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Gender Inequalities in Different Types of Welfare States: Family Policy Institutions, Socio-Economic Class, Religion and Partisan Politics

Can social policies affect gender inequalities? During the past few decades, scholarly views on capacities of social policies to reform gender inequalities have shifted; beginning with conceptions of welfare states as extensions of patriarchy, to an embracing of “woman friendly policies,” and back to a focus on unintended perverse consequences of such policies. This paper examines gender inequalities around 2000 in 18 OECD countries in the context of historical developments of family policy institutions. We unpack rules in welfare state legislation into a multi-dimensional typology of gender-relevant institutional structures pointing to institutional differentiation of policy structures. Of key interest here are policy-sets differing in the extent to which they a) provide claim rights extending capabilities of mothers for full and continuous labor force participation, b) support women’s care work within the home while assuming them to be homemakers or secondary earners, or c) largely leave it to families to act in the context of markets and kin. We explore the roles of religion and socio-economic class as well as of left, Christian Democratic, and secular center-right parties for this institutional differentiation. This typology is used as a lens to analyze a broad spectrum of dependent variables reflecting gender inequalities in terms of occupational segregation, labor forces participation, and gender wage gaps as well as in access to top earnings, managerial positions, and corporate boards. Methods include hierarchical linear regressions (multi-level analyses). We point to methodological problems in previous causal research. One key problem has been the assumption of uni-dimensional gender policies, distorting specifications of independent variables. Another serious problem is the attempt to analyze gendered effects of a country’s family policies by focusing on women *in* employment without satisfactory empirical analyses of selectivity *into* employment on the basis of socio-economic criteria. Our typology of gender policies identifies major differences in inequality outcomes among countries, while fears of perverse effects of gender egalitarian policies can not be verified.