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Attitudes toward parenthood in the focus of family policies and the changing gender relations in the family. An international comparative analysis

ABSTRACT

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In the context of persistent low fertility rates, the identification of factors that facilitate the reconciliation of paid work and family is one of the leading topics both in research and policy, especially in comparative perspective. Based on differences in the cultural and social policy regimes, the societies address differently the issues regarding reconciliation between paid work and family. The main purpose of the dissertation is to examine how the societies of Bulgaria and Germany address the issue of work-life balance and how the levels of work-family conflict vary between the two countries. The participation of men in household work and care activities and the part-time work of women are also main topics of the study.

The dissertation starts with key findings of relevant theoretical approaches and empirical research, related to the changing gender relations in family. The first part focuses on theories explaining the changing attitudes towards the division of homework tasks and parenthood and their impact on the reproductive behaviour and gender relations within the family. The review of the theories includes different approaches, which explain the division of paid and unpaid work between the partners and the effect of the welfare state. A special attention is put on the gender sensitive concepts and the critics of prevailing theoretical frameworks. In addition to the key research findings, the main advantages and disadvantages of empirical methods complete the first part of the dissertation.

The second part of the dissertation focusses on the comparison of Bulgaria and Germany regarding family-related indicators and social policy regulations. The total fertility rates, the age at childbirth and the prevalence of part-time work are analysed among other indicators in a comparative perspective between the two countries. Also, the share of families at risk of poverty or social exclusion is analysed as an important difference between Germany and Bulgaria. The regulations regarding parental leave, child and family benefits and father's quota regulations are examined and summarised for each country. The family policies directly and indirectly influence the formation of gender relations and the allocation of time in employment and care. Such policies include regulatory mechanisms to support working parents, especially working mothers, work-family reconciliation and gender equality.

The third part of the dissertation focuses on work-family reconciliation of men and women in Bulgaria and Germany and the factors, which impact the levels of conflict between work and family responsibilities. Also, the perceived work-life satisfaction has been analysed and compared between the two countries. The involvement of fathers in housework activities and care for children has also been examined and compared between Bulgaria and Germany. The empirical analysis is based on data from the European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) conducted (2016). Descriptive statistical analysis has been performed, based on the

demographic categories gender, age, educational attainment and income, etc. Through regression analyses, the subjective assessment of satisfaction with family life is examined, comparing men and women, across age groups and according to level of education and income.

In conclusion, it can be summarized that despite the common European framework, Bulgaria and Germany differ substantially in several indicators related both to the egalitarian division of household labour and childcare, and in terms of the opportunities for work-family balance for mothers and fathers. The availability of part-time work and the diverse family policies in Germany contribute to a better work-life balance, compared to Bulgaria. The policy regulations also actively support the participation of fathers in childcare and household duties.