socialise through the involvement of grandparents. The chance of having at least one grandparent willing and able to help out is quite good.

It is also the case that children will grow in a rather different environment if they are looked after within the family as opposed to going to a kindergarten or care centre. Clearly there are benefits to both and parents will differ in their views about what they prefer. A kindergarten provides socialisation for the children at an earlier stage. Care within the family may help develop family bonds – of course if it goes badly it may do the opposite. There is also the contrast between the professionally trained carer and the well-intentioned amateur. The modern Nordic system is allowing people far more choice about which option they can adopt and by providing income rather than simply childcare opportunity gives them the opportunity to decide

how they want to balance a better employment and career prospect against more hours with a child.

The corporatist or continental approach, typified by Germany, concentrates more on providing the income support that enables people to afford to look after children well, with less emphasis on work. However, these systems are not cut and dried and the Netherlands in particular has placed a great deal of effort in encouraging workplace flexibility so that both parents can share childcare and work. Whereas the Nordic stereotype is two parents working and the stereotype in some other countries one parent working full-time and the other part-time, in the Dutch case there may be more employment in the family than a single full-time job but it will be the sum of two (or more) part-time jobs. Although as the book shows, even that model is being developed. One of the key features of the Dutch system is the nature of part-time work. Typically only some jobs are available for those who wish to work part-time or erratic hours and many of these jobs are low grade and poorly paid. Hence taking the part-time option will for many people result in a considerable reduction in the income, career and quality of work prospects. In the Dutch case many more jobs, including responsible ones can be part-time as employers have adjusted to be able to run such a flexible system.⁶ In many countries, when both parents with young children work, there is a heightened risk that one or other parent will have to take time off suddenly either through illness or because the arrangements for care outside a formal kindergarten system break down. This uncertainty, even if it does not actually materialise in absence, is likely to have an adverse impact on career prospects.

The traditional Southern or Mediterranean model puts more emphasis on care being provided by the family. However, as the triangle illustrates through the two axes in Figure 1.1, there is a second dimension related to who is going to be most involved in the provision of the system and in choice. Thus in the corporatist model much of the provision and the decision-making over how the system is to be structured comes through the social partners. This has quite considerable democratic implications. The emphasis will come through the workplace. Those who are not employed will have far less of a say. Hence the whole process of making oneself heard and having influence will be different. Those who are unemployed often have the most difficulty. They are on the one hand encouraged to find employment but on the other do not have the resources to undertake the search properly if they are simultaneously looking after small children. This is particularly difficult

⁶ In 2000, there was a(n unpublished) survey of the nature of employment in the Eurosystem central banks, which showed that one third of the employees in the Dutch central bank were working part-time. In the Finnish central bank (the only Nordic central bank in the euro area) was around 1 per cent, all identifiable individuals with special reasons for having that status.

in the case of single parents. In the United States there has been specific pressure on this group to obtain employment, limiting the period over which benefits are available (Altman and Shore, 2011) and similar incentives are in place in some European countries including the UK. There will always be a general incentive in these circumstances, if the quality of life without employment is low. Nevertheless if this group is not heavily involved in the process of deciding how the system should work it will be at a double disadvantage.

In a sense, if the extended family is viewed as the most appropriate way to solve childcare problems then there is less of an issue with the broader democratic concerns, as it is the narrow environment that is most applicable. However the high age of marriage and low birth rates in some of these countries, Italy in particular, suggest that there are clear limitations to the appeal of this approach. It is also true that most kinship support is provided by grandmothers, and the sense of familial obligation may cause grandmothers to bear more childcare responsibility than they would ideally desire.

It is the income approach that has the most archetypal relationship with the democratic environment, as this is primarily financed by transfers across individuals; although where there is a strong insurance basis to the welfare system, some of this support will come from transfers for the same family across time. Here the main concerns are the level at which the democratic process should take place. Much of the funding tends to come from the tax system often with hypothecated taxes related to employment. However, provision of services and issues related to inclusion are normally a localised concern. This may be met by funding being transferred from the national to the more local level. Indeed, in the US, one of the more important mechanisms that has been used to contain such spending has been to allocate funds on the basis of numbers and to make no further allowance for circumstances (Altman and Shore, 2011). There is then a strong incentive for the delegated authority to try to get as many of its clients off the books as soon as possible. This has resulted in very considerable pressures on groups such as single parents to ensure that they obtain at least some form of employment, however, lowly paid or inappropriate for the parent's skills or needs before support is withdrawn. There is considerable complaint that this does not remove people (and children in particular) from poverty but simply switches the source of their (inadequate) income. Indeed the position is far worse as at least while unemployed the parent was able to exercise that role virtually full time. With a poorly paying job the chances of being able to find childcare of a quality that is a reasonable substitute will be slim to say the

least.⁷ There is also a danger of a reinforcing form of deprivation related to the neighbourhood in which people live. If employment is difficult hence making income support more tenuous, the chances of a good social infrastructure and social inclusion are reduced. While something can perhaps be done through programmes such as the Asset Based Community Development programme (Altman and Shore, 2011) the prospects are not good.

One of the main concerns is that provision does not come through the organs of the state but through a range of agencies, some private, seeking to fill the gaps in the publicly provided system and other agencies that have a contract with government to provide services (Mayes and Mustafa, 2011). It is not that such agencies necessarily offer a poor product but that the opportunity for democratic involvement is limited. Such agencies are accountable directly to government but not normally directly to parliament, although this can be the case where an agency is supposed to be independent to protect it from short-run government predation. This may apply to the welfare funds themselves to make sure that they are not raided by government in times of fiscal difficulty or in the pursuit of short run electoral gain. In general, parliament is involved at one remove, although the accountability process may involve another appointed rather than elected agency. This is particularly the case in the health sector (Mayes and Mustafa, 2011) which is readily littered by such indirect bodies (see Vibert (2007) for the best known critique of this 'rise of the unelected'). Also such agencies will normally be subject to independent audit from some government audit authority, which is likely to submit its reports to parliament rather than the government.

In many respects it is difficult to contest these arrangements as the services provided can be relatively routine in character and subject to performance contracts. It is difficult to ensure any ability to achieve value for money in these circumstances and having a sequence of contestable contracts may be the best pressure for efficiency that the public sector thinks it can devise. Nevertheless this separation from direct influence, particularly at a local level, is a drawback. Of course it is always possible to construct consumer groups and other advisory bodies but these tend to have no great standing in such organisations and may exist more to help the organisation present its policies and actions in a manner which is more acceptable to people than to change them. Civil society will always look for means of having a more effective voice. In these circumstances exit is often difficult and the greater the disadvantage for any individual the lower the chance that

⁷ Except of course where the parenting itself is deficient.

they can improve their position either by moving home or switching suppliers.

In any case, one group who is clearly disadvantaged is those that move. Despite requirements across the EU that benefits are available equally to all EU citizens irrespective of the path of their previous residence, this clearly does not work in many cases. With an insurance system based on previous contributions, an immigrant may not have built up any such qualification or one that is transferable if they come from a different system. More importantly their level of social inclusion is likely to be considerably lower, despite efforts to help them through orientation or other classes. Furthermore such migrants only have some of the democratic rights of the local population. Without acquiring citizenship, they will not have voting rights in national elections and may find it very difficult to express their views even at a local level. As things stand the numbers involved may be relatively small but they will still have consequences for decisions over child bearing and raising and indeed for the quality of life of all those involved. The lack of social networks will make efforts to organise informal childcare more difficult, especially where the rest of the family are in a different country. While technically choices may be available, in practice many of the more disadvantaged groups may find that they do not. However, not only do they have difficulty in trying to change their position through participation but it is also difficult to devise mechanisms that will achieve it.⁸

THE WELFARE TRIANGLE AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The relationship between the three concerns or points of the welfare triangle (income, employment and social integration) is not straightforward. It can be linear when more income or employment leads to better social integration. In this sense, work and income are an important means to the democratic end of full participation in society if they provide enough financial security to enable people to live the life that they value. But some low-paid and less secure forms of employment contribute to in-work poverty (Kenway, 2008), whilst state benefits are less likely than ever to provide income security given that most are time-limited, after which benefit levels are usually quite low. Where benefit levels are minimal, the objective may appear to be less about

⁸ There is a much more positive side to migration but analysis following the work of Tiebout (1956) suggests that people may move to communities where the majority have similar characteristics and attitudes—the wealthier suburbs are a common example. In these circumstances it is likely to be more difficult for minority groups to have an influence, hence again having an adverse impact on those facing difficulty in organising childcare (Altman and Mayes, 2010).

social integration than about raising people's financial incentives to actively seek and find employment – and it is not always clear that work offers a route to social inclusion when the formerly unemployed find jobs in the low-wage secondary labour market. In this respect, pressures on domestic economies to grow and remain competitive suggest that employment at an aggregate level is seen as a means to wealth creation without always considering its social dimension in terms of the quality of the work available or its welfare-enhancing (or diminishing) characteristics.

The social dimension is important because it allows us to ask why societies seek to create wealth beyond the simple but vital task of self-renewal and self-preservation in a globally competitive environment. It is very much a democratic question being concerned with how we as a society (and not as individuals) decide in fair and inclusive ways what we need wealth for (Yeatman, 2004, p. 82), and how to ensure that all citizens share in this wealth. It is by its nature a value judgement over what our shared objectives and common goals should be, which from a democratic perspective requires processes and structures that enable the 'participation of every mature human being in the formation of the values that regulate the living of men [and women] together' (Dewey, 1937). Otherwise, it is left to others – the more powerful, wealthy or influential – to decide what is good for society with the effect of suppressing alternative viewpoints and reinforcing existing inequalities based on social status or tradition. Thus democracy is at heart about social inclusion through equality of opportunity and social justice.

The example of childcare is useful in highlighting the risks posed to social inclusion by a lack of or limited public support for families with preschool children. The past two decades have seen widening income inequalities between families with and without children as the risks of poverty have shifted towards households with children in most OECD countries (Förster and Mira d'Ercole, 2005).⁹ The risk of household poverty is strongly associated with two factors: household composition and work status. As regards household composition, sole parents face higher poverty rates whilst households composed of several children are more likely to struggle financially. Despite falling child poverty rates in the UK since the mid-1990s, one in five UK households with three or more children live in poverty compared to a comparatively low four per cent of households with only one child (OECD, 2008: Table 5.2). Only in the Nordic countries and in Austria, where poverty rates for households with children are quite low, does the incidence of poverty change little with more children or even fall slightly as

⁹ The OECD defines poverty as people living on less than 50 per cent of the median income of the entire population.

in the cases of Finland and Sweden. This suggests that a higher level of public investment in children, as in the Nordic countries, goes some way to offsetting the financial strains of having more children and allowing parents a more substantive choice over their ideal family composition.

Whilst public spending on families and children is above the OECD average of 2.2 per cent of GDP in all the Nordic countries, spending is highest in France and the UK at over 3.5 percentage points.¹⁰ But in terms of reducing inequalities and the associated risks of poverty and social exclusion, it is perhaps more important to consider how and where money for families with children is spent – on cash transfers, on services or on tax breaks. Most EU countries spend the largest share of family benefits on cash transfers in the form of paid parental leave, financial support for lone parents and help to cover the costs of childcare. The concern here, again referring back to the welfare triangle, is with income and with some level of compensation for family members who are no longer able to work due to childcare responsibilities (although parents may sometimes use state benefits to pay for formal childcare).¹¹ Similarly, tax breaks on income from child benefits indicates a concern with income compensation, although only in a few countries (e.g. France, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands) do they make up any more than 0.5 per cent of GDP. In contrast, the Nordic countries spend proportionately more on services than on cash transfers, for example by directly financing or subsidising comprehensive early childcare provision. This allows parents to return to work, often on a full-time basis, following a period of parental leave, and reflects a concern to promote employment as the best way to tackle poverty and social inequalities.

This takes us to the second issue of work status and risk of household poverty. It is clear from the OECD figures on poverty rates that employment is a main route out of poverty for households with children. In this respect, services for families with children rather than cash transfers are likely to be more effective, although the costs, quality and availability of childcare are important factors. Sole parents in paid work remain at high risk of poverty where childcare fees are high as in Spain and Ireland. As most lone parents are women, and as it is most often mothers who take more time off work to care for their young children, then it is key to underline the highly gendered costs of caring for children at home that may have long-term consequences. Older single or divorced women who have taken significant periods out of

¹⁰ See the OECD Family Database (section PF1.1) at www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database.

¹¹ The UK, where middle-class households can pay around a third of their income on childcare costs, childcare benefits targeted at sole parents reduce these costs significantly to around 10 per cent of average wages. Where this allows single parents to work, poverty rates amongst this group fall sharply from 39 per cent for unemployed lone parents to 7 per cent. Figures are from the OECD family database.

the labour market as full-time mothers are especially vulnerable to poverty in countries where basic pension entitlements are based on long minimum contribution records as in the UK, and not on citizenship or length of residence as in the Scandinavian countries (Hoff, 2008, p. 30).¹² Where mothers have been able to work on a part-time basis, they may still face greater risks of poverty in the present and in old-age if they are unable, given low wages, to adequately save for their retirement or, as in Spain, if their work is considered in policy terms as 'supplementary' and not subject to social insurance contributions (Hoff, 2008, p. 29).

The EU's focus on raising female employment rates has, quoting Hobson et al. (2002, p. 11), 'politicized the paid work/care nexus and has arguably opened new possibilities to place the work/care relation on the political agenda and to expand public services towards children and the elderly'. In other words, how societies choose to organise care is up for democratic debate, which will inevitably involve some discussion of the family even if there remains some reluctance to delve into private matters. Much attention has been paid to improving early childcare services, and it is noteworthy that the expansion of public childcare provision in the UK from the late 1990s from a virtual zero base was achieved alongside active labour market policies such as the 'New Deal' programmes for, among others, unemployed young people, lone parents and the disabled.

In this sense, we can see formal childcare provision as an active type of social policy that reflects a quite different vision of gender relations, the family and the labour market. At a conceptual level, the family is seen more in terms of two adult workers (the 'dual adult worker model') than the Victorian ideal of a male breadwinner and a dependent wife (Lewis and Giullari, 2005), although a lack of affordable or full-time childcare means that mothers still often experience work differently to fathers (e.g. on a part-time basis with potentially fewer career opportunities as some of the contributions to this book show). Nonetheless, the labour market is considered more as a site of emancipation and opportunity for women rather than a site of oppression and struggle for power between different social classes.¹³ The family too is viewed differently. Once seen by post-war welfare states as a place of security and harmony for male wage-earners, it is potentially a site where hierarchical relations are embedded and certain forms of injustice are institutionalised and condoned. Thus social policy, as many feminist commentators have rightly argued (Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994), ought not to reify the family as neutral or apolitical but recognise the role of wives and mothers as unpaid providers of welfare

¹² Of course, what is important too is the rate of the basic pension which is particularly low in the UK.

¹³ For early writings about power resource theory, see Korpi (1983) and Stephens (1979).

services for their husbands and children, and the dependencies that this entails. It is hence also legitimate to highlight the family as a site of potential social conflict and power relations (as theorists have done for the labour market) that may undermine the wider democratic goals of social justice, inclusion and equality of opportunity.

CHILDCARE AND THE FAMILY AS A FORMATIVE SITE OF DEMOCRACY

Questions of how societies organise the care of young children offer valuable insights into the family and wider political society as complementary sites of democracy. If democracy, as Dewey (1937) asserted, is at heart about enabling individuals to meet their full potential by participating in the social institutions that affect them, then the democratic principles guiding family relations ought not to be significantly different from those underpinning more public institutions. Giddens (1992, p. 184) speaks of a 'democratisation of the private sphere' whose legitimacy is found in the same ideals that sustain political democracies: free and equal relations between individuals, protection from coercion or arbitrary power, and the personal autonomy to be self-reflective and self-determining.¹⁴ As the public sphere has progressively eschewed rights or obligations derived from tradition or status (Commaille, 1998), then it is similarly important to consider how far familial roles are assigned rather than negotiated on the basis of gender or, in the case of children, on the basis of age.

The family is a key element in the wider democratic framework because, as a site or social institution where cultural norms are strongly embedded, it has a bearing on people's behaviour, attitudes and options. Schools can complement or compete with families in children's socialisation and education, and quality early childhood education can certainly tackle social disadvantage provided it is made available for families living in the most deprived areas. Similarly, paid work is an important balance to the private life of adults. It can raise people's personal autonomy within families and give them greater say, or 'bargaining power' (Korpi, 2000, p. 140), in family decisions. This, in the longer run, can alter received norms about gender roles and allow women to achieve more equitable outcomes in the public as well as private spheres. It is very likely that extensive support for families and working parents in the Nordic countries has helped bring more women into the labour market and into active politics than anywhere else in Europe.

¹⁴ Here Giddens draws on the work of David Held (2006).

In democratic terms, the goal is to raise the individual's capacity 'to deliberate, judge, choose and act upon different possible courses of action' (Held, 2006, p. 263). But it is the absence of substantive choices that often defines the care decisions of parents, with the rational choice being that mothers spend much more time outside the labour market than fathers due to the coincidence of gender wage gaps, notions of 'good mothering' and a lack of alternative childcare options. In this respect, this book's concern is not so much with how far families adhere to wider democratic goals, but to ask how childcare policies might help to make parents' choices more substantive.

But since social policies deal in normative judgements about the right ordering of social relations, it is not surprising that childcare policies are highly contested and that some countries favour certain choices over others. Most, for example, still provide longer leave entitlements to mothers than fathers although some have shifted to make parental leave entitlements gender neutral. Other countries are attempting to involve the private sector in childcare provision whilst a few are beginning to formally recognise childcare provided by grandparents. The various contributions to this book provide examples of how childcare is being redistributed between different welfare actors whilst offering insights into how different countries are attempting to improve or expand parenting choices.

REDISTRIBUTING CHILDCARE AND AFFECTING CHILDCARE CHOICES

In Table 1.1, we map out three different types of childcare arrangement (care in the home, in formal and in informal/voluntary settings) to show how each shapes the distribution of welfare provision among the family, state, market and not-for-profit sector. The aim is not to give a complete picture of all possible types of childcare, but to broadly illustrate which arrangements might partially relieve family caregivers of childcare responsibilities. The table highlights how childcare can be shared among different welfare providers as parents build up various 'care packages' (Knijn et al., 2005) to allow them to better reconcile work and family. These care packages will tend to be quite complex in most European countries if mothers are to sustain work on a more permanent or full-time basis (Daly, 2011, p. 17), perhaps with the exception of Scandinavian countries where the state invests heavily in children from a young age as 'public goods'.

Different welfare states still favour certain forms of childcare over others on historical or ideological grounds. How far the private sphere of the family is subject to social policy intervention depends on the sensitivity of welfare states to liberal concerns not to interfere in private matters, conservative

Table 1.1 Distribution of care by childcare type

Type of childcare arrangement	Childcare provider			
	Family	State	Market	Not-for-profit
Home-based				
- paid or unpaid parental leave			✓	
- extended leave options ('cash-for-childcare')	✓		(e.g. hiring of live-in nannies or child-minders in the home)	
- by unemployed parent				
Formal settings				✓
- day care			✓	(e.g. by registered community groups but may involve significant input from parents and/or extended family) ¹⁵
- preschools			(e.g. run by private individuals, commercial centres or, less often, situated in the work-place)	
- after-school clubs		✓	(e.g. provided by local authorities)	
- holiday programmes				
In formal or voluntary provision	✓			✓
	(e.g. by extended family, especially grand-parents and friends)			(e.g. parent & toddler groups, church groups, ethnic support networks)

efforts to promote the family (often in its 'natural' gendered form) and more progressive attempts to ensure that decisions taken within the family unit are less consequential upon women especially. Daly (2011, p. 19) similarly finds three trends currently at play: the 'Third Way' philosophy that promotes a dual-earner model in families by subsidising non-parental forms of childcare (including private care provision) but is much less committed to equitably

¹⁵ A good example are the *crèches parentales* in France where parents pay an equal share of the costs, provide food and nursery equipment, and generally are active in their day-to-day management.

sharing unpaid care work between parents; a neo-familialist approach that promotes care by the family and more latterly grants rights to the primary carers of young children (usually women); and, a social egalitarian vision that seeks gender equality in paid and unpaid work by investing in extensive public childcare and by encouraging fathers to take a greater share of parental leave.¹⁶

Based on ideal-type welfare typologies, it might be said that the Nordic countries represent the social egalitarian model and southern European countries embody a more familialist approach. Yet the usefulness of such typologies is also found in policy divergences from these ideal types. Cash-for-childcare policies, or extended periods of parental leave of up to three years, fit uncomfortably from a gender perspective into the Nordic approach to childcare. The extensive provision of preschools for children aged three and over in Italy and Spain also seems incongruous with the familialist model, and requires explanation of their religious roots, notably the Catholic church's desire to gain early influence over the state in educating young children (Bahle, 2009, p. 26). In the following chapter, Mark Thomson considers recent developments in childcare-related policies and their impact on gender-equity aims at work and in the home.

That family policies within the same country appear to pull in competing directions is not surprising. They are as much, if not more than other social policies, 'issues of moral and political values' (Titmuss, 1975, p. 23) that compete over differing ideas about child welfare, on the one hand, and gender equality, on the other.¹⁷ The result is that reforms in family policies are not simply moving in one direction towards the individual adult worker model (Daly, 2011). The family remains an important welfare provider, especially for very young children, although childcare is certainly now more than ever a matter for public policy.

States can influence parental choices about childcare in two main ways: either by directly inducing certain choices over the type and location of care (e.g. by investing in public childcare facilities), or more indirectly by raising the possibility for parents to choose between alternative forms of childcare (Lister et al., 2007, p. 130). The first approach sees childcare choices as issues of public concern because they are concerned with inducing the right choices by parents for themselves and their children. Arguments for publicly

¹⁶ This is not to deny the diversity of care preferences within countries given the impact of social class, ethnicity and culture.

¹⁷ In this collection, Armlaug Leira refers to 'Wollstonecraft's dilemma' that continues to inform debates between feminists over whether rights granted to women ought to be the same as those granted to men (equality as 'sameness') or whether rights should take account of differences in biological and social reproduction (equality as 'difference'). These debates clearly inform ideas about child welfare and related questions about ideal types of childcare, especially for infants and young children.

investing in formal childcare services, for example, view day cares and preschools as contributing to greater equality between families with and without children, and between children from different socio-economic backgrounds through early socialisation and education. The second approach maintains that childcare choices are personal ones. The state's role is to support these personal choices, principally through financial assistance. In France, parents can choose to use the *Complément de Libre Choix du Mode de Garde* to pay one parent to care for their child at home (until the age of three) or to help cover the costs of a nanny or professional childminder, despite generous public childcare services.¹⁸ As Table 1.1 indicates, live-in nannies such as *au pairs* is another form of home-based care, perhaps based on a 'fictive family relationship' (Sollund, 2010).

The Nordic social-democratic model of family relations is most explicit in trying to induce better parental care choices, and is unique in several respects. High rates of male and female employment support a social welfare model that can afford generous paid parental leaves and near-universal childcare services. Nordic countries have managed better than other European countries to fill gaps in childcare provision between the end of parental leaves and the start of affordable childcare services (although Karoliina Majamaa's chapter here highlights grandparents' role in filling some childcare gaps in Finland). The dovetailing of childcare in the home with formal care for children in day cares mitigates the trade-off between work and family, especially for mothers. Also, avoiding a long work hours culture as in the UK has perhaps helped many Scandinavians achieve a better work-family balance, although whether the introduction of the 35-hour working week in France encouraged men and women to share household labour more equally remains unclear (Fagnani and Letablier, 2004; Windebank, 2001). Ineke Casier et al.'s chapter in this book confirms, on the basis of survey results from 55 countries, that even highly educated professional women (in the field of photonics) do more household chores and care work than their male partners. This is especially the case when there are children in the family home.

More than anywhere else in Europe, Nordic countries are also attempting to redistribute childcare between mothers and fathers by extending rights to shared parental leave and, most explicitly, through 'daddy quotas' to encourage fathers to take more time off work to care for their young children. Iceland, for example, reserves three months for mothers, another three months for fathers and a final three months to be shared by parents as they see fit. By making daddy quotas non-transferable to mothers, they are seen as

¹⁸ There is high demand for public childcare that, especially in bigger cities, can often outstrip supply. French public childcare centres are usually open for 11 hours a day throughout the year apart from on public holidays and for one month (August) over the summer.

inducing better choices both for parents and society. In other words, childcare in the home is also a matter for public enquiry. The immediate goals are to redistribute childcare (and household chores) more equitably within the family unit and to allow fathers to bond earlier with their child. The wider goals are to make society's understanding of care less gendered, and to develop the notion of the 'caring father'.

Still, and as Arnlaug Leira's chapter in this collection finds, even in the Nordic countries parental leave remains disproportionately taken up by mothers. This may be the financially rational decision, given that Nordic fathers still earn higher wages in general than mothers, but Leira argues that this decision remains underpinned by cultural norms and the different expectations of mothers' and fathers' respective parenting roles even in a more social egalitarian welfare model. Nonetheless, the author maintains that more individualised leave entitlements promote ideas of the 'caring father', of families composed of two main caregivers and of care as a citizenship right.

Leira's notion of the 'citizen-parent' in the Nordic model is not simply about more equitably sharing childcare between mothers and fathers, however. Universal childcare has evolved to become a social right as the Nordic welfare states have invested in publicly funded and professional childcare services (albeit less quickly in Norway). This social right, which is seen as fundamental to promoting more gender-equitable outcomes, has remained intact despite calls in the 1990s for greater recognition of personal choice in light of the growing diversity of 'family forms, norms and values', for example through the introduction of cash-for-childcare policies in many Nordic countries (Sipilä et al., 2010).

Anne-Louise Ellingsæter's chapter here on Norway also notes how childcare has become a social right. But her contribution is to describe how Norway's 'hybrid family policy model' has emerged out of the political struggles between childcare as a public or personal matter, and how it has been quite successful in offsetting and reversing the country's fertility decline. The political left has supported public childcare as an important service for working parents and young children, and has fiercely opposed reforms proposed by centre-right for more parental choice through cash payments to compensate for unpaid care work or to pay for private childcare. The outcome is a mixed model. On the one hand, family-based care is underpinned by generous paid parental leave entitlements during the child's first year of life followed by an option to receive cash for home-based care for 1-2 year-olds.¹⁹ On the other, parental demand for public childcare

¹⁹ The hiring of nannies to care for young children in Norway is a recent trend that responds to thus far a minority of parents' preference for home-based care (Sollund, 2010).

services has grown as day cares and preschools have become a normal part of early childhood, leading in 2009 to childcare services becoming institutionalised as a social right for all preschool children aged one and over.

Guarantees to early childcare places for every child exist outside the Nordic countries, notably in the UK and Germany which in the 1990s still adhered to Lewis' (1992) strong male-breadwinner model of family relations. There is growing concern by many European governments to intervene early in families, especially those living in more disadvantaged communities, as a way to improve the life-chances of the very young. This fits well into a broader framework that promotes the rights of children in areas formerly considered the domain of adults only, such as a right to be heard in cases of divorce or in guardianship matters (Daly, 2011; Lister, 2007). Thus the notion of the 'citizen-child' is developing, although children clearly enjoy fewer *de jure* rights than do Leira's 'citizen-parents'.

Despite this, there remains a notable difference between the Nordic approach to childcare and strategies adopted elsewhere in Europe. Whereas Nordic policies are based on the view of children as a public good, family policies in many other European countries consider the child more as a shared entity (Daly, 2011). This means that, in contrast to the role of state in the Nordic model as a significant childcare provider, in other European countries several different welfare actors are now involved in the care of young children (despite, and perhaps due to, rights to early childcare places that are only guaranteed on a part-time basis). Parents in the UK, Ireland and Germany for example must put together diverse care packages involving the extended family, friends, private childcare centres, voluntary groups and individual childcare providers if they are to fill gaps in social entitlements to public or subsidised childcare. Several of the case studies in this collection confirm this view of the child as a shared concern, and raise issues that this potentially brings.

A first issue is the ability of private childcare centres to deliver quality and universal services. In this collection, Janneke Plantenga's chapter critically discusses the market-based arguments that led to privatising childcare in the Netherlands in 2005. Childcare provision by private suppliers was to be demand-driven with the aim of stimulating market forces, increasing parental choice and bringing cost efficiencies. In assessing the costs, quantity and quality of Dutch childcare today, Plantenga describes an imperfect solution whereby childcare, although sold in large quantities, is of relatively low quality. Dutch parents have difficulties in evaluating the quality of childcare services which makes switching between suppliers less likely, and undermines the argument of raising parental choice. Two other worrying trends are occurring in the Dutch model: the share of the total costs of childcare paid by parents is beginning to grow as the state attempts to cut the

amount it pays (the initial intent was that the costs would be shared equally between employers, employees and the state); a second concern is that the quality of provision is not a significant policy concern as childcare is largely framed in terms of raising female employment levels.

The Dutch case raises some doubts about the wisdom of leaving childcare services to the market. Rising costs are not indicative of better childcare quality and may simply push lower-income Dutch parents to rely on more informal care arrangements (for example care by grandparents). Yet the following chapter by Rachel Dennison and Nora Smith shows that some Northern Irish parents remain willing to pay a significant proportion of their salaries on formal childcare – on average 45 per cent of their weekly earnings, or the equivalent or more of one parent's (often the mother's) income. In such circumstances, it is useful to ask about the benefits both to mothers and their children of such large investments. Whilst work appears to be more than just about the financial rewards (e.g. in terms of raising personal autonomy and avoiding the negative effects of long-term unemployment), we must assume that parents also value good childcare in terms of its social and educational benefits for their children. But it is important to remain circumspect about all parents' ability to assess childcare quality, as Plantenga argues, if in general they have only partial knowledge of educational principles, hygiene or safety.

A clear finding from Dennison and Smith's research is that reconciling work and family life usually entails part-time work (most commonly by mothers) and reliance on informal support (by grandparents especially). Indeed, European social policies often promote part-time work, not just as a result of limited public or subsidised childcare provision, but also through policy reforms that encourage or facilitate an earlier return to work on a part-time basis. Daly (2011, pp. 12-13) gives two examples: rights to work part-time without losing benefits (in Austria, Belgium, Germany and Portugal),²⁰ and the possibility to work a limited number of hours whilst on parental leave (as in Germany and France). In this regard, the dual-earner model that underpins notions of active citizenship is better described as a one-and-a-half earner model according to which fathers usually continue to work full-time whilst mothers shift to part-time employment (see also Plantenga, 2002).

Although part-time work is often associated with less job security, lower pay and fewer career prospects, it can equally mitigate the risks of long employment gaps that make it difficult to re-enter the labour market due to diminished job skills and losses in work experience. The benefits of part-time work may also be psychosocial; i.e. having a break from full-time childcare and household duties, or the sense of some (limited) financial autonomy from

²⁰ Countries cited in Morgan (2009, p. 41).

the main earner. The educational level of mothers is a key variable, though, as better qualifications are likely to expand work opportunities and pay more (and hence make formal childcare more affordable). Another key variable is partnership status as lone mothers are less able to rely on childcare support by the father than mothers in a stable relationship.

Shireen Kanji's chapter on lone mothers in the UK explores this interplay between educational level and partnership status. Based on a national longitudinal survey that follows the lives of children born in 2000/01, Kanji considers how the use of childcare by lone and partnered mothers changes over time and links these findings on childcare usage to differences in labour market participation. Lone mothers face several constraints to their participation: relatively few qualifications that limit job prospects; very little childcare support from former partners; and, the high cost of childcare especially for children under the age of one. An important point, though, is that partnered mothers with no or few qualifications also have low participation rates even as their children enter school. Qualifications matter, not just for employment prospects, but for the type of childcare used as both working lone and partnered mothers with better qualifications tend to choose more formal care provision. Still, informal care remains high in the UK (by maternal grandmothers especially) across all educational levels despite a general trend for better qualified mothers to rely less heavily on their own parents for childcare support.

As Kanji's chapter shows how poverty and disadvantage (due to low educational levels) contribute to lone motherhood, the chapter by Kirsten Scheiwe turns the equation around to discuss the gendered consequences of divorce for women. As Scheiwe rightly says, typologies of family care models relate mostly to couples and do not adequately address the rise in single-parent households and its implications for paid work and care given that mothers are the main carers after divorce. Her chapter finds in the context of German family law that legal approaches to regulating childcare and its costs appear in a normative sense contradictory. Marriage remains a strong institution in Germany that brings certain tax and health insurance benefits for spouses with few or no earnings of their own. But divorce appears to penalise partners who have invested in the care of children or in household tasks in two related ways. First, ex-spouses on low or medium incomes are often unable to fully cover maintenance and child support payments. Second, divorcees are then pushed into dependence on means-tested benefits to which they may not be entitled if they possess private property items such as savings or housing that, potentially, formed part of a divorce settlement. Eligibility for state support implies first selling off or reducing these items. From this, we can understand how divorce may act as a route into poverty for many women.

One of the aims of raising formal childcare provision, albeit only on a part-time basis in Germany and the UK, is to mitigate the risks associated with marriage breakdown. Policies and institutions in Europe are in general adapting to changing family forms and dynamics. Most countries are shifting away from the post-war male-breadwinner model of family relations. But they are moving at different paces and are not simply replicating a Nordic or social-democratic model of family relations where concerns of equality (between children, between different family forms and between men and women) guide debate over policy reforms. Whereas many countries seek to foreground the rights of children (for example, to childcare places as an important source of early education and socialisation), issues of gender equality often lose out when the focus is on raising female rates of employment *tout court*. Improving access to childcare in theory frees up time to work, but it is an empirical question if work represents a more substantive choice for mothers given the quality of work available, especially if they can only work on a part-time basis.

Outside the Nordic countries, and perhaps France, there remain obvious gaps in formal childcare provision for the under-threes, especially in Austria, Germany and in most of the new EU member states. But whereas older EU member states are attempting to fill these gaps,²¹ childcare for the very young has undergone a process of re-familisation in many former communist countries. Roza Vadja's chapter here argues that this has occurred in the case of Hungary due to three factors: the persistence of long paid parental leave of up to three years which reflects a conservative social norm that mothers should be the primary carer of young children; the deteriorating state of the country's public childcare facilities; and, the lack of political debate about gender equality despite the country's commitment to EU targets to raise female employment rates. Only recently have reforms in childcare policies been debated, but they have failed to garner public support as there is a perceived absence or lack of alternatives to home-based care due to ongoing job shortages and the lack of public investment in affordable and quality childcare.

Finally, it is important to note that childcare in formal settings – provided by the state, the market or not-for-profit groups – is an important supplement to family-based care, not a substitute for it (Daly, 2011). Indeed, and leaving aside the particular situation in many former communist countries, there are processes at work in many European countries that promote more family-based care, perhaps as a way to value care work or to acknowledge different attitudes to work and care (Hakim, 2004). Paying parents to stay at home for

²¹ Germany intends to raise formal provision by instituting a new legal right to a day-care place for the under-threes from 2013.

up to three years is the most contentious policy reform in this direction, not least when it is identified as a quick-fix to rising unemployment as in France. Less socially controversial are policies that extend shared parental care leave, including 'daddy quotas'. In further recognition of the value of family care for young children, but provided by grandparents, the Netherlands has introduced a grant for people who regularly care for their grandchildren whilst Australia introduced the Grandparent Child Care Benefit in 2005 that covers the full cost of childcare fees in approved centres.²²

These tentative moves to publicly recognise care by grandparents indicate how informal care may in the future become more formalised. Even in Finland where there exists a high level of public support for working parents, grandparents play an important role in filling gaps in childcare as described in Karoliina Majamaa's chapter. Changing family forms (through divorce, single parenthood) and more atypical working hours increase the importance of kinship support, yet the desire to care for their grandchildren appears as the principal reason for Finnish grandparents to assume a caring role as opposed to being out of a sense of familial duty or need. A possible counter trend to formalising kinship support is a move towards 'active ageing', notably seen in efforts to raise official retirement ages given pension crises and ageing populations. Again issues of gender equality and justice arise here as childcare by grandparents is usually provided by grandmothers.

Grandparents also fulfil an important role in times of family crisis. It is often at these times that the state steps in to more formally define family relationships with a view to securing the best interests of more vulnerable family members, especially children. In her chapter on Australia, Marilyn McHugh presents the role of kinship carers (usually grandparents) of vulnerable children in need of care, and offers some comparative insights with other Anglo-Saxon countries. She highlights the particular problems faced by grandparents because of their older age, lower income and poorer health in fulfilling this role. But problems also arise, when compared with official foster carers, due to their lack of defined relationship with the state. Whilst both formal kinship and foster carers have access to similar financial and non-financial public support, informal carers such as grandparents are less likely to access such supports. Despite their reluctance at times to engage with the child welfare system, there is an argument for formalising informal kinship care given the risks that a lack of support may pose for both vulnerable children and their grandparent carers (again grandmothers especially).

²² See 'PF3.3 Informal childcare arrangements' in the OECD Family Database available at: www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database.

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