

# German child-care subsidy sparks nursery spat <sup>[1]</sup>

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## EXCERPTS

Proposed German subsidies for parents who keep young children at home rather than put them in a creche have prompted furious reactions....

Chancellor Angela Merkel's new coalition government, sworn in Wednesday, has vowed to introduce from 2013 a subsidy of 150 euros (225 dollars) per month to parents who keep their children under three out of public day care.

Dubbed the "stove premium" or "mother hen subsidy" by feminists who say it encourages women to stay home to look after the kids, the plan has also been slammed by critics who fear immigrant children will lose a valuable chance to be integrated early into society.

The subsidy has unleashed a fierce debate in a country where statistics show that parents do not appear to need further incentives to stay at home, with only 18 percent of children under three cared for by a third party.

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Anette Stein, an expert in child education at Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation, said the new 150-euro subsidy was "the wrong policy" to help families, immigrant or otherwise.

"The goal has to be to encourage parents to send their children to the creche," especially parents from the lower social classes, Stein said.

"It is precisely these children" who benefit from an early introduction into the education system, she said.

For children of immigrants or the working class, a stint at a creche in the early years hugely increases the chances of a long and more successful academic career, a 2008 Bertelsmann Foundation study found.

Furthermore, the subsidy "is expensive and we need that money to develop quality education for our small children", Stein said.

The subsidy was a key demand of the Christian Social Union (CSU), Merkel's conservative sister party from Bavaria in the south of the country.

They argued that parents who save the state money by not requiring a creche place should get this cash back -- in the shape of this subsidy.

CSU politician Johannes Singhammer, a spokesman on family policy, said it offered families more choice and was "an important signal from society to recognise parents that stay at home and look after their children themselves".

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- reprinted from AFP

**Region:** Europe <sup>[2]</sup>

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