Access to parental leave benefits: Constructing deservingness and undeservingness through policy narratives

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• Eligibility and inclusiveness of parental leave benefits
From investigating eligibility to understanding varying entitlements

- Own previous work on eligibility to leave rights (conceptual framework: Blum & Dobrotić 2018; Dobrotić & Blum 2019a; empirical application: Dobrotić & Blum 2019b)

- Findings: Huge variety in degree of universalism to selectivism, but most countries fit selective type and exclude some groups from benefit access

- How are eligibility aspects of parental-leave policies (and their reforms) legitimised by policymakers?
- How is the deservingness or undeservingness of affected social groups constructed?
• Understanding varying inclusiveness: Narratives and deservingness

• Empirical illustration
‘Stories of how to give or take’

- Inclusion or exclusion of social rights can be understood in terms of reform narratives (Blum & Kuhlmann 2019):
  - Stone’s (2012; 1988) work on narratives, i.e. as instruments being used by political actors in the policy process
  - Characters: Those narratives can be distinguished by how they build on the deservingness of target groups (Schneider & Ingram)
Narratives and aspects of eligibility

- Narratives can contain stories about who should get (or lose!) what – and why (Blum & Kuhlmann 2019)

**Whom?**
**Entitlement principle**
- Citizenship / residence
- Employment
- Acquired right (through contributions)
- Derived right (marriage)
- ...

**Whom - and when?**
**Eligibility criteria**
- Fixed definition (e.g. age, sex, income)
- Pre-requirements (e.g. citizenship / employment history)
- Means-/needs-testing
- ...

**What?**
**Benefit scope**
- Benefit type (e.g. cash, service)
- Benefit level
- Duration
- Take-up-related duties (e.g. behavioral requirements)
- ...

Source: Dobrotić & Blum 2019a
Narratives and deservingness

- Social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993)
  - **Advantaged**: powerful and positively constructed (e.g. the elderly, middle class, soldiers/military)
  - **Contenders**: powerful but negatively constructed (e.g. the rich)
  - **Dependants**: weak but positively constructed (e.g. mothers, children, poor families)
  - **Deviants**: weak and negatively constructed (e.g. welfare cheats, undocumented immigrants, drug addicts)
Four types of social policy reform narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Reforms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Old-social-risks policies</strong></td>
<td>Expansionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>(I) Stories of giving-to-give</td>
<td>Deservingness and acknowledgement (Advantaged)</td>
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Source: Blum & Kuhlmann, 2019
• Empirical illustration
Germany: *Elterngeld* reform 2011

- Parental benefit (*Elterngeld*) introduced in Germany in 2007, with income replacement rate of max. 67%, minimum of €300 (e.g. for non-employed parents) and maximum of €1,800
- Reform announced in June 2010, as part of government’s post-crisis austerity programme, coming into effect in 2011

- Retrenchment measures
  - 1) €300 minimum amount calculated against benefit for long-term unemployed (i.e. de facto abolished), and employment-based benefit deducted for short-term unemployed recipients
  - 2) Highest-income earners of annually €250,000 for singles and €500,000 for couples no longer entitled
  - 3) For recipients with former incomes of €1,200 net per month and more, the replacement rate is successively decreased to 65%
1) A first glance at narrative stories: The construction of long-term unemployed parents

- „It is a step that hurts, I am clear on that, and it is also drastic. Nevertheless, one has to say that the logic of Hartz IV is to cover the needs of parents and children. (…) Paying the Elterngeld additional to it was, basically, a mistake and inconsistent right from the beginning. (…) It makes sense not to pay them Elterngeld, and one also has to see the principle that benefits have to be lower than wages.“ (former family minister Kristina Schröder; SZ, 7 June 2010)

- A story of taking-to-take ("they don’t deserve it") rather than taking-out-of-helplessness ("our hands are tied") despite this being a ‘crisis package’!
2) A first glance at narrative stories: The construction of ‘super-rich’ parents

- „If Hartz-IV recipients (long-term unemployed) receive no Elterngeld any longer, we also have to take something at the top side of incomes. Who pays wealth taxes is not reliant on the Elterngeld. We need a signal of fairness here.“ (Miriam Gruß, FDP; WAZ, 9 October 2010)

- A story of taking-to-control, drawing on fairness and shifting part of the power to control the crisis back to the (former) recipients
Thank you for your attention!
References

### Illustration from family/leave policies

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<td>Possible policy + reform, e.g. granting access to leave benefits for additional groups (such as self-employed)</td>
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To discuss / paper etc.
- linking conceptually with dimensions of social rights + eligibility (e.g. different scope for different groups incl.? take-up related duties as eligibility?)
- Comparison? Other case(s)?

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