

German childcare plan sparks debate on stay-at-home mums^[1]

Author: Lentze, Georg

Source: BBC News

Format: Article

Publication Date: 7 Nov 2012

EXCERPTS:

Is it a "stay-at-home premium" that will stop mothers from looking for work, or is it fair compensation for parents who choose to look after their young children without the state's help?

The German government's plan for a childcare allowance payable to parents who do not use state-subsidised nurseries has sparked fierce debate.

Recently Chancellor Angela Merkel's centre-right coalition reached agreement on the measure, under which eligible parents of infants aged between 13 and 36 months would receive 150 euros (£120) a month.

'Kinder, Kueche, Kirche'?

The plan has been pushed through by Mrs Merkel's conservative Bavarian Christian Social Union allies against critics in the coalition's own ranks.

And the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) have threatened to lodge a complaint with the constitutional court to stop it.

Sunday's agreement has not silenced everybody in the governing camp. Cornelia Pieper, a leading member of the pro-business Liberals (FDP), says money allocated to the measure should instead be ploughed into formal education. The childcare allowance is "a return to the old concept of the family based on Kinder, Kueche, Kirche (children, kitchen, church)", Ms Pieper, minister of state at the foreign ministry, told the regional daily *Mitteldeutsche Zeitung*.

Others have rejected this argument, pointing out that parents who receive the allowance can still both go to work if they make other childcare arrangements, such as relying on relatives or privately-run nurseries.

That is why the "stay-at-home premium" label used by critics of the scheme is "deeply wrong", Georg Meck said in the right-leaning *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* daily.

However, now that the measure has been agreed, a commentary by Berthold Kohler in the same paper concedes that supporters of the traditional family model have been put "on the defensive" by this debate.

Among those leading the attack on the measure is the popular women's magazine *Brigitte*. It carried a commentary by Julia Karnick arguing that it does not make any sense to reward parents for choosing not to take up a service offered to them by the state. "It stuns me when politicians keep doing the opposite of what has to be done," Ms Karnick says.

Picking up on the fact that the allowance has been championed by a Bavarian party, Nadja Erb in the *Berliner Zeitung* says that "outside Bavaria practically nobody believes that it is a good idea". The paper says that this is why it is unlikely to stay in place after the September 2013 parliamentary election.

'Hausfrau' debate

Against the backdrop of the childcare controversy, the current edition of the weekly *Die Zeit* runs a series of articles on whether it is still acceptable to be a stay-at-home mother in modern-day Germany.

One article makes the case for the choice of being a "Hausfrau". Sabine Rueckert says a "self-aware housewife" is a "rebel

against the constraints of the market".

"She does not take part in the big rat race. She is not always mobile and contactable. She sits by the sandpit and watches her toddlers shovel. She has what children need to grow up: time."

Ms Rueckert acknowledges that "being a housewife is not necessarily good fun" because "her work is not valued". Nevertheless, housewives quietly "hold things together and provide an atmosphere which is good to come home to".

Another article argues that for a mother to stay at home indefinitely is not fair on the father, who finds himself condemned to be the sole breadwinner in uncertain economic times. Christoph Droesser says such men miss out on valuable family time.

"A woman who expects me to provide for her and our children 'until death do us part' puts a burden on my shoulders of which even the strongest can no longer say today whether they can bear it, even if they want to," he adds.

An article in Die Zeit's magazine supplement makes a different point: choosing to give up one's career to stay at home with the children can result in poverty if the breadwinner ends the relationship. Julia Friedrichs, whose article is about a mother who faces this predicament, says the possibility of resuming work and sharing childcare with her partner had not even entered the woman's mind.

"Contrary to Scandinavia and France, where the state sponsors childcare, or Britain, where many women have no choice but to take up work again soon, Germany is still a conservative country in which the state chiefly supports the mother who stays at home rather than childcare facilities," she says.

-reprinted from BBC News

Related link: Child-care stipend in, payments for doctor visits out ^[2]

Region: Europe ^[3]

Source URL (modified on 27 Jan 2022): <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/11/german-childcare-plan-sparks-debate-stay-home-mums>

Links

[1] <https://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/11/german-childcare-plan-sparks-debate-stay-home-mums> ^[2]

<http://childcarecanada.org/documents/child-care-news/12/11/child-care-stipend-payments-doctor-visits-out> ^[3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe>