



Summary

*Karin Jurczyk, Josefine Klinkhardt*

## Father, Mother, Child?

Eight Trends in Family Life for Policymakers  
to Keep in Mind

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to Keep in Mind

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## Foreword

The family is the first context for a child's development, and the most important. This is where children begin to develop their own identities and first experience a sense of closeness, community and security. Family is a domain where learning takes place – for all generations. In their daily interactions, children, mothers and fathers learn from and with one another. They develop empathy and a sense of responsibility, and learn to deal with conflict. Values, beliefs and norms, passed on from parents to children, evolve in the course of everyday life. Thus parents exert an enormous influence on their children's educational opportunities and overall life chances – as research in Germany and other countries has clearly shown.

During the past 20 years, the conditions that affect family life and children's development in Germany have become increasingly complex. Karin Jurczyk, head of the Department of Families and Family Policy at the German Youth Institute (Deutsches Jugendinstitut – DJI), and Josefine Klinkhardt, a researcher at DJI, have published a book highlighting these issues. Drawing from extensive data and a large number of quantitative and qualitative studies, the authors describe eight trends that pose growing challenges for mothers and fathers as they organize the daily lives of their families. They describe the great diversity of family composition and how parents are managing the competing demands of their jobs, child care and their own personal needs, as well as the demands and norms of society.

Special attention is devoted to exploring what these trends mean for children growing up in today's families: How do they experience their parents' financial difficulties and struggles to achieve a work-life balance? What are the consequences for children that the gap between families of different socioeconomic status and environments is widening, in terms of their living conditions and the support and stimulation they are able to provide? A major contribution of this book is that it looks at these questions from the child's perspective. The authors never lose sight of the fact that the primary concern of a sustainable family and education policy should be to promote well-being and equal opportunities for every child and adolescent to get a good education and participate in society.

The eight trends described in this book reveal that in a number of respects, family policy in Germany has failed to keep pace with changes in families' living situations. Most importantly, it has not devoted enough attention to the needs of children. Child poverty, shortages of suitable housing for families and of high-quality daycare, discrimination in the education system, too little time with fathers and mothers –

these are only a few of the problems that children encounter far too often in our society.

Family policy should pay greater attention to the needs of children. Families need financial security and a high-quality infrastructure that is geared to the realities of their lives. As a result of changes in family structures, current tax and social insurance benefits that are linked to families and marriage are failing to reach the people who need them. A set of mechanisms needs to be put in place to guarantee a minimum level of financial security for every child, protecting families from falling into precarious circumstances. Families must no longer be put at a disadvantage, particularly in the social insurance systems. Those who take time off to rear their children should not be penalized in the workplace – and they should not have to worry about a lower pension when they reach retirement age. As we seek to promote a work-life balance, children should be recognized as a crucial factor in decisions about timing and scheduling – rather than focusing exclusively on the needs and constraints of adults, specifically parents and employers.

Children also need high-quality educational facilities where they can grow and develop to their full potential. Parents and educational institutions must work together in this context. Efforts should be made to involve mothers and fathers, who deserve recognition as experts on their own children. They, in turn, depend on a readily accessible infrastructure that can provide advice and assistance. Families that find themselves in precarious circumstances or come from different cultural backgrounds often have a difficult time locating, or accepting, appropriate support. Barriers that prevent people from using such resources must be identified and eliminated.

This is a long list of formidable challenges, and they require a rethinking of arrangements and benefits that have long been in place. It is also important to show respect for all parents and children and to be open and tolerant toward diverse living arrangements, cultures, and perceptions of what it means to be a “good family.” The Bertelsmann Stiftung is addressing these issues in its project “Strengthening Families and Enhancing Education Opportunities”. Our thanks go to Karin Jurczyk and Josefine Klinkhardt, as well as the DJI staff, for the valuable information and insights in this book, which will be of great help as we go forward. If children are to enjoy a positive development, they need strong families and an educational system that offers equal opportunities for all. Family and education policy must be linked and our mission must be reexamined from the viewpoint of the children, to the benefit of the children.

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# Summary

## Background und purpose of the study

Family can be crucial to an individual's sense of well-being and security, a refuge where regeneration can take place. Adults as well as children derive emotional, physical and mental support from their families. Families contribute in many different ways – benefiting children, of course, but also adults. In the course of everyday life, families, and individual family members, contribute to important processes: personality development, social interaction, education and skill development. Indeed, the family is the most important environment for a child's life and learning. In addition, however, what families contribute is enormously important to society. Families are an essential part of our social structure; they promote social cohesion and, by bringing up the next generation, contribute to the preservation of society. Not least important, they make it possible for our work-based society and welfare state to function.

Certain conditions need to be in place if families are to provide the necessary services and processes for both individuals and society, and if they are to offer children an environment that promotes positive development. Given the complex challenges families are facing today, this is particularly important. Society, the world of work, and family have changed in a number of ways since the 1960s and 1970s, and change has escalated during the past 20 years. With many boundaries becoming increasingly blurred, we need a new approach to “doing family” (Jurczyk et al. 2009a and 2009b; Jurczyk 2013) – an active and purposeful approach to shaping family life.

Of course, the changes that have taken place have made it easier for families and individuals to shape their own lives and helped to counteract rigid role stereotypes. In this sense, social change has been a positive force. But it also means that families today face growing challenges. Over the past two decades, the conditions for creating a family environment that promotes children's positive development have become increasingly complex. Working conditions, family structures and gender relations

have all changed during this period, but not in a coordinated way (Jurczyk et al. 2009b).

The present study seeks to examine and describe the various trends of the past 20 years. It uses relevant data and findings to shed light on the new challenges facing families and family policy. It offers a foundation for a discussion of how family policy can best respond to changes in society, work and families so that families are offered the support they need, thereby making “doing family” possible. The study’s basic thesis is that family policy has not adequately or systematically considered how the conditions that affect families have changed. Too little has been done to modify infrastructures in the light of these new challenges. As a result, families face enormous – indeed, sometimes nearly insurmountable – challenges in their everyday lives.

The study examines how children are affected by the trends described and by the failure of family policy and society to provide the necessary conditions for healthy growth. It also looks at how childhood is experienced under the circumstances that exist today. The primary goal of a sustainable family policy should be to promote the well-being and positive development of all children. This study can be helpful in reconsidering family policy from the perspective of children.

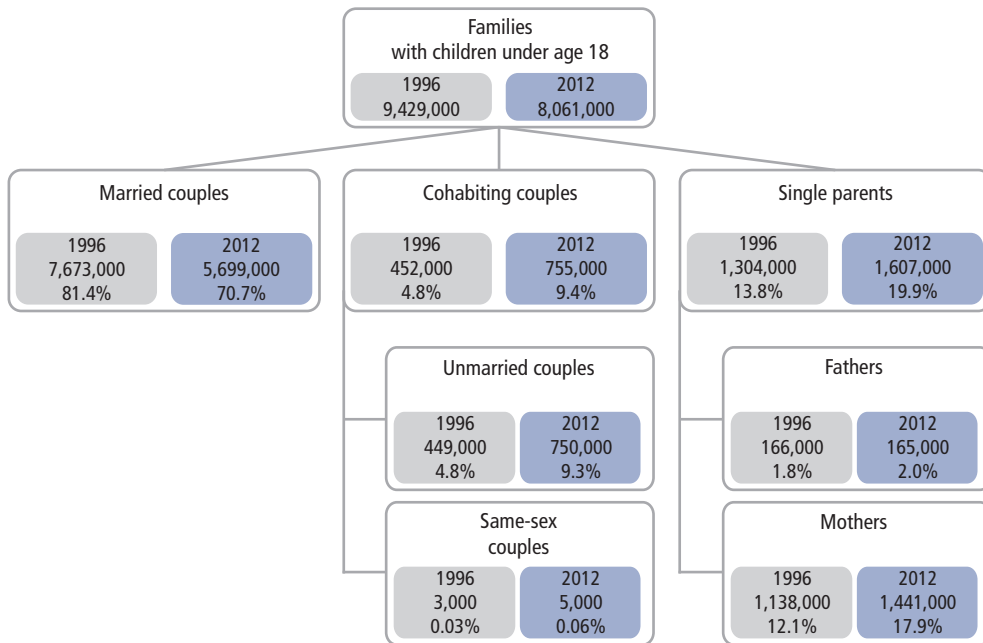
### **New challenges for families – eight trends**

The study identified eight trends, described below, that highlight changes in family life and in the conditions surrounding families.

#### **Trend 1: Diverse family structures**

Over the past decades, people’s lives have taken an increasingly dynamic course. As a result, it has become more difficult to coordinate the lifestyles of family members. While marriage is still the most common family structure in Germany, the percentage of all families anchored by a married couple has dropped by one-third since 1996 (BMFSFJ 2012a: 14), and other family structures have become increasingly important.

As marriage rates are declining, the number of divorces is holding steady at a high level. Since 2002, roughly 35 percent of all marriages have ended in divorce. Nearly half of all divorces involve minor children (BMFSFJ 2012a). More and more children are growing up with only one parent in the home, in most cases (90 percent) a single mother. In 2011, a total of 1.6 million parents were rearing a child under the age of 18 on their own; in 1996 this figure was 1.3 million (ibid.: 14).

**Figure 1: Family structure in 1996 and 2012**

In absolute numbers and as percentages

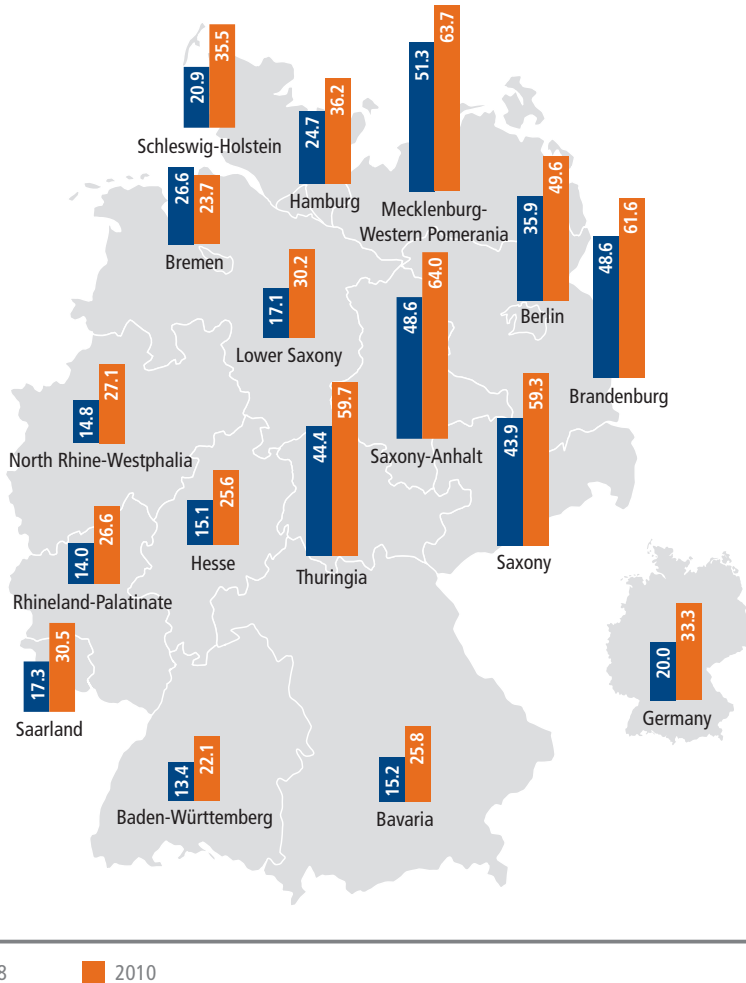
Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (German Federal Statistical Office) 2013c: 122; calculations by the authors

There has also been a steady increase in the share of children born to unmarried mothers. In 1998, the parents of one child in five were unmarried; by 2010 it was one in three. There are substantial differences between the *Bundesländer* (German states) in this regard (Langmeyer and Walper 2013).

Today children are less likely to grow up in a so-called normal family and more likely to transition from one type of family structure to another. With some people choosing not to marry, some separating or divorcing, and some remarrying and creating blended families, children are growing up in more diverse family circumstances than ever before. As a result, children are more often living in multiple locations, i.e., in different households, particularly when their parents have separated.



**Figure 2: Percentage of children born to unmarried mothers in the Bundesländer (German states), 1998 and 2010**



As percentages

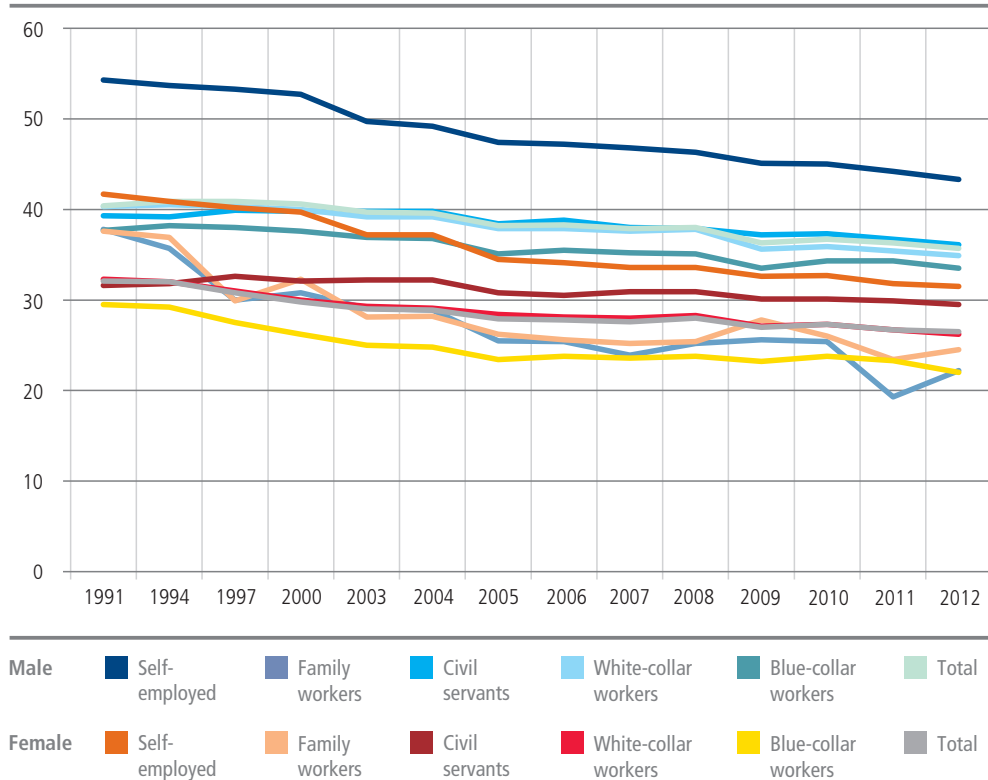
Source: Langmeyer and Walper 2013: 24, based on data from Statistisches Bundesamt (German Federal Statistical Office)

### Trend 2: The erosion of the male breadwinner model

Many factors, particularly the expansion of educational opportunities, have led to greater labor market participation by mothers and women in general. Men are often no longer solely responsible for the family's income. Rates of labor force participation still differ between eastern and western Germany: In the west, 28 percent of couples with children still conform to the traditional male breadwinner model, but this is true of only 12 percent of families in the eastern region of the country (Tölke 2012: 207).

Although more women are now in the labor force, their work hours have declined in recent years – while the number of part-time jobs has increased. In 1991, 57 percent of women in Germany were employed outside the home, working an average of 32.1 hours per week. In 2012, 67.8 percent of women were working, but only an average of 26.5 hours each week (Statistisches Bundesamt 2013d: 121 and 2013e; calculations by the authors).

**Figure 3: Average number of actual work hours per week for employed individuals, by gender, 1991 to 2012**

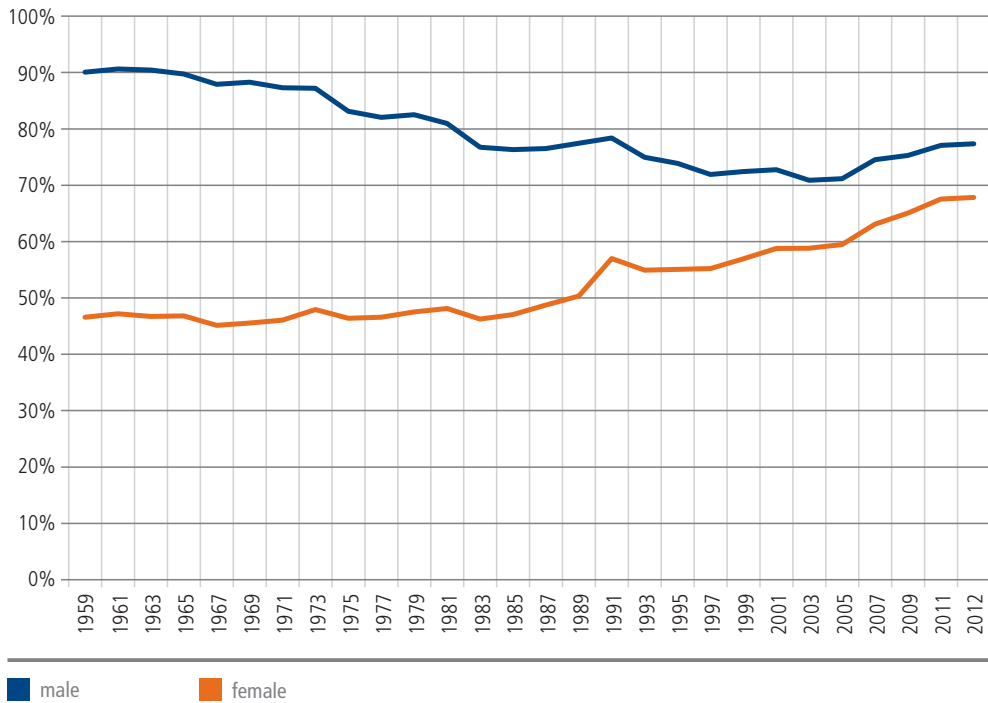


Number of hours

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (German Federal Statistical Office) 2013d; graph by the authors

Increased labor market participation by women has led to significant changes in gender relations and gender identities. Most children are no longer in the exclusive care of their mothers, but are growing up in a variety of settings. This is particularly true of children whose mothers work outside the home. Women who are in the labor force spend less time caring for their children than do women who are not (for children under the age of six: 1:50 versus 2:57 hours per day). A comparison of the years 1991/1992 and 2001/2002 shows, however, that the average amount of time spent on child care has not decreased, but rather increased (Statistisches Bundesamt 2003).

**Figure 4: Rate of labor-force participation among individuals ages 15 through 64, by gender, from 1959 to 2012**



As percentages

Population, employed persons, employable persons, unemployed, unemployable persons: ages 15 through 64 (until 1971: by birth year; beginning in 1972: by age). Until 1962: not including military personnel. 1983, 1984: EC labor force survey. 1987: revised projection (based on 1987 census). Until 1990: territory of the Federal Republic of Germany prior to reunification. As of 2005: After the 2005 Microcensus Law took effect, the survey was no longer based on a fixed reference week (until 2004 normally the last holiday-free week in April), but was instead a continuous survey with a variable reference week. Instead of providing a snapshot of a specific calendar week, beginning in 2005 results showed overall trends as an average for the entire survey year.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (German Federal Statistical Office) 2013e, Microcensus (working tables); calculations by the authors

In addition, fathers are playing an increasingly significant role as attachment figures in their children’s lives. Although in most families the father is still the important breadwinner, there has been a fundamental shift in perceptions of a father’s role. Men want to spend more time with their children. In 2007, only 12.4 percent of fathers were receiving paid paternity leave, by the fourth quarter of 2011, that share had risen to 27.7 percent (Schutter and Zerle-Elsässer 2012; Statistisches Bundesamt 2013a).

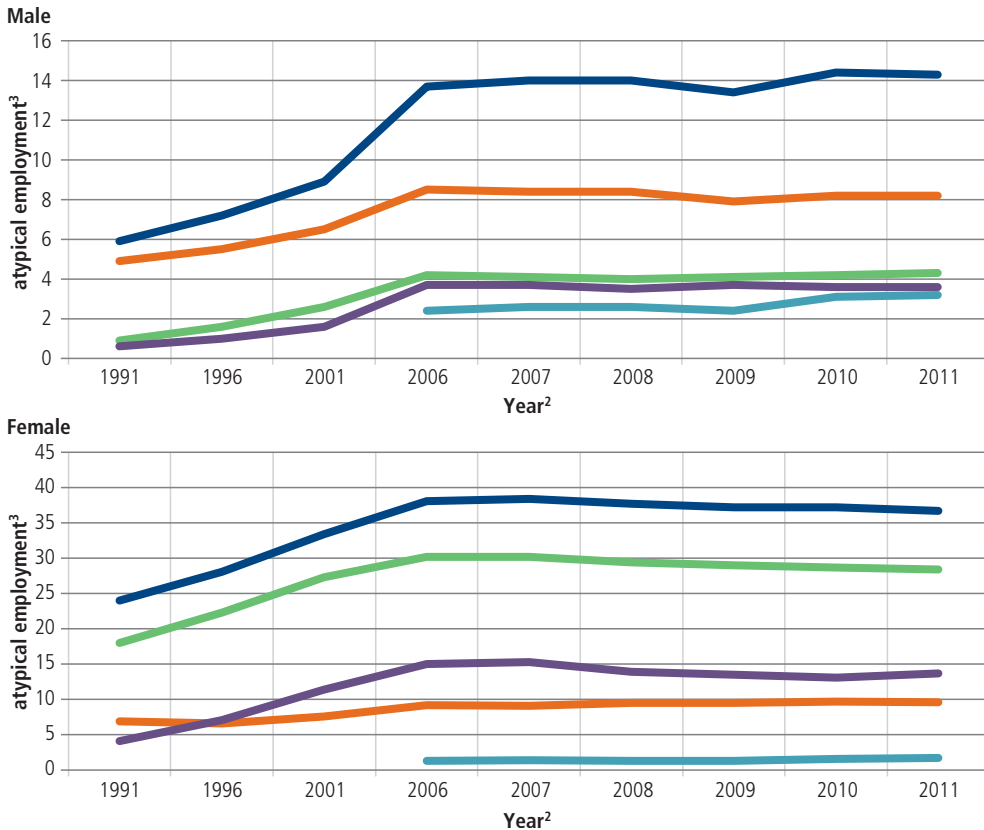
Overall, therefore, the role models children are encountering in their homes have become less rigid. With family structures becoming more egalitarian, children are more likely to be growing up in a family characterized by partnership and trust, between the parents as well as between parent and child.

**Trend 3: The increasingly blurred boundaries of gainful employment**

Established structures in the labor market are becoming less clearly defined; this trend is reflected particularly in a decline in the number of “normal” employment relationships. With an increase in flexible work hours and job-related mobility, people are less and less likely to work for a company on site and at fixed times. Instead, some work may take place in the evening or on the weekend, at different job sites or while employees are traveling.

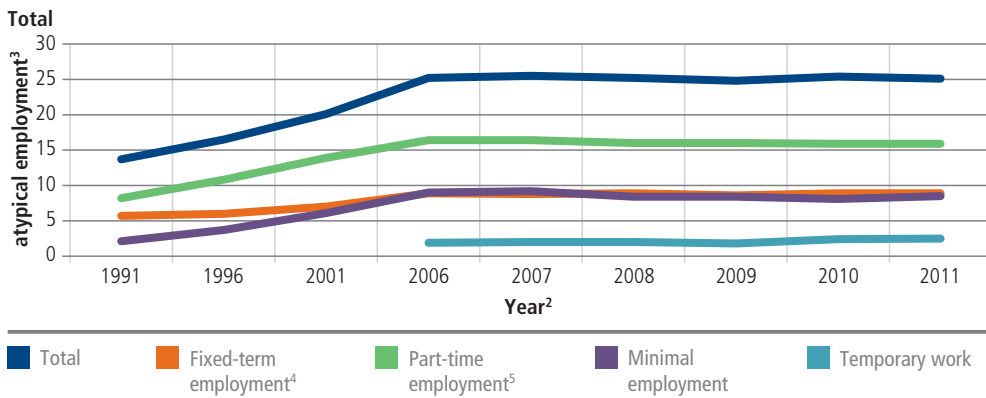
What’s more, increasing numbers of people today are in “atypical” job situations, such as part-time work, *Mini-Jobs* (i.e., minimal employment), temporary jobs or fixed-term employment. The share of such workers increased from 13.7 percent in 1991 to 25.1 percent in 2011 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2012a: 7).

**Figure 5: Percentages of individuals in atypical employment situations<sup>1</sup> by type, 1991 to 2011**



## Summary

Figure 5 (continued)



As percentages

<sup>1</sup> Persons between the ages of 15 and 64, not including persons in school or training; not including career military or individuals performing compulsory military or community service

<sup>2</sup> Until 2004: results from a reference week in the spring; beginning in 2005: annual averages

<sup>3</sup> Before 2006: not including temporary work

<sup>4</sup> Individuals may be counted more than once

<sup>5</sup> 20 or fewer work hours per week

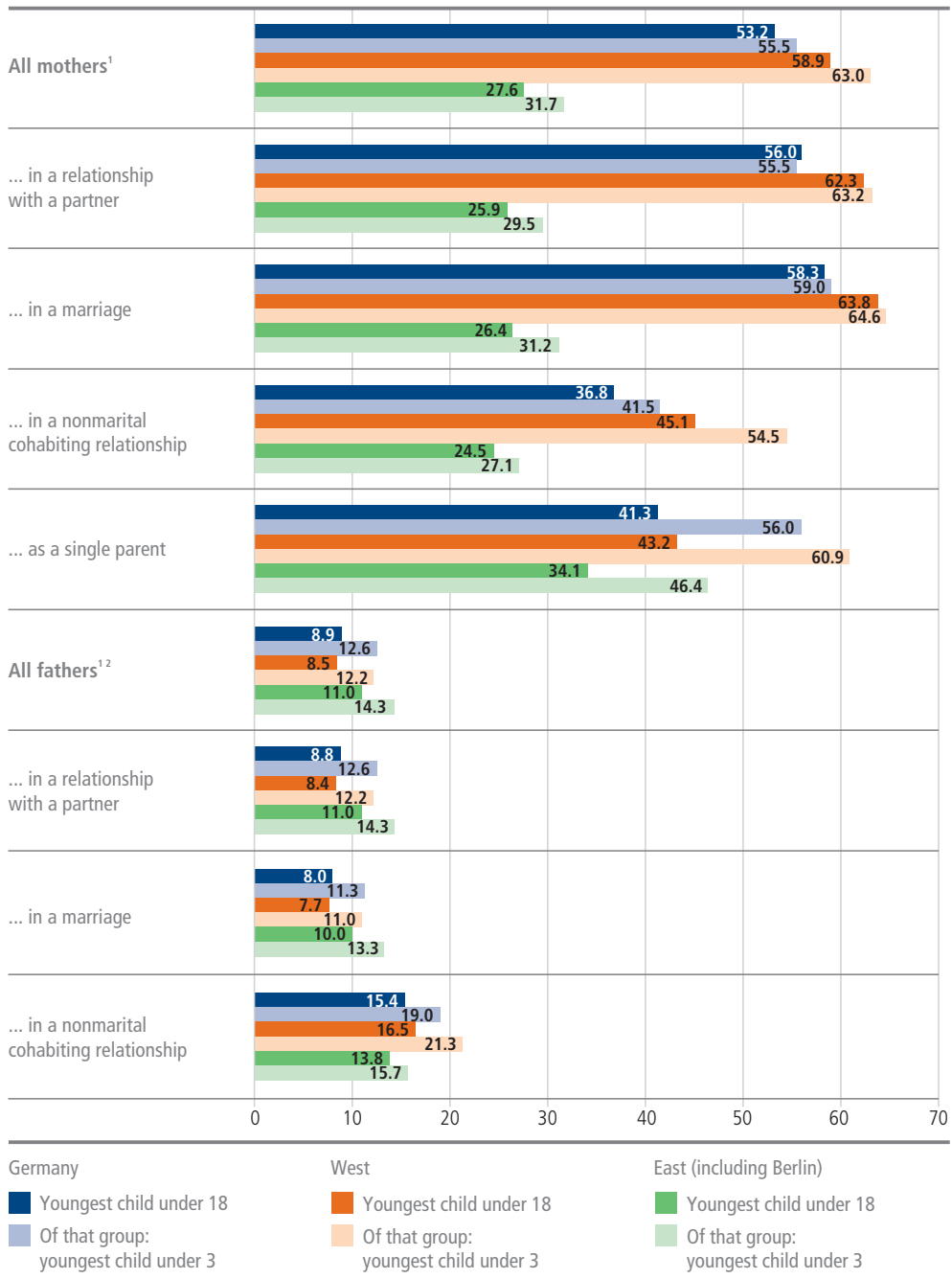
Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (German Federal Statistical Office) 2012a: 7; Microcensus results

In Germany, mothers are especially likely to have atypical jobs. Nationwide, 53.2 percent of all mothers with children under age 18 have atypical jobs. The western and eastern regions of Germany differ significantly in this regard, however (58.9 versus 27.5 percent) (Keller and Haustein 2012: 1089).

As the number of fixed-term and poorly paid jobs increases, workers are also facing greater demands. Employment today is therefore more intense than in the past. Work is increasingly making inroads into the private sphere, and more and more tasks have to be completed in the same amount of time. As a result, workers are under greater pressure, overburdened and stressed (Haubl et al. 2013; Lohmann-Haislah 2012; Zok and Dammasch 2012). Today one in three workers finds it difficult to unwind at the end of the workday (DGB Index Gute Arbeit 2012: 16). With the boundaries between work and personal life becoming increasingly blurred, and given the demands on working parents in terms of scheduling, mobility and/or job requirements, families are finding it more difficult to spend time together and create a sense of togetherness. For many families, moreover, these changes are directly affecting their financial security, their family life, and perhaps also their decisions on whether to have another child.

As a result, children are more likely to experience their parents as under a great deal of stress, and their needs have to take a back seat to their parents' jobs.

**Figure 6: Mothers and fathers in atypical jobs, by age of youngest child, 2011**



As percentages

<sup>1</sup> Parents of working age with youngest child under 18 at home; includes foster, step- and adopted children

<sup>2</sup> "Single parent" category is not shown separately because of insufficient number of cases

Source: Keller and Haustein 2012: 1089, based on the 2011 Microcensus

If mothers and fathers fail to draw a clear boundary between work and family life, this not only limits the time families spend together, but – as qualitative studies have shown – it also impairs their ability to pay attention to and interact with their children as well as with their partners (Alt and Lange 2012; Jurczyk et al. 2009b).

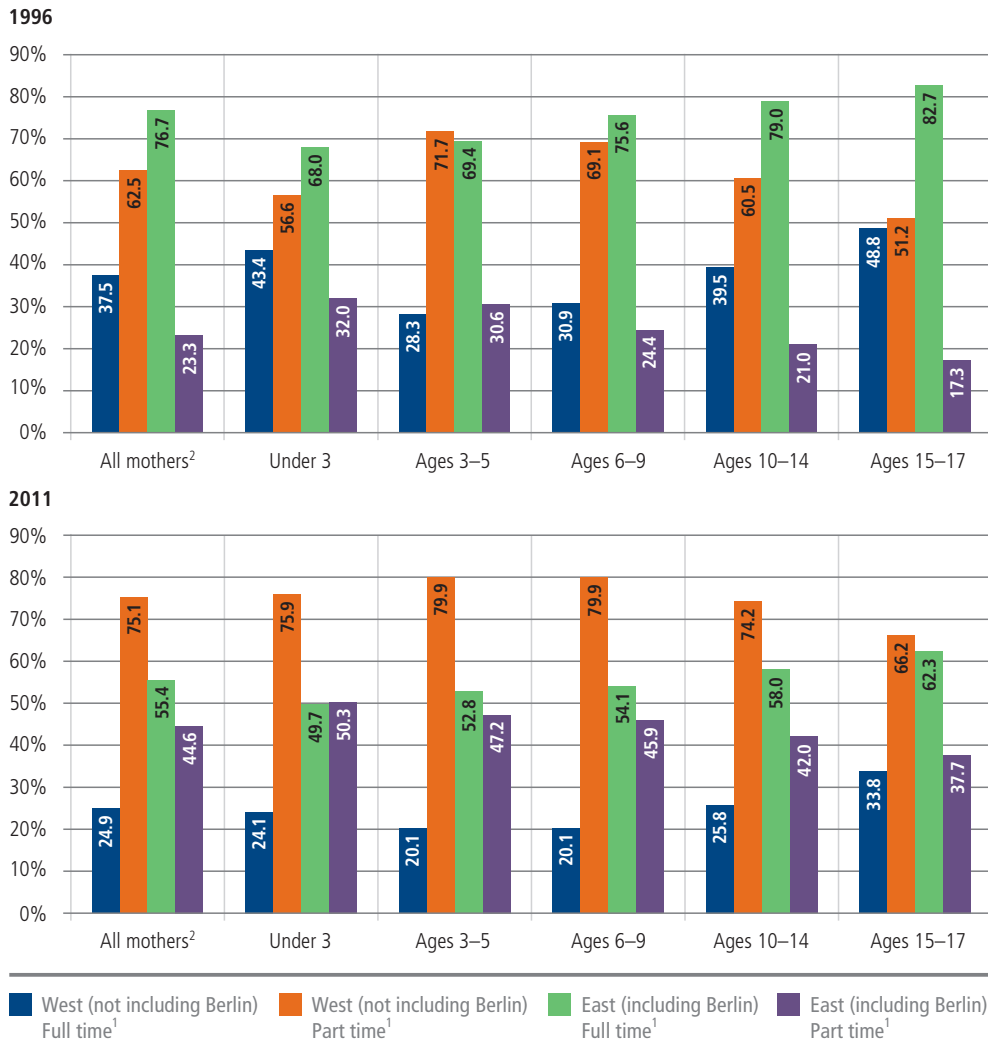
### **Trend 4: Parents under pressure – a work-life (im)balance**

Reconciling the demands of work and family is becoming ever more difficult, and not only because of increasing job demands and changes in working conditions. Higher parenting expectations are also putting more pressure on mothers and fathers. Mothers, in particular, have to juggle a multitude of responsibilities. This often leads women to reduce their work hours or stop working entirely (for a period of time) after starting a family. Between 1996 and 2011, the percentage of mothers with small children who were working part time increased from 56.6 to 75.9 percent in Germany's western states and from 32 to 50.3 percent in the east (Keller and Haustein 2012: 1082). A striking finding is that no matter what their children's ages, more mothers are choosing part-time work.

As for fathers, there is a substantial gap between preferences and reality. Increasingly, they want to be active fathers; but most fathers actually start working more hours, in fact more than men who have no children. Yet today's parents want neither a traditional division of labor – with fathers working longer and mothers quitting work entirely – nor for both parents to work full time (Forsa 2013). Instead, working parents would prefer either to have both partners work roughly the same number of hours, or for the father to work full time and the mother part time (each of these options was selected by 40 percent of respondents, see Forsa 2013).

Pressures on single parents are particularly great, and single mothers, more than any other group, report a shortage of time. Working long hours, and with sole responsibility for household and family, they spend more time each day doing paid and unpaid work than do mothers or fathers living with a partner (BMFSFJ 2011). Compared with other mothers, they spend a similar amount of time with their children, but compensate for working more by taking less time for themselves – including eating and sleeping (Meier-Gräwe and Kahle 2009; BMFSFJ 2011).

Overall, 75 percent of all mothers and fathers report wishing that they had more time for their families (BMFSFJ 2012b: 12), and children, too, are affected by their parents' struggles to reconcile the demands of work and personal life. Eighty percent of 6- to 14-year-olds say that their mothers have enough or even a lot of time for them; however, when asked whether their mothers are stressed and impatient when they come home from work, 30 percent say yes. Strikingly, studies consistently show that children are more critical of the amount of time their fathers, rather than their mothers, spend working.

**Figure 7: Rate of maternal full- and part-time work, by age of youngest child, 1996 and 2011**

As percentages

<sup>1</sup> Percentage of full-time/part-time workers relative to all employed individuals<sup>2</sup> Mothers of working age with youngest child under 18 at home; includes foster, step- and adopted children

Source: Keller and Haustein 2012: 1082

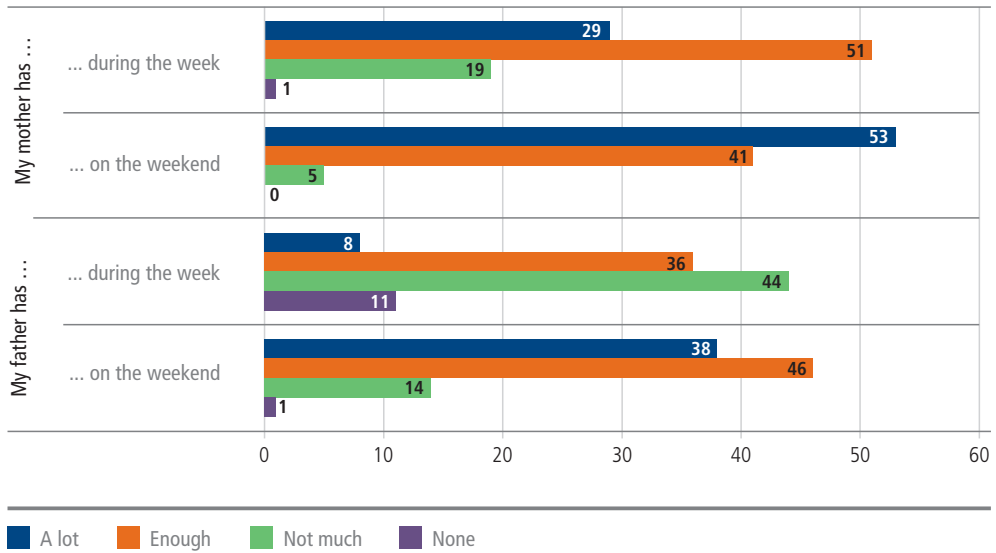
Only 44 percent of children report that their fathers have enough or a lot of time for them during the week (GEOLino, UNICEF and BMAS 2010).

Difficulties in achieving a work-life balance cause insecurity and stress for parents, which in turn affects children. Another consequence is that more children are spending much of their day outside of their immediate family environment (BMFSFJ 2013/2013: 37).



**Figure 8: Amount of time parents have for their children**

How much time does ... have for you?



As percentages

Based on: N=1,500/1,254 children ages 6–14

Source: GEOLino, UNICEF and BMAS 2010: 27; graph by the authors

**Trend 5: The polarization of families’ living conditions, with increased family and child poverty**

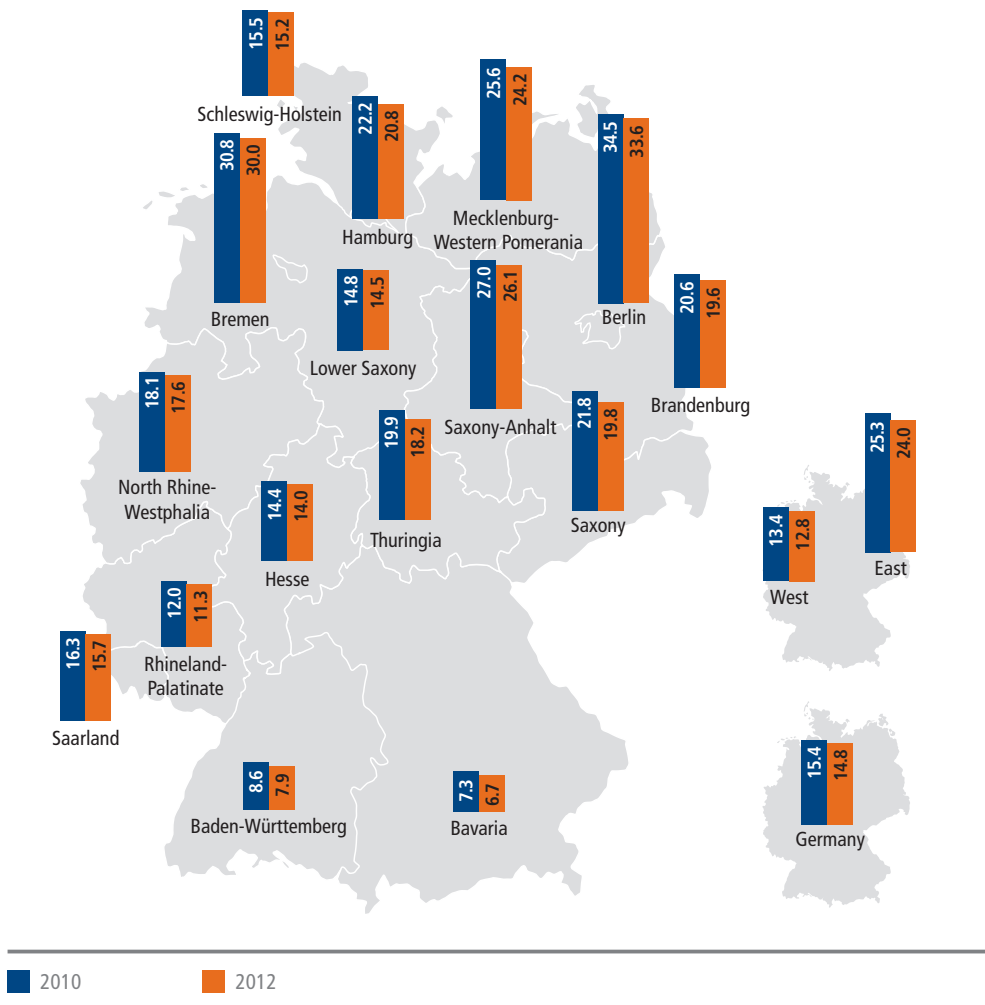
As Germany’s middle class is shrinking, the poor are becoming poorer and the rich richer (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012a; BMAS 2013). Consequently, there is a growing gap between the life circumstances of rich and poor families, and an increasing disparity in the financial, social and cultural resources available to them for coping with their everyday needs.

In terms of financial resources, at the end of 2012 some 1.6 million children under the age of 15 were living in families receiving unemployment and social assistance benefits under the SGB II laws (German Social Security Code). That corresponds to 14.8 percent of children in this age group, a percentage that has declined slightly since 2005 (15.6 percent). There are substantial differences by region in the percentage of children whose families receive benefits under the SGB II laws (BIAJ 2013; Martens 2012).

Certain types of families – in particular single-parent families, large families and families from an immigrant background – are more likely than others to be poor. Since 2005, the risk of poverty has increased for single-parent families. According to the 2011 Microcensus, 42.3 percent of single-parent families were at risk of income

poverty. For large families, the risk of poverty has declined slightly since 2005, but 23 percent of these families were still at risk in 2011 (BMAS 2013).

**Figure 9: Percentage of children under age 15 in families receiving benefits under the SGB II laws, 2010 and 2012**



As percentages

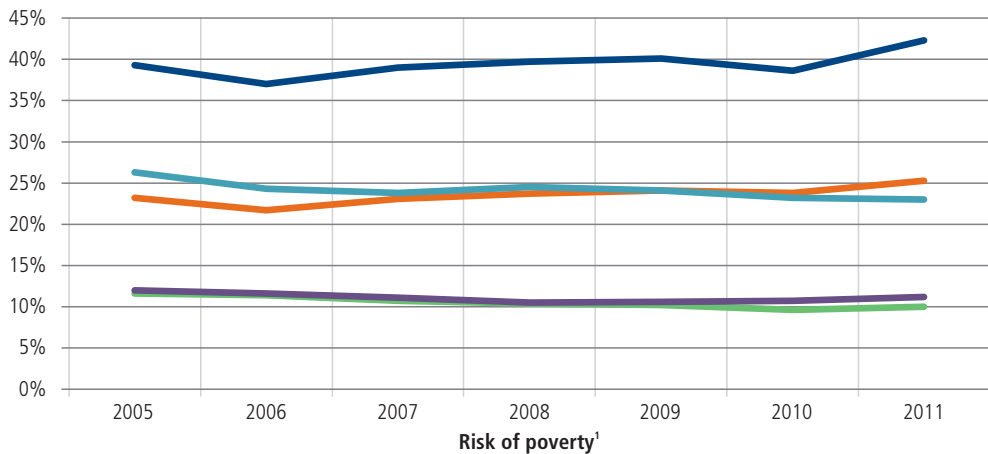
Source: Martens 2012: 28 (2010 data) and BIAJ 2013: 4 (2012 data); graph by the authors

For children growing up, this means that opportunities and risks are unevenly distributed. In 2010, more than one child in four under age 18 was living in a family affected by poverty, unemployment or educational disadvantage (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2012: 225). Growing up in such conditions is associated with the risk of fewer opportunities in life and a lower level of participation in society.

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Growing up in precarious circumstances can affect nearly every aspect of a child's life. While poverty and social disadvantage do not automatically lead to a precarious childhood, it is evident that financial security in the family increases the likelihood of a child's successful development – through attentive parenting and a reduction in parental conflict (Bradna, Jurczyk and Schutter 2012; Walper 2008).

**Figure 10: Risk of income poverty for various types of households in Germany, 2005 to 2011**



<sup>1</sup> Equivalized net household income (new OECD scale) < 60 percent of the median income of all persons

■ Single parents ■ Persons living alone ■ Couples with 1 child ■ Couples with 2 children ■ Couples with 3 or more children

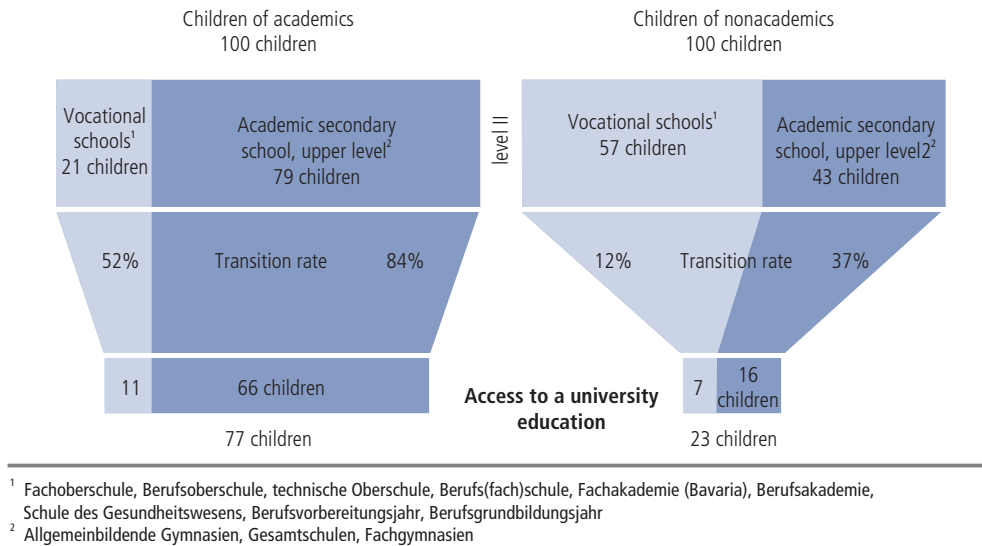
As percentages

Source: BMAS 2013: 461; based on Microcensus results; graph by the authors

Conversely, financial difficulties can exacerbate conflict between parents, increasing the risk of separation (ibid.). Multiple studies have shown that economic deprivation has an adverse effect on children's health and social relationships (Walper 2008 and 2009; Laubstein et al. 2012).

In this context, it is particularly problematic that the German educational system has shown little success in promoting integration and compensating for deficits. Indeed, it reinforces social inequity by failing to ensure that all children are afforded fair educational opportunities. A look at what is commonly referred to as the "education funnel" makes this clear.

**Figure 11: Social selection in access to universities – the “education funnel” in 2009**



<sup>1</sup> Fachoberschule, Berufsoberschule, technische Oberschule, Berufs(fach)schule, Fachakademie (Bavaria), Berufsakademie, Schule des Gesundheitswesens, Berufsvorbereitungsjahr, Berufsgrundbildungsjahr

<sup>2</sup> Allgemeinbildende Gymnasien, Gesamtschulen, Fachgymnasien

Source: Middendorff et al. 2013: 112

## Trend 6: Increasing cultural diversity – immigrant families

Children and adolescents from families with an immigrant background account for a growing percentage of Germany’s population. In many cases, however, they were born in Germany and hold German citizenship. In 2011, according to recent census results, 26.8 percent of children under age 18 in Germany came from an immigrant background. Of that group, roughly 77 percent were German citizens (Statistisches Bundesamt 2013b: 12 ff., calculations by the authors). The overwhelming majority of children from immigrant families – 89 percent – were born in Germany. As a result, German society has played a significant role in their socialization (Otremba 2013: 18).

Thus the immigrant background of these children refers to their parents’ immigration rather than their own (cf. Betz 2011: 270). It should be noted in this context that the percentage of children living in families from an immigrant background is higher at younger than older ages. Among children under age three, 35 percent live in such families; this is true of 27 percent of 14- to 18-year-olds (BMFSFJ 2010: 22). For children in Germany, growing up in an environment of cultural diversity is therefore becoming increasingly “normal” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2012b).

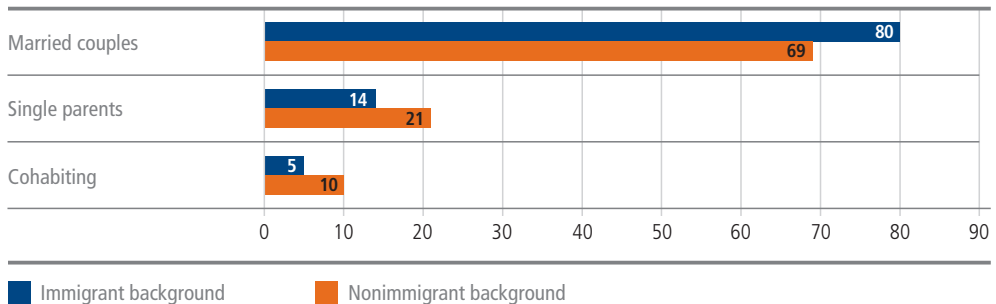
Individuals and families from an immigrant background are enormously diverse – with regard to their countries of origin, the circumstances of and reasons for their migration, and the conditions of their entry and integration into German society (Baykara-Krumme 2012; BMFSFJ 2000). And, just like nonimmigrants,

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they are living in heterogeneous environments (Alt 2006; Merkle 2011). At present, however, we lack sufficient data to present a detailed description of their very different living situations. As a result, we run the risk of ignoring their diversity and lumping them all together under the stigmatizing label of “immigrants.” To avoid doing this, it is important to consider the story of a family’s immigration in the context of that family’s life as a whole.

Nonetheless, this paper seeks to present a description of immigrant families that is as differentiated as possible. Relative to nonimmigrant families, they are more likely to suffer economic hardship. In 2009, 30.5 percent of families from an immigrant background were at risk of poverty (BMFSFJ 2010: 37), but that risk varied dramatically by country of origin. Depending on the family’s cultural background and socioeconomic situation, unfavorable conditions can have a cumulative effect on a child’s development. Compared with nonimmigrant families, parents in immigrant families are also more likely to be married and less likely to be single parents, and families with three or more children are more common (15 vs. 9 percent) (Galster and Haustein 2012).

**Figure 12: Families with and without an immigrant background, by family structure, 2010**



As percentages

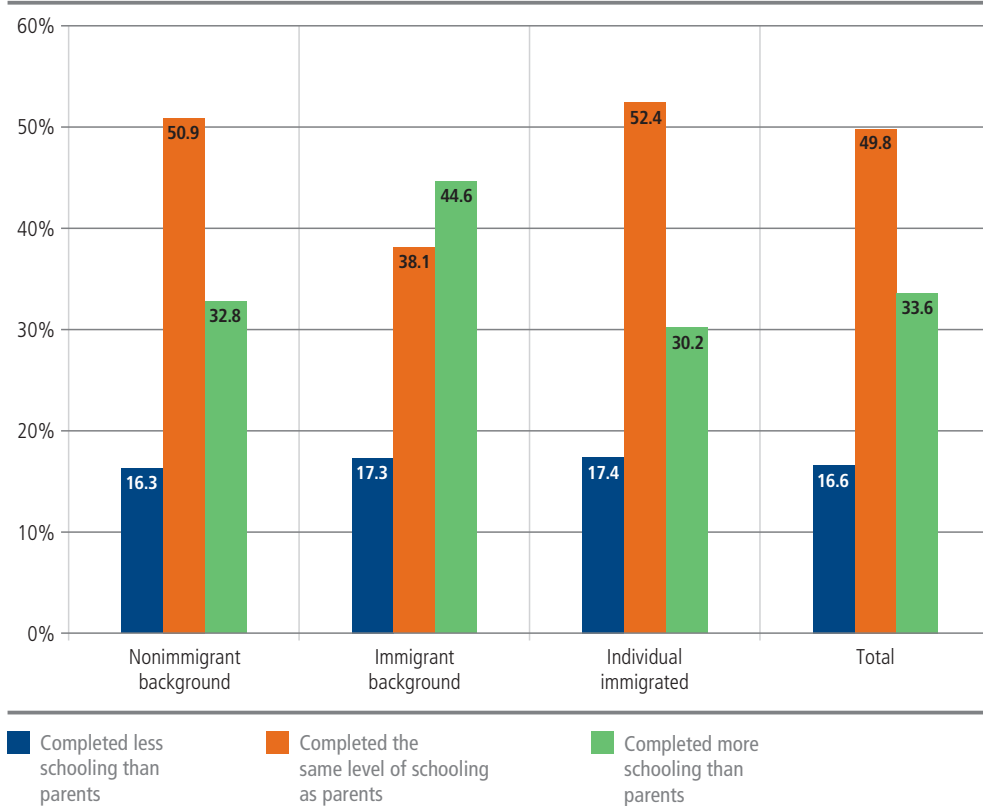
Source: Galster and Haustein 2012

Since 2000, the PISA studies have shown a significant improvement in the test results of 15-year-olds from an immigrant background (Klieme et al. 2010). Furthermore, young people whose families have immigrated to Germany are more likely than their nonimmigrant peers to exceed their parents’ educational attainment (BMFSFJ 2013).

It is still the case, however, that children from an immigrant background face longer odds in the education system, and they still do worse than their nonimmigrant peers. For example, tests of primary school children and 15-year-olds (IQB state-level comparison and PISA) confirm that a gap still exists. This is due in part to the fact that immigrant families are less likely to take advantage of early childhood education and care programs, particularly in the first three years of a child’s life; in

addition, too little attention is paid in the education system to the culture-specific capital of children and parents from an immigrant background.

**Figure 13: Persons from age 15 through age 25 by intergenerational trends in educational attainment and by migration status, 2009**



As percentages

Source: BMFSFJ 2013: 88

### Trend 7: The changing shape of childhood

Over the past few decades, the conditions under which children are growing up have changed dramatically; this is clear from the trends described above. Demographic developments have led to a significant decline in the number of children in our society. Moreover, there have been changes in how childhood is experienced and perceived. Today the relationship between parent and child is more of a partnership, and children are viewed as somewhat autonomous, competent and capable of playing an active role in shaping their environments (Alt and Lange 2013).

A significant percentage of children experience more than one type of family structure, and they are increasingly in the care not only of their families, but also of

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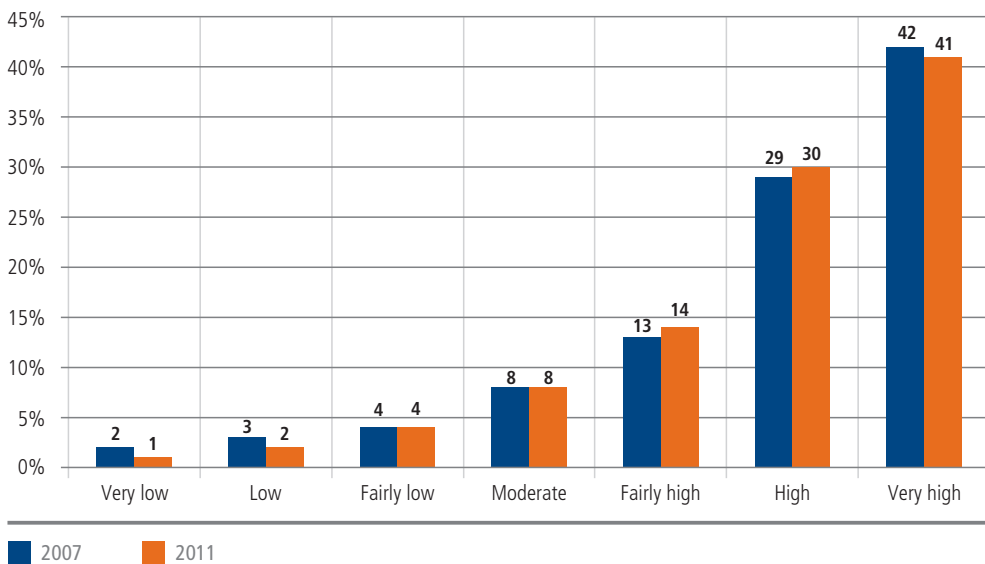
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public child care facilities. Many find their mothers and fathers to be frequently stressed and overworked. At the same time, children and young people today have access to an abundance of leisure activities, and various types of media play a prominent role in their lives. Despite the changes that have taken place, children and adolescents feel very comfortable in their family environments; this has been confirmed by a number of surveys (LBS-Initiative Junge Familie 2007 and 2011; BMFSFJ 2013).

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**Figure 14: Level of well-being in families, 2007 and 2011**

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As percentage. Approximately 10,000 children between the ages of 9 and 14 were included in the survey.

Source: LBS-Initiative Junge Familie 2007: 35 and 2011: 43

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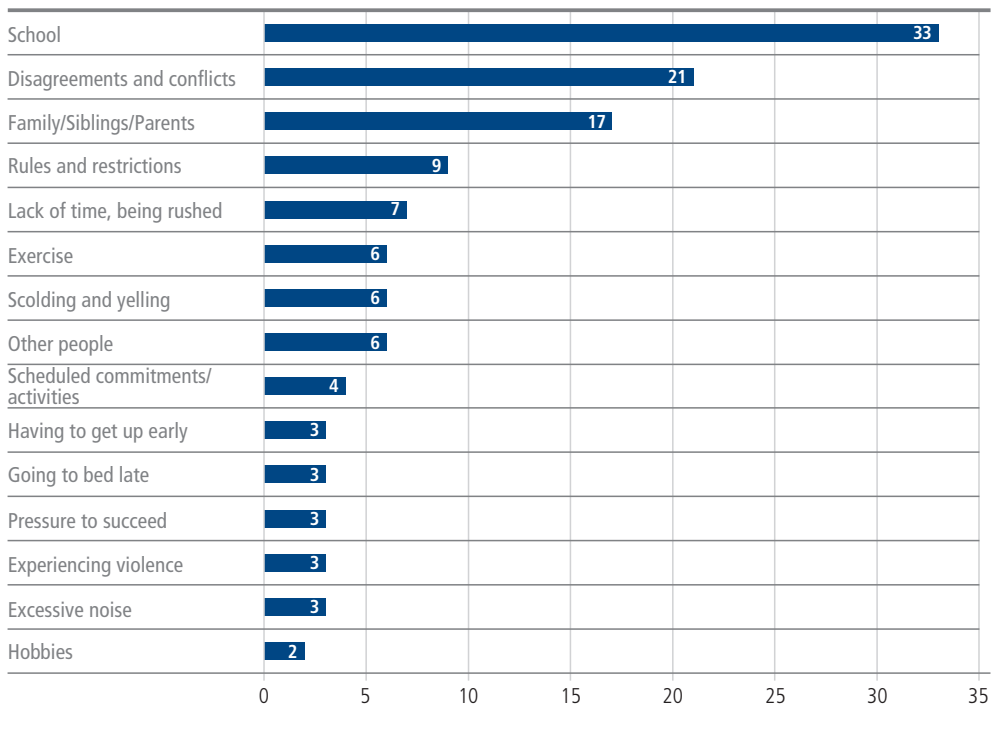
Note, however, that there are substantial differences in the living environments and activities of children from disparate social backgrounds. Studies of childhood have shown that how leisure time is spent depends greatly on social origins and parental income, and this affects the range of experiences young people are exposed to (Leven and Schneekloth 2010a). It starts with conditions in the home, as well as opportunities for play and experiences in the immediate social environment. There are also significant differences in rates of participation in organizations and volunteer work, depending on socioeconomic status (SES) and milieu conditions. Nearly all high-SES children – 95 percent – are active in an organization; this is true of only 42 percent, or less than half, of low-SES children (ibid.: 106).

Children are spending more and more time, and at younger ages, in public educational and care facilities. This is fueling a trend toward placing academic demands and increasing pressure on children. With a greater focus on early childhood edu-

cation, more testing of children's development and skills is being carried out at a very early stage. This puts an enormous amount of pressure on children as well as on parents (BMFSFJ 2013).

Children report experiencing the lowest levels of well-being at school. In 2011, 16 percent of the children surveyed said that the level of their well-being at school was low; fewer – 13 percent – gave that response in 2007. On the other hand, roughly half of the children reported a high or even very high level of well-being at school (LBS-Initiative Junge Familie 2011: 45). As children grow older, however, their sense of well-being at school declines, and school is the source of their greatest stress – ranking above conflicts, disagreements, and stress in their families (LBS-Initiative Junge Familie 2007, 2009 and 2011; Elefanten Kinderschuhe 2012).

**Figure 15: Which of the following do you find stressful?**



As percentage. N = 4,691 second and third graders

Source: Elefanten Kinderschuhe 2012: 141

Because not all families are able to provide the same level of support and stimulation, the gap between the conditions under which children and adolescents of different social backgrounds are growing up is continuing to widen. Early in life, children from disadvantaged families have already internalized the message that they have little chance in the school system. While 76 percent of high-SES children aspire to pass the *Abitur* examination, which is required for university entrance,



this is true of only 19 percent of children from low-SES families (Leven and Schneekloth 2010b: 164).

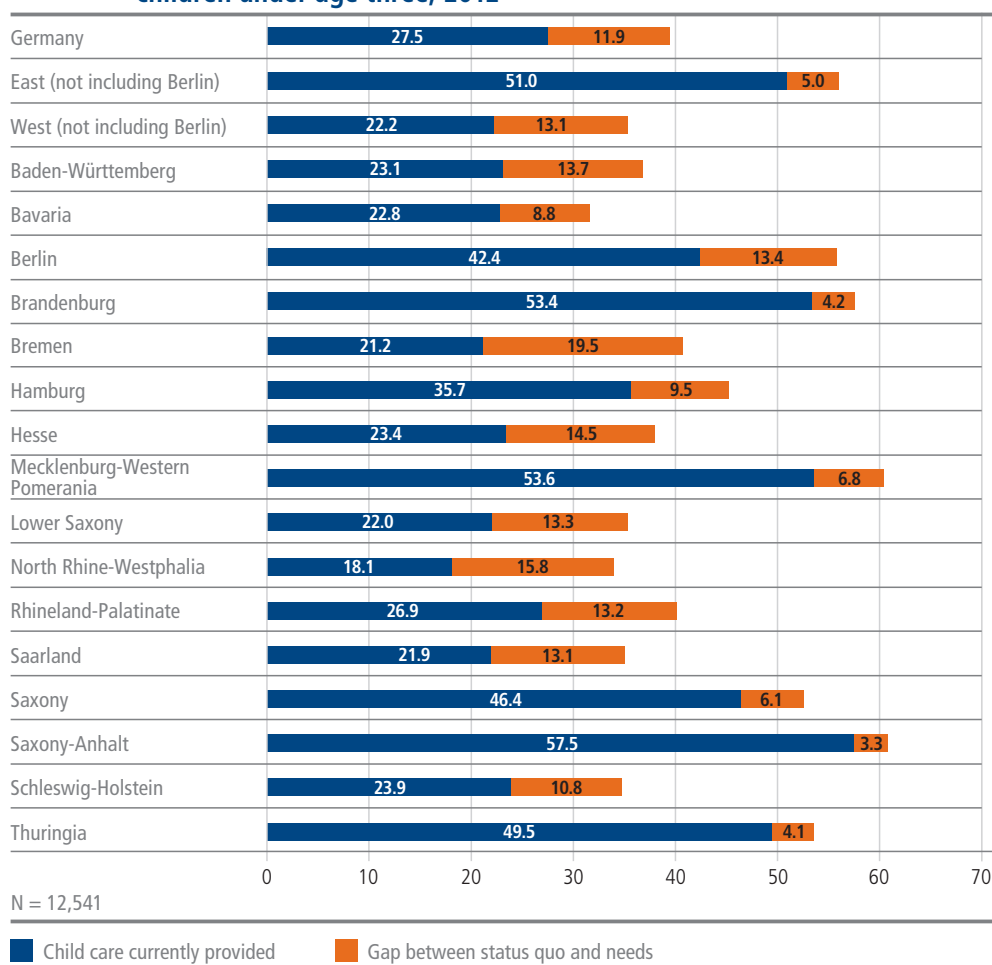
As for mothers and fathers, changes in family life and living environments have led to higher expectations of what it means to be a “good parent.” Parents who are committed to education are closely involved with their children’s education and make sure that they have access to a variety of supports and learning opportunities. At the other end of the spectrum are parents from less advantaged socioeconomic groups, many of whom have themselves completed little education, who find it a greater challenge to provide their children with educational support. One problem is a lack of financial resources; another is a lack of the normed cultural resources needed to help their children succeed in Germany’s education system. All of this exacerbates social inequality.

### **Trend 8: The institutional gap – infrastructures are no longer meeting families’ needs**

Changes in the structures that affect families have led to a need for more and somewhat different kinds of infrastructural support. The term “institutional gap” refers to the fact that infrastructures are no longer in tune with the changing needs of families and children. This gap manifests itself in a number of ways: In many cases, there are not enough infrastructures, and they are of inferior quality. In addition, they are increasingly out of sync with families’ scheduling needs. They are designed with normed conceptions of native, middle-class families, employment and gender relations in mind – all of which have declined in importance.

The lack of sufficient high-quality infrastructures is particularly problematic in areas where families need more support than in the past. This is true in the areas of education, counseling and assistance for families. Resources have even declined for family education, where staffing has been cut despite growing demand. Over 2,700 people nationwide were employed in family education in 1998; by 2010 that number had dropped to only about 2,000 (Fuchs-Rechlin 2011: 2; Statistisches Bundesamt 2012b: 109). With fewer staff members, and with demand growing and becoming more differentiated, there is cause for concern that the quality of the system of family education will deteriorate.

A shortage of high-quality infrastructures is also affecting the education and care provided for children and adolescents. Despite a steady increase in the number of daycare slots for children under age three, it has not yet proved possible to meet parents’ needs. The most important problem is that child care is often not available at the times when it is needed.

**Figure 16: Gap between child care actually provided and child care needs, children under age three, 2012**

As percentages

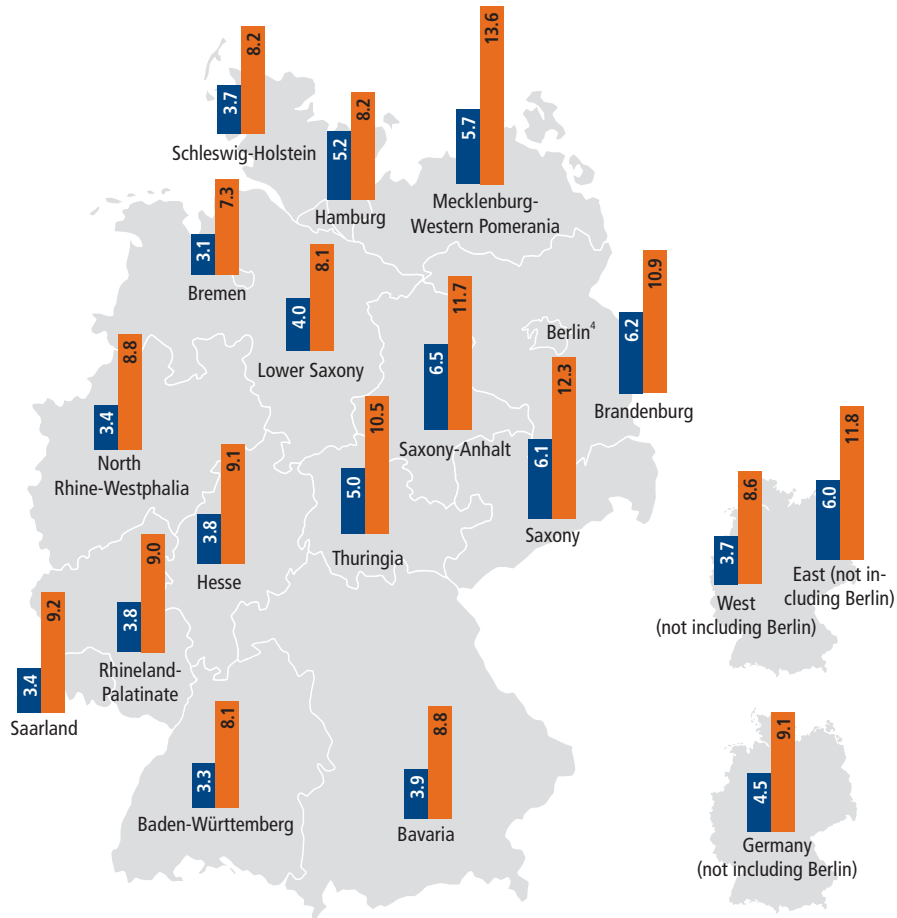
Source: DJI 2012: 13

Moreover, an expansion of care has taken precedence over an effort to improve quality, at least in some *Bundesländer* (German states) – and this can have a long-term negative impact on children's education and development, as well as on their well-being while they are in the public care setting.

A comparison of staffing formulas by group type reveals that most German states are far from achieving the recommended formula of 1:3 for children under age three and 1:7.5 for older children.

All-day schools have become more important in recent years, yet to different degrees. There is still a short supply of all-day schools for certain types of schools and in certain regions. Another problem is that the staff of all-day schools do not always have the necessary qualifications to meet public standards.

**Figure 17: Staffing formula<sup>1</sup> by group type in the Bundesländer (German states), March 1, 2012**



■ Krippengruppe<sup>2</sup>      ■ Kindergartengruppe<sup>3</sup>

As percentages

<sup>1</sup> Ratio of full-day attendance equivalents to one full-time employee equivalent.

The staffing formula expresses the number of full-time attendance equivalents in each group for each full-time employee equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> All groups limited to children under age three

<sup>3</sup> All groups limited to children from age three to school entry

<sup>4</sup> For statistical purposes, almost all facilities in Berlin are classified as facilities without a fixed group structure, even when their activities involve a fixed group structure. Thus no further conclusions can be drawn regarding the application of the staffing formula to specific groups.

Source: Bock-Famulla and Lange 2013: 318

Families have very different needs in urban and rural areas, and it is more and more common for these needs to remain unmet. Housing is becoming increasingly scarce – and beyond the means of many families – in the cities; rural areas suffer from a lack of such basic services as medical care.

Finally, there is the problem of an institutional gap when high-quality infrastructures are available, but do not match families' specific needs, circumstances and lifestyles. In the sphere of family education, for example, too little attention has been paid to the increasing cultural diversity of our society and the growing inequality of families' living situations. Prevention and support programs for families are geared to the middle class, so they often fail to reach those who need them most.

There is also a lack of coordination among the schedules of public infrastructures, and a failure to take into account changes in working hours as the boundaries of work become increasingly blurred. This puts greater pressure on families and further complicates their lives. In some places, however, programs are working more closely together, for example in family centers and *Mehrgenerationenhäuser* (multigenerational houses). A further expansion of contact centers for families would be helpful in implementing policies to assist families in managing their time.

## Conclusion and recommendations

To provide sustainable support for families, and particularly for children, those who set family policy should be aware of the eight trends described above and consider their impact on children. Taking the child's perspective, as the field of childhood studies does, is not the same thing as taking the family's perspective, since family is usually viewed from the parents' point of view. Measures that can help parents manage their daily lives may well have negative effects on children.

The demand that we create a "family-friendly" society, which has become at least a rhetorical goal, needs to be joined by a demand for a "child-friendly" society. It is important to explain what these goals mean and how they may conflict with one another. When we refer to "the family" as an entity, we need to differentiate between these two perspectives in the future.

In seeking to meet the challenges for families resulting from the trends described above, it would be a mistake to attempt, through family policy, to reverse those trends. Instead, programs and services should be designed so that children can enjoy a healthy upbringing within their own families, and they should facilitate successful interactions between the family environment and other significant areas of a child's life, particularly the education system. A present-day family policy must take into account changed conditions and focus on what children, mothers and fathers need today.

The Seventh Family Report from 2006 (BMFSFJ 2006) identified three factors – money, time and infrastructure – that are essential for successful family life. An appropriate family policy should ensure that they are made available to children and their mothers and fathers. In order to educate and care for their children, parents need money, time and infrastructures. Their needs are not the same as the needs of childless individuals or couples. Since society is dependent on the willingness of some people to have and bring up children, families must be recognized adequately,

and they need the support of family-friendly policies that include financial resources, public services and jobs that meet families' scheduling needs, and family- and child-focused infrastructures.

The goal of such support should be to enable all people to live as they choose. Today it is a given that we accept the lifestyles of people who choose not to have children. By the same token, a modern family policy should support couples who wish to have children, as well as existing families, by providing the necessary social framework – and not, as the Fifth Family Report from 1994 (BMFS 1994) put it, treating them with “a structural lack of regard” and putting obstacles in their path.

The crucial question, therefore, is whether our existing (complex and often confusing) system of allowances aimed at supporting families adequately recognizes all that families do and the financial burdens that they bear – and whether it focuses sufficiently on children.

Just as we need to keep in mind the fact that those with children have different needs, we should remember that the pressures of family, work and school weigh more heavily on some families than others. This relates to the fact that families are becoming more diverse socially, regionally and culturally, and that in certain kinds of families – for example single-parent families and families from an immigrant background – stresses are more likely to exert a cumulative effect. Policies should be implemented to offer these families special support.

In the following pages we will take another look at the trends outlined above. We will describe the weaknesses of current family policy and offer our conclusions and recommendations for policies that can help us meet the challenges of the future.

### Diverse family structures

As family structures become more diverse, it is important to recognize and appreciate families that differ from the so-called “normal” or nuclear family. Different types of family structure lead to different needs. Infrastructures should be geared to the specific structure and situation of each family. In the interest of children – who, after all, do not determine the lifestyles of their parents (e.g., whether or not they choose to marry) – family policy should provide equitable and appropriate support for all types of families. Policies should not unduly favor lifestyles and partnerships that conform to the traditional model – which, it should be noted, has declined in significance. Unfortunately, marriage-based benefits (such as *Ehegattensplitting* – a tax treatment of spouses) account for a major share of government support for families, despite the fact that they are not available to all families and that, indeed, they also favor married couples who have no children.

We recommend a review of the family policy measures that are currently in place to determine whether they are subject to selectivity. Changes should be made to ensure support for the efforts of families in general, particularly in providing care for children, rather than for certain types of family structure. This applies particu-

larly to financial support. Financial and tax benefits, as well as monetary transfers, should be linked to children rather than to family structure. Instead of merely taking a static view of various types of family structure as they exist today, we need to remember that structures change over time; a family's status today may not be the same tomorrow. Cohabiting couples may marry; single parents may form a blended family.

Keeping in mind the diversity of family structures, it is important to engage in a discussion of values and role models. Every effort should be made to avoid stigmatizing certain family structures, instead recognizing the contribution families make by bringing up children. Thus, we need to appreciate diversity in an individualistic and pluralistic society.

### **Erosion of the male breadwinner model**

As a result of the erosion of the traditional male breadwinner model, gender roles have become more similar. Women, even when they are mothers, are more likely to want and need to work outside the home, while men are more eager to be involved fathers. A consistent policy that promotes a work-life balance and gender equity should be put in place to create the necessary conditions for children to grow and develop, and it should not be assumed that a child's well-being requires mothers to stay home to manage their households and care for their children. It would be helpful in this context to ignite a discourse on family values, independent of traditional roles, and on the many ways in which employment might be structured to reflect changes in the preferences of both men and women.

There are a number of ways to encourage gender equity, which is essential for implementing a sustainable policy to support families and children. The traditional breadwinner model should no longer be the basis for social and family policy initiatives, which play an enormous role in determining which infrastructures are provided for children (such as child care).

It is particularly important for labor market conditions to allow both men and women as equal partners to choose how they want to distribute responsibilities throughout their lives. This means dismantling barriers that discourage women from entering the workforce. Tax incentives, such as *Ehegattensplitting*, can make gainful employment seem not worthwhile. And fathers should no longer be encouraged to work considerably longer hours than they really want to. Instead, family policy should help partners allocate responsibilities for household and child care more equitably. More emphasis should be placed on encouraging men to play an active role in managing their households and bringing up their children. This requires a greater appreciation for the contributions families make by caring for children – whether that care is provided by mothers or fathers.

Another issue is equal pay for equal work. A substantial gap still exists between the wages of men and women, making it more difficult to achieve an egalitarian

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division of responsibilities. In addition, both mothers and fathers favor having women and men work similar numbers of hours, as shown most recently by the Eighth German Family Report from 2012 (BMFSFJ 2012c). This would promote a more egalitarian division of labor; even more important, it would better accommodate children's needs, and in particular make it easier for them to spend time with their fathers.

### **The increasingly blurred boundaries of gainful employment**

We have shown that changes in the job market, with work making inroads into other areas of life, can be stressful for families and make child care more difficult. This is also likely to discourage some people from starting a family or having an additional child. The flexibility demanded by today's jobs, in terms of both scheduling and location, makes organizing family life more problematic, although it should be noted that it has also opened the door to jobs that do not conform to the traditional male-dominated model of employment. Above all, allowing people to determine their own family-oriented work schedules, taking into account location, situation, duration and allocation of time, would lead to a better work-life balance and allow workers to spend more time with their families.

Steps also need to be taken in the labor market to prevent families from falling into precarious circumstances – despite employment. Working parents need to be paid an appropriate remuneration so that they are not forced to rely on government assistance. Reducing the expectation of constant availability and the stressful nature of work employees are required to do also make sense. Close cooperation among those responsible for family and labor market policy, the ministries, labor and management is crucial, since favorable working conditions are essential for the well-being of working parents and their children and, more generally, for family life that includes quality time. This means ensuring that parents have enough time and energy for their children – which is what both parents and children want.

### **Parents under pressure**

Taken together, the trends described above – the convergence of gender roles, diverse family structures, the increasingly blurred boundaries of gainful employment, along with higher educational expectations – are putting increasing pressure on parents. While they are often exhausted and overwhelmed, parents are still striving to do their best to meet their children's needs. Again, this points to the need for a better work-life balance – but it does not mean embracing a new model of full-time employment for both parents. Women as well as men need support at work and at home, and they need time to care for their children.

In addition to providing a financial safety net, it would be helpful to create models for time budgets that both women and men can use, throughout their lives, to care

for family members or for other family-related purposes. In special situations, for example after the birth of a child or when a child enters school, this would permit mothers and fathers to reduce their work hours or take a leave of absence to devote more attention to their children.

Companies, for their part, must become more aware of changes in gender roles and more mindful of their responsibilities for their employees. Workers' attitudes would then change, too: It would no longer be considered unusual for fathers to take advantage of parental leave or to work part time, and mothers would no longer be assumed to bear sole responsibility for child care.

Furthermore, parents should no longer be under pressure to micromanage their children's learning, either in early childhood or beyond. With many parents lacking confidence regarding the upbringing of their children, it is important to make parenting advice available. We also need to take a close look at the cycle of ever-increasing expectations that parents and children find themselves caught in today, and find ways of bringing it to a halt. Family must be recognized and respected as a private space with its own "logic"; its role is not to achieve some standard of individual optimization, but rather to promote well-being, personal development, mutual affection and positive relationships.

### **Polarization of families' living conditions**

With society increasingly polarized, the same opportunities are not available to all families and children. A sustainable family policy must work to combat the inequality that exists between families and childless adults, as well as between families in diverse situations. This is particularly important in view of the negative effects of these inequalities on children. In addition to suffering economic deprivation, disadvantaged families are stigmatized in a number of ways. Society has a responsibility to show greater appreciation for the contributions of families from different environments, even if they do not conform to middle-class norms. A crucial goal is to protect families and children from poverty and enable them to achieve economic stability and play an active role in society.

To that end, efforts must be made to combat the forces that promote social inequality. This can be done by working to reduce income inequality, in particular, but also to ensure equal opportunities in the educational sphere. Reducing income inequality requires special support for families and children living in poverty. In order to calculate the minimum amount required to ensure an acceptable standard of living for a child, age-specific needs and the child's place of residence must be taken into account. Single parents are especially likely to be poor, owing to barriers to employment such as a lack of acceptable child care and incompatible work hours. To combat poverty among this group, it might be helpful to provide coaching or part-time training, but also to provide supports specifically designed to help single parents combine work and child care responsibilities. To achieve fair education



opportunities, we need to encourage families to take advantage of high-quality early childhood education and care services for *all* children.

Furthermore, socially disadvantaged parents need support that will allow them, in turn, to help their children. This is a goal of the federal government's model project *Elternchance ist Kinderchance* (Opportunities for Parents are Opportunities for Children). Schools, for their part, might promote equality of opportunity by extending the duration of primary school, offering high-quality, structured all-day schools and making it easier for children to transfer from one type of school to another. Throughout the education system, those who work in child care facilities, social services and schools need to improve their interactions with parents.

### The increasing cultural diversity

Through certain social mechanisms, society's cultural diversification – resulting primarily from an increase in the immigrant population – is closely associated with the above-mentioned trend toward greater polarization. For children in particular – less so for members of the older generation – it is increasingly “normal” to live in an environment of ethnic and cultural diversity. We therefore need to be more appreciative of the many cultures found in Germany today and foster a culture of respect for diversity that embraces the contributions of immigrant families and children.

This applies particularly to the staffs of public institutions, who serve as a link between families and society in the spheres of education, child care, and advice and support services. They are often the most important point of contact for both parents and children. In their interactions with families, they require intercultural competencies and need to respect the culture-specific resources the families have to offer.

It is not only a matter of promoting inclusion and equality of opportunity for children from diverse social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, for example by providing practical language training. It is also essential to change attitudes toward what is foreign or different, which can enrich the lives and widen the horizons of nonimmigrant families and children. It is clear that there is a need for systematic research on families and children from an immigrant background, focusing particularly on cultural and national backgrounds, the immigrant generation and the social disadvantages they often encounter.

### The changing shape of childhood

Given how childhood is changing, family policy today needs to devote more attention to the well-being of children, consider their unique perspective and provide equal opportunities for all. This means that family policy should no longer focus mainly

on parents. Differences in interests must be recognized, and conflicts between the perspectives of parents and children analyzed.

If equality of opportunity is to become a reality, a child's social background should no longer play such an important role in the educational system or in society. In order to provide high-quality education and care in early childhood and during the school years, taking into account children's individual needs and well-being, it is essential to implement a wide variety of family-policy measures coupled with educational reforms.

We should remember, however, that parents are still the single greatest influence on their children's education and opportunities. Accordingly, they need to be part of any reform effort, and the family environment needs to be taken into account. Moreover, we need to help strengthen the parenting skills of mothers and fathers. Special efforts should be made to reach parents who – because of work or family responsibilities, or for reasons of language or culture – have not been able to take advantage of family education programs or be involved with educational institutions. If we succeed in reaching out to parents, benefiting from their expertise and gaining their support as partners in their children's education, this could have a long-term positive impact on children's educational trajectories.

But there is another, perhaps somewhat contradictory, aspect to keep in mind as well. Parents should not be pressured to bring up their children "correctly," i.e., in a way that conforms to the expectations of schools and the workplace. Promoting positive child development is not the same thing as promoting education in the sense of acquiring school-relevant knowledge. With all of the hype about education, it is often overlooked that the real goal, in a broader sense, should be to enable every child to live a life of independence and self-determination. Childhood is also a time for "purposeless" play and "meaningless" free time. Children must be recognized as genuine protagonists in the interest of protecting their rights and allowing them to develop into independent individuals.

### **The institutional gap**

As we have shown, there is a systematic "institutional gap" between the infrastructures that are currently in place and the needs that exist. Policymakers should take a number of steps to create a network of resources designed to meet the needs of families and children. Supports for families fall into the categories of time, money and infrastructure (BMFSFJ 2006). Beyond those categories, however, there is the issue of gender equity, and we also need to take a more differentiated look at effects on children.

Infrastructures, with the exception of financial assistance, should be available within the local area, since a family's quality of life is determined by the immediate environment. Under Germany's federal system, cooperation between the federal government, the states and the communities needs to improve. Effective links are

also needed between the various entities that help to support families, including not only public agencies but also independent and private organizations, such as charitable organizations, family associations, churches, employers, unions and representatives of civil society.

In order to meet families' diverse needs, appropriate supports should be put in place, fine-tuned and – as necessary – expanded. Examples include preventive measures such as family education programs, family counseling and family support services, which should pay more heed to the circumstances of those they serve, in matters of scheduling, location, content, methodology and professional approach. Special efforts should be made to reach families from an immigrant background, fathers and families that find themselves in particularly precarious circumstances.

Furthermore, in order to promote children's development and help parents achieve a better work-life balance, need-based, high-quality education and care facilities must be widely available. It is also important to increase the availability of high-quality all-day schools. Educational institutions and care facilities should offer stimulating programs for all children and young people, tailored to their individual needs and abilities. These programs must be compatible with parents' job requirements (particularly work hours) and accommodate atypical schedules and vacation periods.

It is becoming increasingly difficult for families to find affordable housing in the cities and reliable basic services in rural areas. If those areas are to remain attractive to families, such problems must be solved; in some cases demographic changes call for innovative solutions.

Finally, a family- and child-friendly policy at the community level must accommodate families' schedules and thus promote their well-being. This might mean offering coordinated services for both children and parents in facilities such as family centers and multigenerational houses as elements of that policy.

Our overall conclusion is that family policy today does not adequately reflect the changes that have taken place in family life over the past few decades. There is an urgent need for modernization. The purpose of family policy is to promote cohesion and assist the generations in caring for each other. Child well-being is the starting point and goal of family policy. It is assumed, and rightly so, that responsibility for children's well-being will be shared by parents, public institutions and civil society. To that end, family policy must support the family, in all its diversity, and focus on the needs of children.

A sustainable family policy should strive to ensure that all families can survive economically, that appropriate infrastructures are available, that parents and children have sufficient time for one another, and that a work-life balance, characterized by gender equity, can be achieved. Differences in regional needs, particularly between the eastern and western regions of Germany, between cities and rural areas, and between individual neighborhoods, also need to be considered.

If these steps are taken, it will be possible to help families cope with the new challenges that confront them, and to promote the positive development of children, who are living under the changed conditions of a modern, more flexible and individualistic society. This would constitute a significant step toward achieving a sustainable, child-friendly society that offers fair opportunities for all.

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