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Still a perfect model? The gender impact of vocational training in Germany

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Reconstructing the parallel structure of ‘dual’ and ‘school-based’ vocational routes reveals the close connection between the German vocational training system and the segmentation of the labour market by gender. The example of jobs in childcare and pre-primary education shows that the legacy of semi-professionalism in these occupations is not just rooted in the nature of training and working conditions, but complexly interlinks with the prevalence of the male breadwinner model sustained by social policy regulations and the German taxation system. In France, by contrast, the central state takes responsibility for the provision of childcare from zero to six years of age to support female labour force participation and dual-earner couples. This has also fostered professionalisation in the respective occupations. Whilst this may not necessarily induce a degendering process at the level of horizontal segregation of vocational qualifications, it facilitates gender equality in terms of vertical mobility and the professional status of women.

Keywords: labour market segmentation; school-based VET; social services; tertiarisation; staff shortages

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Introduction

Within the OECD countries, the German system of vocational education and training (VET) remains central to economic prosperity and social mobility. Even under conditions of globalisation, welfare state restructuring and the recent economic crisis, the dual apprenticeship system¹ upholds a model function, mainly because it can be directly linked to low rates of youth unemployment (OECD 2013a) and the sustainable production of skilled labour. In a comparative perspective, these advantages persist despite demographic shifts and related possible future staff shortages.

The dominant assessment of the German VET system, however, obscures its gendered structure and dynamics, which continue to impact on female labour force participation and the reproduction of gendered professions (see Jørgensen 2015, and Taylor, Hamm, and Raykov 2015, on gendered systems of VET and employment elsewhere in Europe and North America). Alongside the dominant apprenticeship training for skill formation in manufacturing, industry and the commercial fields, a school-based vocational track covers skill formation for the social, educational, care and some medical professions. Heterogeneity and lack of skills protection result in profiling the school-based routes as semi-professional. Furthermore, these (← p. 78) predominantly female professions are characterised by restricted career opportunities and lower salaries as compared to the male-dominated work areas the dual system qualifies for.

Having been largely ignored in the past, the bifurcation of training structures and labour market opportunities has more recently turned into a major issue of concern. In this context, the gendered nature of care work presents a challenge in two ways: on the one hand, women today are better qualified and increasingly work more hours, so that they are no longer

available for providing unpaid care at home and in the family. This induces a higher demand for public and private personal social services. Working in personal services and care jobs, on the other hand, offers little attraction given the low wages and underdeveloped career opportunities. The result is staff shortages already apparent on the German labour market. Additionally, most care services hardly meet the expected quality standards as they are based on a semi-professional approach, particularly in the areas of early child development and elderly care. Fostering the quality of social services, labour supply and career opportunities have thus moved onto the political agenda across various policy fields, including labour market, family and gender equality.

Advancing reforms, however, is hampered by the divergent interests of multiple stakeholders competing for budgetary resources and by lack of knowledge of the interrelation between skill formation, labour market segmentation and welfare state policies. On the one hand, research on skill formation has hitherto concentrated on training in manufacturing and commercial services as the core of capitalist economies. On the other hand, welfare state scholarship has been more interested in service provision and its gender impact with a focus on labour market features such as participation rates and gender segregation. Particularly in comparative research, the German VET system is usually identified with the highly regulated dual system, while school-based vocational training for social services has gained much less attention (Greinert 2007). This has led to a specific understanding of vocationalism tied to the socialisation function of apprenticeships which, in turn, renders the gender impact of the overall system a ‘blind spot’.

This article addresses the gendered character of the German VET system by taking into account its institutional foundation in welfare state development, related labour market outcomes and the challenges arising from ongoing tertiarisation. First, we will set the scene by describing and comparing dual and school-based vocational routes and linking these to labour market structures. Next, gender-specific labour market features underpinned by the male breadwinner model and family policies will be presented. Within this established institutional framework for skill formation, the rise of female labour force participation and expansion of the service sector have led to ambiguous effects as concerns work and training in the social services. The recent developments of precarious working conditions on the one hand, and the trend towards professionalism of training and in the provision of services on the other, will also be addressed. In the next section, childcare and pre-primary education are taken as examples to demonstrate how changing demands challenge the current qualification structures and working conditions in these areas. Finally, a comparison with developments in France, where the professionalisation route fostered by the central state has been more prominent, serves to illustrate the specific dynamics between welfare state policy, qualification structures and engendering processes on the labour market. Concluding remarks specify the risks of current adjustments and future needs for reforms as well as research in the social service sector in Germany. (← p. 79)

By focusing on gender in relation to the labour market and training, we make reference, first, to men and women as social groups characterised by different material, cultural and social resources, not least due to their different forms of participation in society’s division of labour (paid and unpaid work). Of special interest are hence differences in female and male labour force participation and men’s and women’s access to and choice of vocational tracks, industries, jobs and hierarchical positions. Second, we conceptualise gender as a social construct that plays out in action – as a reproduction of role expectations and ascribed

competences that vary between women and men. Finally, gender is reproduced at the structural level, embedded in institutions such as education and training routes, living wage constructions and the standardisation of working time. The degree to which social practices at work and in society are engendered and how these practices might be changing, however, cannot be presupposed but has to be traced empirically.

The reproduction of gendered professions through the vocational training system

Reconstructing the parallel structure of ‘dual’ and ‘school-based’ vocational routes reveals the close connection between the vocational training system and the segmentation of the labour market by gender. Part and parcel of this connection in Germany is the interlinking of skill formation and occupational labour markets based on the concept of ‘Beruf’, which has, over centuries, structured the German labour market (Greinert 2007). In this context, the socialising function of VET intersects with stratified and standardised educational and occupational routes (Hanf 2011), resulting in restricted permeability between educational pathways and low levels of flexibility and mobility among the workforce as compared to many other European countries (Solga 2008).

Historically, the crafts-based apprenticeship model was introduced for the training of skills required for industry and complemented by vocational schools between 1890 and 1920 (Hanf 2007). The aim was not only to supply the newly emerging factories with standardised skills, but also to pacify the growing numbers of proletarian youth by enrolling them in formalised, predominantly in-company training (Greinert 1997, 2007). Almost at the same time, full-time vocational schools were established for educational fields, social work, health care and other areas, which did not form part of the crafts or industrial training system of skilled labour. These schools were targeted to provide a decent vocational education for young girls to prepare them for their roles as housewives, governesses or other jobs in personal services in case they were seeking gainful employment (Kleinau and Mayer 1996). From this tradition, there developed a specific female-stereotyped vocationalism linked to the school-based vocational training system that mainly covers skill formation for the social, educational and medical professions such as childcare, nursing, elderly care, speech therapy, physiotherapy, and so on (Friese 2013). Today, this track covers more than one hundred professional domains, which remain female dominated.

While the school-based vocational routes are also dual-track, covering both theoretical and practical (work-based) training, they differ from the approximately 350 dual apprenticeship schemes in that they are not equally standardised and nationally regulated by the Vocational Training Act (‘Berufsbildungsgesetz’) (Füssel and Leschinsky 2008; Hanf 2011). Regulated at the federal level, school-based (← p. 80) vocational routes display non-standardised and heterogeneous curricula and training providers, which are difficult to assess in terms of their numbers and the quality of training they provide (Hall 2012). Hence, the related professional areas are less regulated (with the exception of nursing)²; are anchored predominantly in personal services; provide restricted career development pathways and lower salaries (as compared to the male-dominated professions of the dual system); and display 70% female representation against 41% in the dual system (ibid.). In addition, most training programmes require fees and relatively high entry qualifications. At the same time, there are also female-dominated, crafts-based professions like hairdressing, seamstressing, cookery or sales, which

form part of the dual system. Salaries in these professions are even lower than in the social and care professions of the school-based vocational system (ibid.).

With the diffusion and expansion of the service sector, school-based vocational training has gained relative importance in recent years (Zöllner and Kroll 2013). However, as establishing national qualification standards for school-based training is difficult and career progression is limited, the returns on investment in education and training remain comparatively lower than for many dual training programmes (Hall 2012; Krüger 2004). This partly explains why attempts to equalise school-based and apprenticeship training have not been successful thus far. Consequently, the historic polarisation persists and still influences job stratification between men and women in Germany today.

The segmentation of the German labour market by gender

Alongside tertiarisation and the general transformation of the economy, female labour force participation in Germany has been growing significantly over the last 30 years. This increase from 52% in 1980 to 71% in 2010 (OECD 2012) was fuelled by the expansion of the welfare state and the public sector between the 1960s and 1990s. The rapidly growing tertiary sector, including social services, thereby absorbed most of the female workers. Additionally, German reunification since the 1990s further contributed to the rise of female labour force participation, reflecting the tradition of dual-earner couples in the former GDR.

During the same period, in Germany as in other Western countries, labour market segmentation by gender has become more pronounced not only in terms of sectoral segmentation, but also in terms of working time, pay structures and representation in job hierarchies. While this has partly created a so-called ‘pink-collar’ ghetto (Charles and Grusky 2004), the profiles and extent of this segmentation vary significantly between countries (Schäfer, Tucci, and Gottschall 2012). In an international comparative perspective, two characteristic features of the German welfare state and economy significantly contribute to upholding distinctive labour market segmentation by gender: first, the specific connection between skill formation and the labour market resulting from the VET system; and second, the prevalence of the male breadwinner model that makes it likely for women to remain the secondary wage earner.

Persistent gender discrimination can be attributed to the specific connection between the vocational training system, labour market participation patterns and the social welfare system. Work-based socialisation not only provides individuals with a particular set of vocational skills, qualifications and orientations, but also functions as a means of social integration both at company level and in the labour market in general. Thus, individuals are assigned a social status based on the division of (← p. 81) labour derived from vocational profiles with specific income stratification and career progression routes (Hanf 2011). Skilled workers (‘Facharbeiter’) can rely on institutionalised patterns of career progression and benefit from high levels of skills protection and social security compared to, for example, unskilled workers (Baethge and Baethge-Kinsky 1998). The ‘Facharbeiter’ career is furthermore associated with full-time, continuous and protected employment and collective workers’ participation rights, parameters which in Germany constitute the basis of the social security system and derived benefits (Gottschall and Schröder 2013).

This is relevant for female workers insofar as most of the rise of female labour force participation since the 1990s has been in the segment of non-standard and marginal employment (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2012)³. When it comes to working-time arrangements, gender differences are particularly marked, whereas duration of employment contracts hardly varies by gender. In 2012, women held 87% of all regular part-time employment of less than 20 h per week and 81% of all marginal employment contracts (Fromm and Bartelheimer 2012). These include the so-called mini- and midi-jobs that restrict workers to a maximum wage of €450 or €850 per month, respectively, and imply only limited or no contribution to the social security system.

The high share of female marginal employment can be explained by the fact that more than 80% of the female workforce resides in the service sector, which relies on a high proportion of non-standard employment as compared to employment in industry. The service sector is furthermore characterised by low average wages, irrespective of the growing importance of social services. Over the past two decades, for example, wage structures in this sector have shown considerable less pay increase as compared to jobs of the same qualification level in core industries (Bispinck 2013). Marginal employment combined with low wages translates into considerable disadvantages for female workers in terms of entitlement to social security and retirement benefits.

The second factor that upholds gender discrimination relates to the specific connection between labour market and family policies. Research has shown that, while women increasingly contribute to the household income⁴, they nevertheless continue to carry most of the household and family responsibilities (BMFSFJ 2011; OECD 2012). In Germany, this is supported by family policies that make it difficult for women with children to pursue a continued career over their life course (Haasler, forthcoming), with an insufficient childcare infrastructure being one of the main hurdles (Keck and Saraceno 2013). With German taxation favouring a stratified income structure among married couples (Mühling and Schwarze 2011; Vollmer 1998), wives tend to become the secondary wage earner, particularly once they have children. In 2007, 44.6% of all German households with children followed the male breadwinner model with the man working full-time and the woman working part-time (BMFSFJ 2011). By contrast, in other European countries, more diversified wage earner models prevail (Lewis and Giullari 2005). Finally, the gender pay gap, which at 21% is particularly high in Germany as compared to other European countries (OECD 2013b, 257)⁵, further perpetuates this pattern.

Working and training in the social services: trends and challenges

The growth of the service sector in the seminal process of tertiarisation has been a strong promoter of women's integration into the labour market and in turn (← p. 82) contributed to the feminisation of the sector (Esping-Andersen et al. 2002). Another characteristic of this sector is the strong influence of the state, both as a provider of services and as an employer. With the expansion of the welfare state in the 1960s and 1970s, the state served in most Western countries as a model employer for the private sector. Reflected in beneficial employment conditions in the public sector, this had a positive impact on job structures and employment conditions in the social services, too (Tepe, Gottschall, and Kittel 2010). However, Germany constitutes a specific case here since the social services, other than state bureaucracy and public administration, have always been characterised by a broad variety of

public and third sector service providers and employment structures, ranging from informal to formal and including the opposing trends of low-skilled, low-wage jobs on the one hand, and professional work on the other. Thus, employment in social services might be carrying high social risks, particularly as it deviates from the industrial model of standard employment.

Size and growth of the social service sector

As in most Western countries, the share of the German GDP produced by the service sector, as well as its share of overall employment, has grown tremendously over the past decades. As concerns social service provision, several reasons account for the increasing demand and continuing growth of the sector. First, demographic shifts restructure caring needs for children and the elderly, leading to the expansion as well as intensification of health and other care services. Second, female labour force participation continues to grow against staff shortages and changing gender norms. Third, parents increasingly depend on dual-earner models to sustain their family. This particularly holds true for the lower and middle-income levels and for East Germany, where unemployment rates are much higher than in West Germany. In combination with the trend towards flexible jobs and employment, all these trends result in growing demands for childcare facilities as well as social service provision for families.

Whilst women with children predominantly work part-time, research has shown that part-time employment often constitutes a compromise due to the limited availability of childcare facilities and full-day schooling. This means that the majority of women would actually like to work more hours (BMFSFJ 2011; Wanger 2011), which, in turn, implies that the demand for flexible, extended and quality childcare, as well as social services for schoolchildren and young persons, will continue to grow in the coming years. Rising female labour force participation, however, is also linked to decreasing resources for providing home-based care. Additionally, young women are now more forcefully questioning their traditional caring role, so that changing gender norms also account for the restructuring of service demands (Backes, Amrhein, and Wolfinger 2008).

These trends coincide with a growing overall labour demand, on the one hand, and pressures to secure the household income, on the other hand. However, recruitment and retention of staff in social and caring jobs, as well as in health care, is difficult, as jobs in these areas are characterised by comparatively low wages, limited career progression and working hours that are considered non-family friendly. Current unfavourable wage structures and working hours make it difficult for women not only to sustain full-time employment, but also to provide a family income. These conditions result in high levels of staff fluctuation and also make it (← p. 83) increasingly difficult to recruit qualified young people into these female-dominated professions. Finally, ensuring the provision of quality services also presents a challenge.

Quality and professionalism

The semi-professionalism of a considerable number of personal social services can be critically assessed from various perspectives. Precarious working conditions and semi-professionalism stand in contrast to the growing labour force participation of skilled women, dual-career couples and dual-earner households that generate a growing demand for quality child, elderly and health care. This puts pressure on private and public service providers,

including welfare organisations and the Church, which are, alongside communities, not only major employers, but also responsible for the training of qualified staff.

In the case of childcare and pre-primary education, semi-professionalism results from the principle of subsidiarity, which delegates the regulation of qualification standards to the federal level. Lack of harmonisation between the federal states with regard to the qualification and training of staff leads to varying qualification standards, limiting staff mobility across regions and institutions. Moreover, salary levels are low in relation to the duration of training, and career opportunities and possibilities to make the transition into higher tertiary education are restricted (Krüger 1999, 2004) despite the more recent diversification of qualification routes including the introduction of academic programmes for early child development in 2004 (Dudek, Hanssen, and Reitzner 2013). As a result, working in these areas is considered less of a lifetime profession as compared, for example, to more highly recognised and better remunerated primary school teaching. Supporting indicators include the relatively high levels of staff turnover (Pasternack 2008) and the proportion of people working in underqualified positions in the field (Hall 2012, 156). However, the legally required expansion of childcare facilities for children under three years of age alone will imply significant staffing needs. For example, one scenario expects shortages of about 20,000 qualified staff for 2013 (Schilling 2013).

Providers of child and youth care, in particular, find it difficult to meet the growing quality demands since these imply the professional and more specialised training of personnel (Evers and Heinze 2008). Meeting such demands not only requires more training capacities (Rauschenbach and Schilling 2009), but also makes care professions more attractive in terms of qualification standards, salary structure, working conditions, career chances and further training opportunities. When it comes to linking quality standards in the social services to professionalism, Germany is considered less advanced than some other European countries (Gottschall 2004, 2008). In particular, this concerns early child development and pre-primary education (Hagemann, Jarausch, and Allemann-Ghionda 2011).

Although training capacities and the numbers of people trained have been steadily growing since the mid-1990s (Dudek, Hanssen, and Reitzner 2013), current qualification trends suggest that costs are of greater concern than ensuring quality based on professionalism. In childcare, for example, staff with a two-year assistant training qualification, and childminders at home with extremely low qualification requirements, are expected to cover a significant share of the future recruitment needs. Lack of quality standards can furthermore be observed in the case of nurseries (**← p. 84**) and day care centres where, in 2007, over half of all staff were underqualified when assessed against the minimum qualification requirements (Heitkötter and Klößinger 2008).

Employment and working conditions

During the period of welfare state expansion, the state, as an employer, was able to set standards in terms of working conditions, wage structures and social security for employment in the private sector, too. This modelling function has gradually been fading in quantitative and qualitative terms. To the background of budget restrictions and new public management-oriented reforms, public funding for the provision of social services has been reduced since the 1990s so that social service providers more strongly need to compete for limited

resources. The state not only reduced its commitment as a service provider, but also supported and encouraged private service provision, triggering competition among non-profit organisations and emerging private providers (Kühnlein and Wohlfahrt 2006). While the marketisation and privatisation of social and care services aimed at greater choices and incentives to provide quality services, at the same time, it induced changing employer structures and the rise of precarious working conditions in the field (Stolz-Willig and Christoforidis 2011). As a consequence, social services increasingly display dual labour market structures.

For example, in 2007, the share of public employees in social care services was 31.4% as against 54% in 1990, and public employment in the childcare services lays at 56.7% as against 75% in 1990 (Kroos and Gottschall 2012, 107). While the state continues to provide most services already offered, it leaves the needed expansion of services for families and the elderly to private for-profit organisations and non-profit welfare associations. Consequently, non-profit welfare associations experienced a tremendous surge in employment between 1990 and 2008, and by 2008 had more than 1.5 million employees (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege 2009, 18). While the share of private providers is still low, increasing employment shows that they are becoming more important, too. In the face of growing competition for funding and resources, all types of employers, including the Church and welfare associations, increasingly rely on flexible employment patterns and low-wage structures, which translate into precarious working conditions for the mostly female workers employed in the sector.

Germany and France in a comparative perspective

Comparative welfare state research provides insight into the size variations of the social service sector and the quality of social services by relating public, private and family-based service provision with the integration of women into the labour market. It postulates that a large public social service sector, i.e. sector in the field of childcare and education, facilitates female labour force participation as it generates employment opportunities by shifting unpaid family work to the formal sector. This applies not only to social democratic welfare regimes characterised by a large state-run social service sector, but also to liberal regimes. Though here private employers play a stronger role in providing social services. Conservative welfare regimes like Germany, by contrast, are classified as less ‘service intense’ as they favour financial transfers to families, thus keeping the female labour force participation comparatively low (Esping-Andersen 1990; Ostner and Lewis 1995; Sainsbury 1996). (← p. 85)

This rationale is also linked to the quality of service provision and employment structures. Welfare regimes with a ‘high road’ of social service provision, characterised by a large public social service sector that aims at providing high-quality services for all citizens, tend to rely on a skilled and professional workforce and standard employment (Schmid and Ziegler 1993). This approach, exemplified by France, serves as a contrast to Germany where, in line with the subsidiarity principle, the state delegates a considerable share of social tasks to the non-profit sector. Thus, service provision is based on a mixture of formal (public and private) and voluntary work. In combination with the male breadwinner model, this has favoured the provision of social services by the family and third sector organisations, allowing deviations from standard employment with respect to wages and interest representation, especially in the

dominant church-run social service organisations. In France, the model of service provision is more similar to the social democratic welfare regime: The laic state⁶ is a strong social service provider of childcare and education, with comprehensive elementary education and all-day schooling that supports mothers' labour force participation on a full-time basis (Bahle 2007; Morgan 2006). By more forcefully directing the provision of social services, professionalism in the provision of care is more advanced, fostering the development of professional careers in the field, too. Obviously, the role of the state as employer makes a difference here for the structure of social service provision as well as female employment patterns and career chances.

The qualification structures correspond with the designated status and organisation of social services in the respective country. Employment in childcare and pre-primary education in Germany is based on three-year, school-based vocational training and jobs are categorised as semi-professional. The formation is not universally regulated as responsibilities for educational policies lie with the federal states, so that admission regulations as well as training curricula vary by region. Typically, a secondary school level I certificate is required. Meanwhile, the quality of service provision and career progression routes have become a subject of debate and public and international political questioning – not least with the introduction of the European Qualification Framework (EQF) and the national follow-up (see OECD) – so that academisation in the field has been taken up. Today, about 60 degree programmes are available, most of them to be followed alongside full-time employment and offered at universities of applied sciences (Dudek, Hanssen, and Reitzner 2013). In addition, qualification and job entry routes have become much more diversified, including opening up entry routes for career changers, to meet the pressing staffing needs. Nevertheless, in the near future, the majority of childcare workers and pre-primary carers will continue to be trained under the school-based vocational system, as it is expected that only a share of 10–15% of the new recruits will be university graduates (Grossarth 2013). It is thereby envisaged that graduates will primarily serve as heads of childcare institutions and in public management of social services.

In France, the training of kindergarten teachers is the same as for primary school teachers and consists, since 2010, of an academic formation of five years leading to a master's degree (Friedrich 2013). Childcare workers working in a 'crèche' follow a three-year school-based VET route as in Germany. Placing pre-primary education at the same level as primary education implies that the boundary between an understanding of educational content as socio-pedagogical and aligned with infantile needs on the one hand, and a direction towards more (← p. 86) school-oriented learning and development of children at preschool age on the other, is drawn at an earlier age for children in France. The institutional name 'école maternelle' and the denomination of kindergarten teachers as 'professeur des écoles' reflect this. This also has a direct impact on status and salary structures, which are equal to those of primary school teachers (Pasternack and König 2008, 31). Differences, however, play out not only in terms of qualification requirements, but also in terms of employment structures and working conditions. In Germany, about 60% of all jobs are part-time, corresponding to the high share of part-time care provision (Autorengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2012), while in France, childcare and preschool facilities enable and cover full-time female labour force participation. The state as employer and service provider guarantees comprehensive child and pre-primary care and all-day schooling and centrally regulates the training of personnel. Social policy and welfare strategies come into play insofar as early child development and

education in France fall within the responsibility of the state, whereas in Germany, it is regarded primarily as a family responsibility traditionally taken care of by the mother. This perspective and approach again underpins the male breadwinner model.

As shown above, recent developments in Germany also underline more strongly educational and quality aspects, justifying a trend towards academisation of training. However, since the German welfare state is based on federalism and the subsidiarity principle, which apply to all educational aspects and areas, no common strategy can be reached. The discordance compounds with budgetary constraints at the federal level and the political debate over establishing new central funding schemes. As in other areas of the social service sector, this development tends to result in the polarisation of the labour force in that staffing needs are sought to be met by introducing qualification routes for lower qualified and more poorly remunerated staff. In the case of childcare workers in Germany, the job level of ‘social assistant’, based on two years of training, has been introduced. However, also in France, the ‘high-quality’ professional route is partly being weakened by the introduction of state-funded home-based care to facilitate childcare at home and more part-time jobs. Thus, some convergence can be observed with respect to an increase in non-standard employment, namely marginal, part-time and low-wage social service jobs, not only in childcare but also in elderly care (Dathe, Hohendanner and Priller 2009; Hamandia 2007; Kroos and Gottschall 2012; Méhaut 2007).

Future challenges for vocational education and training

Reforming the job and employment situation in personal social services and adjusting the respective training and qualification structure are widely discussed in Germany and some adjustments have been made. These adjustments, however, have thus far remained incremental and carry the risk of polarisation of training and jobs for the still dominant female workforce. The historical legacy of semi-professionalism seems difficult to alter as it is not just rooted in the training and qualification structures and working conditions in the social services, but also complexly interlinks with the prevalence of the male breadwinner model sustained by social policy regulations and taxation. In France, the central state responsibility for the provision of childcare from zero to six years of age to support female labour force participation and dual-earner couples has fostered professionalisation in the respective occupations (Friedrich 2013). (← p. 87) Whilst this does not necessarily induce a degendering process with regard to the horizontal segregation of vocational qualifications, it facilitates higher levels of gender equality in terms of vertical mobility and professional status for workers in personal social services and also across the labour market. In Germany, attempts to meet the growing demand for care provision due to the belated female labour market integration are currently made by a (moderate) quantitative expansion of services and the diversification of job entry routes. In contrast, endeavours to achieve higher quality child and elderly care are counteracted by an emerging new demarcation between low-skill and tertiary educational tracks.

The growing overall demand of social services will continue to present a challenge for the German labour market and the closely related qualification system. According to the BIBB/IAB staff needs forecast until the year 2025, social services fall among the sectors for which significant staff shortages are projected (Helmrich and Zika 2010, 46–48). For example, in health and social care, it is expected that the currently four million employees in

this field will rise to over five million. Against this trend, the state is called upon to take on a central role to ensure professional, quality care provision, not only in terms of providing financial support, but also as a key employer in the sector that also regulates the qualification and training of personnel.

Accounting for the specific historical and institutional legacy of subsidiarity and federalism, it can be assumed that professionalisation in the field is highly conditional. Federal states will have to buy into this idea and provide more funding. The re-enforcement of the role of the state as a model employer is needed to support innovation of qualification standards and stable employment conditions, guiding other welfare associations and private service providers. In concrete terms, this implies employing higher qualified personnel to enhance the quality of service provision rather than concentrating solely on better infrastructure. Finally, the central government and the federal states are called upon to agree on higher, more consistent qualification standards across Germany and on the overall expansion of training capacities.

Upgrading training and working conditions, the opening and flexibilisation of career paths, as well as better pay, would not only benefit women as the major workforce in the field. In the long run, the field might also become more attractive to men and thus lessen the pronounced gender segmentation of the German labour market. Last but not least, the ‘high road’ perspective of qualification, though not the only factor involved, would also contribute towards better fulfilling societies’ quest for high-quality care.

Challenges, however, are apparent not only for the political actors, but also for social sciences research. Given the variety of training systems and employment conditions in social services as well as welfare regimes in Europe, more comparative gender-sensitive research would help to better understand current change dynamics in this expanding field. Not least in the light of political initiatives to harmonise qualification levels and standards across Europe, taking PISA and the EQF as examples, more nuanced knowledge on the different modes of governance of training and employment would also help to understand main actors’ interests, including citizens as clients and consumers.

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Notes

¹ The dual system is characterised by the combination of subject-oriented and general education in vocational schools and company-based training. Depending on their vocational specialisation, apprentices spend about 15% of their training in vocational schools and the remaining time in the company, which also holds employment contracts with the apprentices.

² Nursing has been subject to various national and EU regulations during the last years. This has resulted in considerable convergence in terms of nursing qualifications and occupational profiles across the EU despite the fact that variations in standards based on the different national contexts persist (Brockmann 2011).

³ Between 1996 and 2009, the share of female part-time employment as part of total female employment rose from 50.8 to 70.3% (Wolf 2010).

⁴ This development is more pronounced in East than in West Germany (see Klenner, Menke, and Pfahl 2012).

⁵ The EU-27 average gender pay gap is at 16%. Of the 27 countries, the gender pay gap is only bigger in Austria, Estonia and the Czech Republic than in Germany (OECD 2013b, 257).

⁶ The French Laicism has a long tradition, denoting the absence of religious involvement in government affairs as well as the absence of government involvement in religious affairs. It is based on the 1905 French law on the Separation of the Churches and the State.

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