

Family Policy Relocalization – A Step Forward in Germany?

Presentation at the COFACE-Odisee Conference „Breaking Silos, Building Futures: Policy Innovations for Integrated Family and Child Support”

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Focus

- How municipalities are reclaiming leadership in prevention systems?
- How do they handle the delicate balance between local flexibility and systemic equity?
- What are transferable lessons from Germany's decentralized approach for EU policy?



Characteristics of German Family Policy

- Germany as a social state based on the principle of subsidiarity

Principle of Subsidiarity



Characteristics of German Family Policy

- Traditional family policy is primarily fiscal in nature
- Expensive and non-transparent benefits
- Lack of empirical data in the political decision-making processes
- Family policy debates with a strong influence by ideology
- In connection with child support strong focus on intervention and individual problems and not on prevention, individual resources and social causes of problems



Starting Points of Understanding the Necessity of Relocalization

- New law to strengthen:
 - reconciliation of work and family life (3,2 Mio. 2014 to 4,0 Mio 2024 in **child day care**)
 - creating **German early intervention system** in 2007 - program of comprehensive support for parents and their children, extending from pregnancy through the child's third year of life
 - On state level new **law in family and intergenerational policy** (e.g. Berlin, Thuringia)
- Family policy as important 'soft' - and therefore locally malleable - factors in local development policy – **prevention chains**
- New insights: **Localized needs assessment, the evolving family construct, structural positioning of local family policy and the necessity of planning**

Challenges of Local Family Policy

- Contradiction: local entities as the living environment for families without real formal mandate to shape family policy
- No shared understanding of family policy between the federal government, the states and local levels
- No overview of available services in Germany at all, high degree of fragmentation
- No strategic, systematically structured and/or cross-departmental family policy services on all levels
- Core challenges facing families have not yet been adequately incorporated into family policy approaches
- Just weak connection between real family needs and services



Successful Elements of Local Family Policy

- Established **binding structures for local family support** while **preserving local autonomy**
- Devolved responsibility to the local level, **redefining the relationship between the state** (funding provider) **and local authorities** (as the on-the-ground expert with management responsibility)
- **Institutionalized needs-based assessment** as the core criterion
- **Mandated integrated social planning processes** as the foundation for evidence-based, participatory local family support



Lessons Learned

- Reject ideological frameworks in favor of evidence-based responses to actual family needs
- Treats family policy as central rather than peripheral to community development
- Empowers intergenerational engagement by encouraging prospective, new, and experienced parents to participate in shaping family policy discourse - rather than ceding this domain exclusively to generations beyond childrearing



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Available at: <https://coface-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Insights-Germany-Website.pdf>



Thank you!

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