

Title of the workshop

Joint welfare and self-interest in families: striking a balance between the individual, the family, and the community

Organisers:

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Call for papers

Family dynamics and family diversity

Western Countries have experienced complex changes in partnership and parenthood patterns in the last several decades. The share of partnerships accounted for by heterogamous married unions has declined. The pathways to family formation have become increasingly multifaceted, often characterized by a postponement or decline in childbearing within marriage, a rise in the proportion of children born within cohabitation, an increase in homosexual parenthood, and in step-parenthood as a consequence of the instability of unions. Family trajectories are more heterogeneous both in terms of events and in terms of their sequencing.

Joint welfare and self-interest in families

Increasing diversity in families may impact the alignment of individual self-interest and family wellbeing, which has implications for the practice of social support and solidarity within families and for the perceived and legal obligations among different family members. Solidarity towards former spouses or their children may compete with solidarity towards new partners and their offspring. Vice versa, the extent to which children support aging parents depends on their own as well as their parents' partnership history, which may feature multiple sets of parents and parents-in-law, also potentially complicating intergenerational solidarity between grandparents and grandchildren.

The tension between self-interest and family wellbeing is also present in the division of work and care in families. Both paid work and care tasks have become an integral part of most individuals' life course, producing coordination problems within and across families. This in turn may lead to trade-offs between individual wellbeing and wellbeing of family members, which has the potential to reinforce existing inequalities.

Moreover, these developments affect the way families are embedded in society. In the private sphere of the family, individuals learn about important aspects of social cohesion, such as exchange, cooperation, and trust, which constitute the basis for participation in the community, like volunteering, voting, or providing informal support. Changes in families may affect the family's integrative function for society.

Family diversity and the welfare state

Whereas many social policies were developed to cover well-defined risks such as financial difficulties in childhood or old age, departures from the “standardized” family life course require a re-evaluation of social policy. Certain family constellations, for example divorced individuals and lone parents, are more at risk of poverty and deprivation than others and may not be able to rely on similar levels of support from their social networks.

Also, important differences exist as to which family forms have access to certain social provisions. Laws and policies in Europe have progressively included alternative living arrangements, but important differences remain regarding entitlements of cohabiting unions and the acknowledgement of “family rights” for same-sex partnerships (e.g., access to marriage or registered partnerships, adoption and assisted reproductive technology) or for step-parents in blended families. Such differences bring to the surface how social policies promote opportunities for certain family forms while denying them to others.

Contributions

We welcome contributions focusing on various aspects of family diversity and change: demographic trends, legal arrangements and social policy, and their consequences. Contributions may address outcomes for individuals or families such as vulnerability, relationship quality, well-being, social networks, social support, civic and political participation, labour market participation or social trust.

We particularly welcome research papers that take a comparative approach (placing Switzerland in the context of Europe, or comparing Swiss cantons), a life course approach, or are based on longitudinal data, whether with a qualitative or quantitative approach or both.

English is the preferred language for abstracts and presentations.