

Childcare policy in Germany and Japan

A comparative analysis of the reform process in the periods of Merkel and Abe

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After the second world war many countries decided to realize the idea of an establishment of welfare systems. There are multiple kinds of welfare states and they have differing attributes to them (Social democratic welfare, conservative welfare, family oriented-and liberal welfare).

Because the social system was so weak, the conservative welfare state was founded and gender roles were introduced. The social insurance was financed through taxes and men and women were to be treated in an egalitarian manner.

Due to the fact that family played a big role in society, childcare facilities were expanded. The financial support expanded. In 2001 there was a reform in Germany which intended to provide passive support for childcare and also promote women. Parental allowance was introduced in 2007, as was the daddy month, which is intended to contribute to economic growth, and parental allowance plus. However, the childcare allowance, which was made available for the care of children under two years of age at home, no longer exist at federal level.

The importance of proper care was also recognized by the politicians, so they started rethinking on how to improve the systems. In the process of decision making the political party of Merkel wanted to make great impact on filling higher political ranks with female politicians, supporting the independence of women and the expansion of childcare. *Ursula Von der Leyen* played an enormous role in that matter, because as a mother herself she brought a lot of experience to the table.

In the decision-making process of the Abe government, childcare was used as a means of facilitating economic growth. In order to grow the economy, the Abe government decided that it would be of great use to increase the female work force. The Japanese minister has negotiated that companies must disclose gender pay differences.

The Japanese government created plans to encourage companies to set up more childcare places. This plan showed great effects, due to the fact that there was an increase of 20 percent in total number of childcare facilities all over the country. There were 2,7 million of them in the year 2020.

In 2019 the Japanese government introduced the fee exemption for kindergartens. Another reform was that all companies who have a total amount of over 300 workers must create plans to 2 support a healthy work-life balance. Furthermore, the employers' associations were asked to increase childcare leave to 3 years.

The conservative parties in both countries are following the same goal with solely one difference. The CDU in Germany wanted to indulge more women in the labor market and also bring benefits to the economy, whereas the LDP had the goal to achieve economic growth only and use it as a social investment strategy.

In the process of releasing the measures to follow their economic goals the German government also involved the opposition. The Japanese one did not include any of the over political parties.

In the discussion after the presentation there was a question which included the matter of how the support from the government can be compared in the care allowances and the childcare allowances. The answer to that question would be that the Abe government wanted economic growth, which the country can achieve indirectly through childcare allowances/ educational support etc.

There was also a discussion about why all families receive benefits regardless of assets. The answer to that question is that the assets are distributed horizontally and not vertically. Every family gets benefits to facilitate the financial burden a child imposes on the family. People with higher income also have higher expenditures, that is why every family gets benefits regardless of anything else.