FORMING FAMILY IN THE EUROPEAN UNION:
New Social Risks and Welfare Responses

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Abstract

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Social transformations have brought new risks for family formation which national
welfare states have tried to address with varied success. Analyzing Spain and Sweden’s
historical legacies, this essay argues that they have played a determining role in their national
welfare states’ ability to adapt to the new social risks. The relative success of Sweden and
failure of Spain to resolve the conflicts facing family formation underscores the diversity of
national welfare policy toward families within the European Union. Facing this national
diversity, this essay examines how the EU develops coordination and convergence strategies
for its member-states in female employment, reconciliation, and gender equality. Although
less clear in Sweden, a moderate “Europeanization effect” of family policy appears to be
emerging in Spain. This implies that as national welfare states attempt to assimilate EU
family policy targets, the EU gains greater potential to influence social policy.
To my mother and father, for their help and inspiration.
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INTRODUCTION:

The entry of women into paid employment in Europe marked an important social transformation for family and welfare arrangements. In transitioning from ‘old social risks,’ welfare regimes encountered a debate on how to respond to the modern problems facing families, from promoting female employment and gender equality to improving reconciliation through policies. The various welfare regimes reacted differently to the demands of ‘new social risks’ and experienced varied levels of success. By examining Spain and Sweden, this essay argues that historical legacies played a determining role in these welfare states’ adaptations to change and continue to mark their defining characteristics. Notably, these two countries diverge most strongly in how they address family concerns. Sweden’s progressive state-led approach to female employment and reconciliation policies contrasts sharply with Spain’s residual dependency on the family to maintain its own well-being. The effect of these responses is evident in the relative success of the Swedish model and the challenges that the Spanish model confronts. Yet, the risks and benefits for families are no longer confined by national boundaries. As the EU envisioned a plan for advancing its economy, it simultaneously targeted improvements in female employment, reconciliation, and gender equality. While progress is difficult to assess in Sweden’s already generous welfare state, there is some evidence EU coordination measures have helped Spain to converge toward EU social
goals. In this way, familial states like Spain may utilize the EU as a way to recalibrate welfare in order to achieve improvement in family policy arenas.
I. “NEW SOCIAL RISKS” AND RESPONSES FOR FAMILIES

As families face new social risks, a debate emerges over what responses should be developed that is answered distinctly by divergent welfare regimes. First of all, this section will outline the transition from “old” social risks to “new social risks” and the welfare changes it implies. Secondly, this section focuses on the challenges for families through debates on how to reconcile work and family life and promote greater gender equality. Thirdly, it introduces the welfare systems of Europe and their varied responses to these social risks, which are particularly divergent with regard to families.

1. SOCIAL RISKS:

Old Social Risks: In the postwar industrialist society, workers became integrally linked with their role in the labor market. These workers thus became commodified, meaning that they depend on labor-force participation to earn income and benefits to maintain their well-being. The strict division of labor between men and women during this period guaranteed that the connection to the labor market would be generally built around a male worker acting as the breadwinner for his family (Bonoli 2007: 496). The greatest threats to well-being thus occurred when the (male) breadwinner was unable to work. Including sickness, invalidity, old age, and unemployment, these “old social risks” jeopardized a family’s welfare (Bonoli 2007: 496). However, states tried to offset these threats through intervention.
In this way, all western European countries “developed comprehensive systems of social protection and labor market regulation by providing coverage against the main traditional risks” (Bonoli 2007: 501). These programs were “transfer-heavy, oriented towards covering risks from the loss of earnings capacity due to old age, unemployment, sickness, and invalidity” (Huber and Stephens 2004). Specific policies included cash and service benefits for old age, survivor, sickness, disability, and unemployment (Esping-Andersen 1990, Bonoli 2007). These welfare programs mirrored the patterns of work and family dominant at the time by generally benefiting the male breadwinner. Women benefited from these entitlements from their relation to the male-breadwinner (Bonoli 2007). Although these welfare programs were suited to the industrial society, time has wrought significant changes in social risks. Some old social risks continue to merit attention: people still become sick, disabled, unemployed and old (Huber and Stephens 2004). However, as family and work arrangements altered with time, new risks emerged for society.

**New Social Risks:** Social transformations brought new risks to modern postindustrial society. These social transformations included the “de-industrialization and tertiarization of employment, the massive entry of women into the labor force, increased instability of family structures, and the de-standardization of employment” (Bonoli 2007: 498). Understandably, new challenges to social well-being followed the changes. These “new” social risks no longer center upon a male breadwinner model or even one particular group (Huber and Stephens 2004), although they seem to affect women and youth more strongly (Bonoli 2007). Also, it is notable that new social risks affect both youth and adults, having a greater impact across a life-course. Generally, new
social risks especially focus on family, changes in the labor market, and welfare reform (Moreno and Palier 2005: 5). Specifically, they include “precarious employment, long-term unemployment, being a working poor, single parenthood or the inability to reconcile work and family life” (Bonoli 2007: 495). As these needs change, the former provision standards for welfare no longer match the emerging needs (Ferrera 2003). For instance, the increased elderly population requires governments to redefine their pension and retirement patterns (Ferrera 2003: 2). The traditional welfare state was not designed for the new social risks.

Modern welfare states continue to try to adapt and address these new risks. Huber and Stephens characterize the ‘new’ welfare state as “more service-heavy, oriented towards increasing the earnings capacity of individuals through support for continuing education, training and re-training, and the socialization of care work to facilitate combining paid work with raising a family” (Huber and Stephens 2004). Welfare provisions need to be updated to better address new social demands, like gender equality and equity (Ferrera 2003: 13). One important dimension is how these risks relate to the family.

**New Social Risks for Families:** The massive entry of women into the labor force represented a key social transformation generating the new social risks facing families. The industrial societies divided labor by gender: men into paid work and women into unpaid domestic and care work. However, in the 1970s, starting in northern Europe, women gradually began to enter into labor markets (Bonoli 2007: 499). This social transformation greatly altered the European labor force and brought significant changes. From 1960-1990, the European labor force grew by over thirty million people, with
women representing twenty-five million of these workers (Bernhardt 2007). However, as women entered into the labor force, they often faced (and continue to face) the challenge of replacing their previous unpaid domestic work. Working women, mothers in particular, highlight the changing social demands of the family. Modern social risks for family include the problems of reconciliation (balancing employment with family life and child-rearing) and continued gender inequalities.

New risks for families have great social consequence, since they affect the formation of families and thus demography. Social welfare schemes in Europe rely on intergenerational solidarity, meaning the working generation often supports the retirees. Thus, changing levels of fertility affect the social protection system (Fernández 2007: 6). Over time, life expectancy has improved and the average fertility rates in Europe have declined greatly. The average fertility declined in the EU 15 from 2.72 children per woman in 1965 to a minimum of 1.42 in 1995 (a decline of 46%) before going back up to 1.5 by 2002 (Fernández 2007: 3). Thus, in what is referred to as the “graying” of Europe, the elderly represent an increasingly large proportion of the population, especially in the Southern European countries (Fernández 2007:2). Not a single EU country reaches the replacement rate of approximately two children per woman. The drop in fertility rates does not, however, necessarily reflect a reduced desire to have children. Only a minority of women report wishing to remain childless (Fernández 2007: 8). Also, the number of children desired is persistently higher than the effective number of children (Fernández 2007: 8).

Low fertility rates do not have one direct cause, but they appear related to delays in family formation and reconciliation policies. A lack of supportive reconciliation
policies for women to enter the workforce makes it more difficult for families to have children (Fernández 2007: 8). In this way, the countries with greater female labor force participation are the countries with higher fertility levels. In Europe, these countries are most notably the Nordic countries, whose generous social protection for families seems to enable families to reconcile care and work. The concern for fertility rates creates calls for action to overcome the difficulties in reconciling work and family.

2. CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES (AND DEBATE FOR ACTION)

Striking a balance between work and family life is a great challenge for both men and women. These problems raise debates on reconciliation, focusing on both parents’ roles in employment and care and potential policy tools.

Gender at Work (Female employment): Female participation in the labor force has become a priority for modern society. It is an inherent element of the modern society, viewed positively as a way to boost economic competitiveness (Lisbon Agenda 2000). Also, women’s employment is the most critical factor in any attempt to address the crisis in the welfare state (Esping-Andersen 2002). Increased employment does not itself necessarily lessen the desire of women to have children. Most women now want to combine both employment and motherhood (Esping-Andersen 2002: 72-73). Participation as both workers and mothers is now desired by many women across Europe; however, their ability to juggle these roles depends upon the reconciliation tools available.

Secondly, some authors argue that fathers’ role in employment also requires policy adjustment. Reconciliation is all too often seen as a problem only facing women,
when in actuality it implicates the fathers (Knijn and Komter 2004: xiv). In fact, the neglect of reconciliation support for fathers is evident in their reported dissatisfaction (Lewis 2004). When fathers take the role of primary breadwinner, often they admit feeling distanced from their families (Lewis 2004). Furthermore, surveyed fathers reported being preoccupied and suffering from the absence and distance from the family (Lewis 2004). Paternal leave, especially paid leave or leave exclusively for fathers, has been shown to be a more successful reconciliation tool for fathers (Gornick and Meyers 2003).

Gender at Home (Who Cares?): When women enter the workforce, they still must resolve the question of care. This means they face the new challenge to replace their former unpaid domestic and care work. Women often are still expected to continue high domestic responsibilities (Bernhardt 2007). In fact, women still perform far more hours of unpaid work than men (Bernhardt 2007). Partly due to the burden of dual responsibilities, most “young, childless women can reasonably expect considerable difficulties in combining continued workforce participation with domestic and family responsibilities” (Bernhardt 2007: 7).

Generally, husbands do not shoulder any significant increase in domestic duties despite the possible benefits of fathers’ involvement in care. Husbands still do not contribute to domestic duties at the same level as their wives. Although men perform more household and childcare work now than in the past, their hours of housework only marginally increase when their wives work full-time (Bernhardt 2007). Gender division remains with regard to household duties. Some argue that father involvement in care should be increased (Gornick and Meyers 2003, Lewis 2004). There is evidence that
increased father involvement in care positively affects their children’s well-being and family formation (Lewis 2004). For instance, one study showed that children achieved higher levels of success in school with greater participation of their father in care (Lewis 2004). Gornick and Myers found that fathers were more likely to participate in the care of children when offered stronger provisions for parental leaves and greater flexibility at work (2003: 263). In most cases, however, another source of care is necessary to meet women’s needs in balancing work and family.

**Childcare Centers:** There seems to be a certain consensus that public care services are increasingly necessary to facilitate reconciliation. When mothers enter into paid work, they need to find alternative sources to fulfill care duties (Bonoli 2007). Many authors suggest that more childcare centers, especially for younger children, would be a strong improvement for reconciliation (Esping-Andersen 2002, Gornick and Meyers 2003). With little expectation that fathers will help more with care and domestic duties, Esping-Andersen recommends greater institutional support, particularly that quality childcare should be free and universal (2002). Statistical evidence supports the claim that greater availability of childcare facilities helps with reconciliation (Gornick and Meyers 2003). For example, Gornick and Meyers affirm that mothers in countries with strong programs of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) report less serious conflicts in raising children (2003). This suggests that childcare centers help individual families with reconciliation.

The proponents of greater public care provision call for a re-conceptualization of care responsibilities. For instance, Sevenhuijsen argues that care should not be treated merely as a “safety net” during transitions but instead should be recognized as a
continuous social event that demands daily attention (2002: 130). Gornick and Meyers add the idea that children are “public goods,” meaning that society benefits as a whole from the care given to children (2003). The costs of childcare should be thus be shared by the entire society, not just parents, care-givers, and the organizations that employ them (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Daycare surfaces as a natural product of any such re-evaluation of care as a public responsibility.

Other Policies: In this way, the debate on how to support families hinges on a differentiation between individual and collective responsibilities. These perspectives seem to develop from historical traditions in various countries. In some European countries, families themselves bear the largest burden in maintaining welfare (notably the Southern Mediterranean welfare regime). In these countries, the family is regarded as a fundamental primary group that is culturally imagined in social life and permeates most aspects of people’s life chances (Moreno 2007). This dependence on the family earns these countries the title of familial states.

However, many authors argue that reducing such dependencies on the family through greater public intervention should constitute a part of reconciliation (Esping-Andersen 2002, Lister 2004, Lewis 2004). Lister favors such a process of de-familialization, defining it as the degree to which adult individuals can maintain a socially acceptable standard of living through paid work or social provisions without being dependent on family (2004). This suggests that the public sector should provide welfare services, like childcare facilities, so that the family no longer must resolve their problems single-handedly (Esping-Andersen 2002). Lewis argues that the changing roles of men and women within the family require “an effort on the part of policy makers to
promote new forms of social solidarity, both at the levels of collective provision via policies to promote cash payments for care and care services (so-called de-
familialization), and within the family, by encouraging a more equal distribution of money and labor between men and women” (2004). From their perspectives, policies need to be introduced to ease the burden of care from parents and thus facilitate reconciliation. Overall, family now appears as a central concern in the debate over whether citizens’ social protection should be guaranteed publicly or privately (Martin 2004).

3. FORMS OF RESPONSE (WELFARE REGIME MODELS)

Different forms of response emerged through welfare states. This section shows how the various welfare regimes have tried to address these social risks in their own ways. These different approaches are reflected in the varying success of the regimes in coping with new social risks. Southern Mediterranean states struggle the most to adapt, while the Scandinavian states generally transition fairly seamlessly.

Welfare Regime Typology: In The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism, Esping-Andersen argues that the welfare system is a “stratification system in its own right,” and is therefore able to categorize countries into three distinctive regimes (1990:3). Researchers used Esping-Andersen’s conceptualization of ‘three worlds’ as a framework to explain differences in countries across regime types and discover variations within the same regime.

Welfare states vary along multiple dimensions, such as socialism, conservatism, liberalism, and de-commodification (Esping-Andersen 1990). The most important
dimension is *de-commodification*: the “degree to which individuals can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independent of market participation” and “opt out of work when they consider it necessary without the potential loss of job, income, or general welfare” (Esping-Andersen 1990: 37, 23). By evaluating the extent to which countries’ social rights allow de-commodification, he discovered they clustered into three regimes (Social-Democratic, Liberal, and Conservative-Corporativist) with unique characteristics.

These three regimes have different legacies, determining factors, and ways of distributing welfare. They have distinct logics of organization, stratification, and social integration. The Anglo-Saxon liberal model is minimally de-commodifying, meaning that it is characterized by means-tested assistance, modest cash transfers, or modest social-insurance that benefits low-income workers and encourages private welfare schemes (Esping-Andersen 1990). On the opposite end is the Social Democratic regime, which promotes equality and de-commodification through universal benefits transfer programs (Esping-Andersen 1990). In between these two models lie the ‘Conservative-Corporativist’ welfare states of continental Europe. Of the three typologies, the Christian Democratic (conservative-corporatist) states are the most heterogeneous (Huber and Stephens 2001: 90). Arguably, some of Esping-Andersen’s Conservative-Corporativist welfare states varied enough to constitute a fourth regime type, the Southern Mediterranean Regime (Italy, Spain, Greece, and Portugal). The Southern Mediterranean regime is distinguished by its later development, its strongly divided “insider/outsider” labor market, and its extreme residual dependency on the family in the provision of welfare. Across these four models, the welfare arrangements vary greatly. This is especially apparent on the dimension which this essay investigates: the family.
Regimes’ Success with New Social Risks: The patterns of distributing welfare in these regimes dictate how prepared these systems are for new social risks. The Christian-Democratic states seem to fit best with the old social risks (Huber and Stephens 2004). Although much less generous and comprehensive, the liberal regime also addresses old risks (Huber and Stephens 2004). Yet individuals now need “new social risk policies” that include “spending for families (cash and services), active labor market policies, old age services, and social assistance (cash and services)” (Bonoli 2007: 508). But in contrast to the other models, Huber and Stephens indicate that the Nordic welfare states of the social democratic regime seem better prepared, having “incorporated essential elements of the new welfare states for decades” (2004: 1).

These regimes experienced varied success in adapting policies for the new social risks. The social democratic countries of northern Europe are viewed as having the most generous and developed social protection systems (Bonoli 2007: 502). They also lead as the best-adapted to the new social risks, particularly Sweden, Denmark, and Norway (Bonoli 2007: 508). Christian-Democratic and liberal regimes “perform worse in dealing with new than with old social risks groups; in contrast Social Democratic welfare states are equally effective in dealing with both old and new risks” (Huber and Stephens 2004: 2004: 16). The countries of Southern Europe mark the extreme of the Christian-Democratic states, traditionally performing the worst on these new risks. They are developing social policies more intensively now than in the past, although for them there remains a long way to catch up (Moreno 2007). In this way, welfare regimes evidently diverge more greatly in their ability to respond to new social risks than they did with the
old ones (Huber and Stephens 2004: 17). Across these four models, the welfare systems exhibit especially varied responses to risks affecting families.
II. NATIONAL APPROACHES TO FAMILY: SPAIN AND SWEDEN

1. EXAMINING FAMILY POLICY IN TWO EU MEMBER STATES

Case studies: This essay focuses upon two case studies, Spain and Sweden, selected because they highlight the incredibly diversity of welfare responses to families in the European Union. Family policy is a social dimension in which the welfare regimes adopt extremely different approaches. In particular, these countries represent two of the more strongly contrasting welfare regimes with regard to family, the Social-Democratic model and the Southern Mediterranean variant of the Christian-Democratic model. The Southern Mediterranean model is marked as highly familial, illustrated in its striking reliance on the family to support itself without aid from the state or market. In contrast, the Scandinavian social democratic model supports families almost entirely through state policy. It is often considered successful in its ability to combine high levels of female labor force participation, family-friendly policies, and fertility. Sweden is often taken as the exemplary case study for the Scandinavian countries (Esping-Andersen 1990, Huber and Stephens 2001), and Spain’s severe fertility rates and strains on the family make it the counter-example from the Southern-Mediterranean regime.

In drawing examples from two different “welfare worlds,” this essay omits a discussion of the Anglo-Saxon liberal model’s approach to families. However, to a large degree, the citizens in liberal welfare states must seek social provision privately in the market, with limited expectations for government intervention. This contrasts with the
idea common to the other European welfare regimes that citizens are entitled to a publicly provided guarantee of welfare. By examining their policies on female employment, reconciliation, and other family policies, this part prepares for the later analysis of the EU’s influence in these countries concerning family.

2. SPAIN AND SWEDEN’S WELFARE REGIMES

**Historical Legacies and Characteristics:** The historical legacies of these countries play a determining role in how their welfare systems adapt to new risks. The Nordic countries’ strong labor movements and social democratic parties encouraged them to pursue full employment and generous social policies (Huber and Stephens 2004: 10). Significantly, the labor shortages of the 1960s resulted in women entering the labor force in large numbers in the Nordic states (Huber and Stephens 2004). More women entering the labor market generated a greater demand for care services (Huber and Stephens 2004). Also, the emergence of the women’s movement also helped to establish a gender egalitarian agenda (Huber and Stephens 2004). The social democratic party took up these movements’ concerns, introducing policy to respond to women’s needs for increased availability of public care. The expansion of the service sector created new jobs, which were filled predominantly by women (Huber and Stephens 2004). Further policy followed, including in Sweden, for example, the introduction of individual taxation in 1971, preschool education in 1973, and parental leave in 1974 (Bonoli 2007). By 1972, 60% of Swedish women participated in the labor force (Bonoli 2007). This support of women’s entry into paid employment led to a greater prevalence of dual earner or 1 ½ earner families.
Meanwhile, in continental and southern Europe, Christian-Democratic parties continued to defend the traditional male breadwinner, and it was much more difficult for women’s movements to take hold (Huber and Stephens 2004). In contrast to the Nordic states, female participation stayed around 50% until the late 1980s in continental and Southern Europe (Bonoli 2007). These states did not develop full employment and generally lagged behind in supportive services for families. Thus, the service sector remained small and women’s participation in the labor force remained low (Huber and Stephens 2004). These countries used immigrants, not women, to meet the labor shortages of the 1960s. The preference for the traditional family (male breadwinner/female housewife), a strong Catholic tradition, and the notion of subsidiarity acted as formative factors for this welfare regime (Huber and Stephens 2001). Therefore, these states were historically pre-disposed to be less friendly toward redistribution and services, particularly for those replacing traditional family tasks like childcare (Bonoli 2007). The Southern Mediterranean, in contrast to other Christian-Democratic countries like France, Belgium, or Germany who introduced some family policy support, represents the extreme end of dependence on family networks to maintain their own family well-being.

3. SPAIN, SWEDEN, AND FAMILIES

The effect of these legacies is marked in modern family policy in both countries, notably in their respective approaches to employment, youth, reconciliation and gender equality. Sweden continues its greater universal support and work policies, addressing family and gender concerns “not as separate entities” but as concepts “closely interwoven
and constructed” (Bernhardt 2007). Spain continues its traditional dependency on strong family networks for support. However, some recalibration of the Southern Mediterranean model is needed to counter low fertility and facilitate female employment.

**Employment:** Spain’s welfare system traditionally supported a male breadwinner model for work and family. As such, it is not surprising that a 1990 survey found that around 40% of Spanish women had never worked a consecutive period of twelve months, compared to the EU average of 17% (Bernhardt 2007: 2). Around 2000, Spain was found to have the lowest rate (approx. 50%) of female labor force participation for women aged 25-49 years old (Bernhardt 2007: 1). However, this has improved greatly in the last decade, up to almost 64% by 2005 (Eurostat). Yet when Spanish women entered into paid work, it caused a high level of separation between sex, age, and those inside and outside of the labor market (Flaquer 2000:13). Spain’s ‘old’ welfare state arrangements provided job security for male breadwinners, separating women and youth in particular as “outsiders.” In this way, women and youth are more precarious, experiencing greater difficulties in obtaining stable employment (Moreno 2006a). This in turn perpetuates strong inequalities and difficulties with reconciliation (Flaquer 2000).

In contrast, women’s right to work is a “distinctive tenet” of the Scandinavian countries (Bernhardt 2007). Sweden consistently has one of the highest rates of female labor force participation in the EU, with close to 80% of women aged 25-49 working (Bernhardt 2007). In contrast to Spain’s traditional support to male breadwinners, Sweden introduced policies to facilitate women’s employment in the early 1970s. For example, its policy of individual taxation acts as an incentive for dual-earner families, allowing the second earner to profit more from their income (Jordan 2006). It is
important to note that Swedish women largely entered into paid employment in the public service sector and continue to work in care and social services to a disproportionate degree than in other sectors. In this way, Sweden’s labor market exhibits gender and sectoral segregation. However, in contrast to other countries, a female-heavy sector does not mean that it consists of low-wage occupations.

Also, the use of part-time employment is starkly different in Spain and Sweden. In Sweden, high numbers of women work long-term in paid employment. However, part-time work and short-term career interruptions are frequent. In Spain, smaller proportions of women enter the workforce at all but, when employed, seldom use parental leaves or use part-time work options. Only 19% of working mothers work less than 30 hours a week in Spain (Tobío 2005). In fact, 62% of these women work more than 40 hours a week (Tobío 2005). Considering that part-time work is almost exclusively performed by women, these figures indicate the limited use of part-time work in general (Tobío 2005). Many Spanish women admit the desire to work less (Tobío 2005), yet they do not work part-time or use short-term leave options. Spanish women’s low use of these recourses underlines their difficulties in securing employment and the negative consequences of career interruptions to their earning and advancement potential.

Closely connected to labor force participation and family formation are policies concerning youth. Their ability to transition to adulthood and independence affects the timing of marriage and children. Sweden largely succeeds in activating youth to the labor market. To help them transition to adulthood, youth are provided with social transfers (Biggart and Kovacheva 2006). In contrast, Spain provides little state support for its youth. The difficulty in finding employment and the extremely high prices of
housing postpone Spanish youths’ economic independence. In the Southern Mediterranean countries, youth are three times more likely than their northern counterparts to live at home at age twenty-three (Biggart and Kovacheva 2006). These factors inhibiting personal and financial autonomy consequently also impede the formation of families (Addis 1999). Not surprisingly, Spain’s welfare system exhibits signs of strain, evident in delayed family formation and reduced fertility.

**Reconciliation and Care:** Spanish women shoulder particularly heavy responsibilities in providing care. The previous generation of women, under Franco, was limited to the role of housewife. The expectation for women to continue their unpaid domestic work prevails, however, despite the fact that the majority of this generation of Spanish women are now in paid employment. These “superwomen” must confront dual challenges, fulfilling both work and family responsibility (Moreno 2006b). Spanish men do not contribute significantly more to domestic duties despite the increased entry of women to work. For example, a survey revealed that Spanish men did not contribute more than women on any of eighteen various domestic duties (Tobío 2005). Women performed significantly more cleaning, washing clothes, and food preparation (Tobío 2005). Although younger Spanish couples divide the tasks more equally, it is clear that men do not substitute for women at home when women enter the workforce. Fathers’ help exhibits a more complementary role, not a principal strategy, in reconciliation for most Spanish families (Tobío 2005). Men are not viewed as the principal tool for reconciliation in Sweden either. Swedish men perform better than Spanish men in helping domestically, but still participate at much lower levels than women. In contrast
to Spain, however, Sweden counteracts this effect with state policy, using daycare as the primary reconciliation strategy.

The principal strategy in reconciliation for Spanish women is supportive family networks, most commonly help from the maternal grandmother (Tobío 2005). From the previous generation of housewives, these grandmothers relieve their daughters of some guilt, are available in emergencies, and are a cost-free resource (Tobío 2005). This solution fits well within Spain’s traditional family and welfare arrangements because it depends on family solidarity. There is strong intergenerational solidarity that allows family members care for one another. Reliance upon these networks strengthens intergenerational ties within a family, seen particularly in the care connections between grandmothers, mothers, and grandchildren. Yet it also perpetuates gendered expectations for care. There is doubt whether today’s working women will be willing or able to reciprocate this help for their daughters in the future (Tobío 2005). Therefore, this strategy does not seem adequate and sustainable, and some recalibration of the Spanish welfare system is needed.

As noted above, public day care services represent the principal resource and reconciliation strategy in Sweden. Daycare is universally provided and widely available there (Gornick and Meyers 2003, Bernhardt 2007). This begins early, aiding mothers with young children. The welfare state entitles all children older than 18 months to publicly provided childcare (Jordan 2006). These state policies reflect an expectation for women to continue as workers in addition to child-rearing. The availability of daycare acknowledges this expectation and tries to facilitate reconciliation. The Swedish model
for childcare follows more closely Gornick and Meyer’s concept of “children as public goods,” the assumption that society benefits as a whole from the care given to children.

Spanish daycare’s limited availability and operating hours determine that it will not represent a principal strategy for reconciliation. The slow development of the public care sector reflects a continued Catholic ideology that it is better for mothers to care for their young children themselves (Naldini 2003). Spain provides universal public schools and, since 1975, many pre-school centers for children older than three years. However, there is little support for the very young (Crompton 2006). There is a high demand that goes unmet for childcare facilities for young children (MTAS 2004). For example, in 2004, Spain could not cover the childcare demands of 88.3% of mothers with a child less than one year-old, 62.4% of those with a child aged 1-2, and 34.2% for those with a child aged 2-3 years (MTAS 2004). Other problems with this reconciliation option include when children become sick and the incompatibility of daycare hours with work schedules. These centers often open after the workday begins, close for lunch, and close again before the workday ends. Additionally they have longer holiday periods than work holidays. In conclusion, public daycare is the primary reconciliation tool in Sweden but would need considerable change to become more influential in Spain.

**Family Allowances and Leaves:** Spain traditionally tried to encourage family formation by providing cash transfers for children, instead of offering publicly provided services. In 1994, Spanish fathers became eligible to receive one year credit toward their pension for each child (Naldini 2003). Sweden also promotes generous child allowances. There is a basic allowance for all children up to age 16, an additional child allowance for
families with three or more children, and student grants to help after the age of 16 (Bernhardt 2007).

Sweden encourages employment by improving options for flexible work hours and parental leave (Bernhardt 2007). There are also generous benefits to promote mothers to work continuously and to encourage fathers to take a more active part in care (Gornick and Meyers 2003). For instance, Sweden enables parents with children less than eight years old to legally reduce their workday from eight to six hours (Jordan 2006). Also, parents are allowed up to sixty days for child sick leave and one year for parental leave at a 90% wage replacement rate (Jordan 2006). This parental insurance is applied to fathers as well as to mothers in order to encourage men to participate in care. Specifically, Sweden also offers paternal leaves, non-transferable entitlements that are lost if not used by the father. These policies, provided with high wage replacement in Sweden, increase the likelihood that fathers will use them. Through these leaves, 85% of Swedish fathers take at least two months of leave from work to stay with their children (Bernhardt 2007).

Spanish mothers were offered maternity leave for six weeks before childbirth and eight weeks afterward at a 75% wage replacement rate (extended to 17 weeks in 1989) (Tobío 2005). Fathers can take ten of the seventeen weeks for parental leave. Both parents are eligible to take a three year unpaid leave. However, since families can choose who will take the leave (no benefits exist exclusively for the father), they are almost entirely used by women (Almendros 2002). Furthermore, even the policies for Spanish working mothers often go unused, suggesting they are not making a helpful impact. According to a study in 1995, only 2% of Spanish women with children younger than
three utilized their parental leave (Deven, Inglis, Moss, and Petrie 1997). This trend continues today, with only 11% of all working mothers utilizing some kind of work leave to care for their children, usually for less than one year (Tobío 2005). This limited take-up highlights once again the difficulties in securing a job and the penalties for career interruptions which force Spanish working women to find other reconciliation solutions if they want to have children.

There is some evidence that Spain has recognized a need to update its reconciliation policies. Spain introduced changes in parental leave through the Law for the Reconciliation of Working and Family Life of Working People (LCVFL) following an EU directive (96/34/CE). Through the LCVFL, maternal leaves, reduced working days for the care of children, and a suspension of the work contract for family reasons became permitted (Almendros 2002). However, this law and family benefits do not help in cases of child sickness, which is reported to be the most difficult issue for reconciliation (Tobío 2005). Spanish women consequently remain unable to resolve reconciliation through the policies currently available.

**Fertility:** The difficulties in reconciliation correlate with questions of fertility, suggesting that the Swedish model better allows women to pursue work and family simultaneously than the Spanish model. All throughout the western world, fertility rates are below the population replacement rate, which is an average of 2.1 children per woman. The Scandinavian countries continue to maintain relatively high fertility levels, however, despite greater numbers of women working (Gornick and Meyers 2003). Sweden’s fertility rates were one of Europe’s closest to the desired 2.1 (Fernández 2007).
Notably, Swedish mothers do not seem to limit the number of children they have because of work (Bernhardt 2007).

Spain suffers, however, from incredibly low levels of fertility, in fact, some of the lowest in the world and in history (European Commission 2007, Flaquer 2000: 17). At the turn of the 21st century, Spanish women were only having 1.18 children (European Commission 1998: 5-6). As noted earlier, these lower fertility rates do not reflect a diminished desire to have children. On average, Spanish women have 0.5 less children than their ideal number (Moreno 2006: 10). The difficulties in finding employment and affording housing make Spanish youth precarious during their most fertile years (Addis 1999: 12). Postponed autonomy also contributes to delays in marriage and childbearing. For instance, motherhood has been postponed in Spain to an average age of thirty for the birth of the first child (Chinchilla and Moragas 2007). Furthermore, the lack of state provisions for childcare, maternal, paternal, and parental leaves, combined with the fact that today women cannot or do not want to leave the labor market upon having children, seems to have contributed to the reduction in fertility (Katrougalos and Lazaridis 2003: 74). In the face of poor support for reconciliation, some Spanish women decide upon “extreme” reconciliation strategies, such as reducing the number of children or not having children at all (Tobío 2005).

Implications: Support for families in Spain is marked by a continued reliance upon strong family networks, while Sweden represents a determined effort to aid the family, promote gender equality, and encourage both parents to be earners and caregivers. Examining the historical legacies of the national welfare states suggested the approaches of welfare states to be path-dependent. Secondly, a contrast of Spain and
Sweden’s family policies illustrated how the diverse approaches to female employment, youth, reconciliation, and other family policies corresponded to differences in outcomes. The Spanish model already appears to be struggling to cope with NSRs facing families as noted by the drastically low fertility rates and unmet demands for services for families. New social risks and fertility pressures underline that some national welfare states must adjust to cope with new demands, or recalibrate their welfare models. From this analysis arose the implications that Sweden’s solid policies establish it is a ‘best practice’ case, while Spain needs welfare reform to adapt to the new risks facing families. This essay now will analyze the extent to which a recalibration of welfare for families is envisioned and enacted in an EU context.
III. FAMILY AS AN EU CONCERN

This part will examine the way in which the EU tries to foster coordination between member-states on family issues. Secondly, it will address EU targets for families in female labor force participation, reconciliation, and gender equality and what progress has been made on an EU level. Finally, it will assess any perceived Europeanization effect in policies toward families in Spain and Sweden and locate this inside the debate on EU social policy.

1. BECOMING AN EU CONCERN

Contemporary developments are not necessarily covered by traditional national welfare programs (Moreno and Palier 2005: 1) and neither are they limited to them in scope. Despite dissimilar pasts and approaches, European states share a continued prioritization of social welfare along with economic progress. Specific projects that promote social dialogue and progress toward family concerns have begun to emerge on an EU level. The EU does not introduce policy single-handedly, but instead induces progress toward mutually identifiable goals in its member states. As seen through its targets and prescriptions for family policy, however, the EU increasingly intervenes to encourage national welfare states to recalibrate to the new social challenges. These EU targets mark its primary tool of *soft policy*, meaning that the EU encourages member-
states to follow EU social agenda through the introduction of recommendations, proposals, and calls for change.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) efforts to bring the EU targets for female employment, reconciliation, and gender equality to the attention of the EU member states deserves examination. The Lisbon Summit established the OMC as its primary instrument to stimulate member-states to progress toward social objectives. Significantly, it does not have the authority to direct European legislation or create "hard law" in employment and social-protection (Scharpf 2002). With the OMC, voluntary decisions to follow policy remain at the national level. In this way, nation states must willingly cooperate for the OMC to be effective.

However, the OMC stimulates the different member-states to embrace comparative learning. The OMC thus “provides a framework for cooperation between member-states, whose national policies can be thus directed toward common objectives” (www.europa.eu). The OMC tools for developing convergence include the creation of common guidelines, national action plans, peer reviews, joint evaluation reports, and recommendations. In this way, both objectives and policy choices become defined as a matter of common concern, as will be examined in the goals and progress for female employment and childcare outlined at the Lisbon and Barcelona summits. Through the OMC and thus the EU, states try to reach agreement on common objectives and set common indicators of achievement to measure progress (Scharpf 2002). Furthermore, there is a type of peer accountability as the national governments present their plans for discussion and peer review. This encourages states to make some progress despite the voluntary nature of EU social agreements. The EU now acts upon new social risks,
identifying goals and prescribing targets for female employment, reconciliation, and gender equality.

**EU Targets and Progress for the Family**

There is a sense that female labor participation is the key for employment and economic growth in Europe (European Commission 2007). At the European Council in Lisbon in 2000, the EU created a developmental plan for progress that called for both economic and social progress. In this Lisbon Strategy, also known as the Lisbon Agenda or Process, the EU aims to “become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” ([www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)). Notably, the Lisbon Strategy hoped to achieve 60% of women in paid employment by 2010. In fact, progress toward this target has been achieved; female employment rose from 53.7% in 2000 to 57.2% in 2006 ([www.eurostat.ec.europa.eu](http://www.eurostat.ec.europa.eu)). Women have filled six of the eight million new jobs in the EU since the Lisbon objectives were set (European Commission 2007: 5). However, in order to progress toward the Lisbon objective for female employment, the EU sought to remove obstacles to women’s entry into paid work, by facilitating reconciliation and promoting gender equality.

The difficulties of reconciliation commonly inhibit women’s labor force participation. Working women often are hindered in developing their professional life by the continued burden of domestic and family responsibilities. Particularly, duties in child-rearing negatively affect their ability to participate in the workforce. Strikingly, female employment in the EU between ages 20-49 drops by 15% upon having a child,
compared to a 6% increase for men (European Commission 2007). As noted earlier, problems with reconciliation for young families are evident through the postponement of family formation and lower rates of fertility. In order to counter these effects, the EU sought to minimize the disincentives to combining work with having a family.

The EU developed policies to help facilitate women’s entry into work by promoting public childcare provision. For instance, the EU’s Fourth Action Program (1996-2000), first defined reconciliation of work and family life as a problem for both women and men (Edquist 2006). The EU promoted the development of reconciliation tools, recommending (9/241/CEE) that childcare services should be economically accessible, offer serious care (with respect to health and safety), and provide a broad education (MTAS 2004). In Barcelona in 2002, the EU elaborated on the Lisbon Strategy to design specific objectives for public childcare provision. Explicitly, it targeted increased care coverage to at least 90% of children between three years-old and the mandatory school age as well as to 33% of children under three years old (Plantenga 2004). A few countries, generally the Nordic ones, have already met or exceeded the Lisbon and Barcelona objectives. For instance, Sweden scores rather favorably on both employment and the targeted amount of daycare for children. Many more countries meet the target of childcare provision for children between three years-old and school age, including both Sweden and Spain (Plantenga 2004). However, Spain was one of the lowest scoring EU members for the younger age bracket, with less than 10% availability (Plantenga 2004). These comparative figures themselves reflect an increasing EU trend to measure and evaluate gender and family issues across member-states.

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1 This figure reflects an EU average that did not include data from DK, IE, or SE. (Eurostat Labor Force Survey, annual averages 2005; as cited in European Commission 2007).
In addition to challenges with reconciliation, another inhibitor to women’s labor force participation is the persistent inequalities they confront. Women frequently occupy a much less favorable situation in the labor market than men. Major gender gaps exist in employment and pay, which are “always to women’s disadvantage” (European Commission 2007: 5). The pay gap between men and women persists, with women making 15% less than men for every hour worked (Plantenga 2004). Moreover, gender divisions persist with regard to the type of jobs women take. Women are much less likely than men to be in decision-making positions, despite often higher levels of education (European Commission 2007). They typically take jobs in the service sector. Additionally, women participate in part-time work at much higher rates than men. Almost one-third of women work part-time (32.9% in 2006), compared to only 7.7% of men (European Commission 2007). Part-time work often makes it more difficult to achieve career advancement, higher income earnings, and to obtain benefits. These inequalities reduce the advantages of having a second income-earner in a family. Women therefore confront prevalent challenges to equality when entering into paid employment.

As a result, the EU prescribes improved gender equality policy to counteract the inequalities that deter women from work. The EU recognizes gender equality policy as fundamental to fostering economic and demographic growth. The Spring European Council of 2006 stressed that policies on gender equality are essential instruments for economic growth, prosperity, and competitiveness (Edquist 2006). It further recognized gender equality policies as a necessary step toward reaching the Lisbon objectives. As part of this progress toward the Lisbon Agenda, the EU encouraged “gender mainstreaming,” meaning that the EU systematically tries to consider all policy from a
gender perspective at its conception and thus continue to make advancements (Plantenga, Remery, and Rubery 2007). Additionally, the EU established specific projects to further this goal, namely the Institute for Gender and the EU Pact for Gender Equality. The Pact targets the implementation of policies promoting female employment and reconciliation as a way to meet the demographic change. Some progress has been achieved; the gap in employment rates between men and women was reduced to 15 points by 2005, especially low in youth aged 15-24 (5.9%) (European Commission 2007).

With regard to these issues relating to family, the EU increasingly identifies priority concerns and follows with specific policy prescriptions. The Lisbon, Barcelona, and gender equality targets indicate member-states’ shared expectations to combine economic advancement with social provision. The OMC’s tool of “benchmarking” served to establish comparisons by identifying best practices among the EU member-states. The Nordic states already fare well on the goals for female employment, childcare, and gender equality. In this way, the Nordic states seem to stand out as ‘best practice’ cases in their ability to resolve the new risks facing families. The EU uses benchmarking to advance toward the best-performing countries’ models, thus promoting imitation of good practices and programs. In fact, the EU recommendations and action addressing these issues demonstrate a close resemblance to the Nordic model of social provision. These tools seem to help in convergence on social policy (Moreno and Palier 2005: 33). In this way, the EU hopes to utilize the OMC to promote policy learning in member-states and help them to address the new social risks facing families.
2. EUROPEANIZATION EFFECTS IN SPAIN AND SWEDEN

Spain’s original extremity in depending on family networks makes its progress toward EU social goals more marked. This in turn suggests there is potential for the EU to influence on Spain’s social policy. Spain has experienced some difficulty in executing plans to improve gender equality and female employment (Edquist 2006). Its public support for families is underdeveloped and requires improvement to achieve these EU goals. Yet the OMC seems particularly geared toward the countries of the Southern Mediterranean (de la Porte and Pochet 2004: 75). Consequently, in Spain, the OMC does appear to be making progress toward EU goals. Spain developed a “New Social Contract,” similar to EU family projects, targeting a more equitable balance between men and women in work and care, more women in higher-paid employment, and increased part-time work opportunities (as long as they did not mark an exclusively female domain) (Edquist 2006). Also, the introduction of the laws toward reconciliation (1999) and for gender equality (2007) further underline Spain’s efforts to readjust its family policies to fall closer in line with EU goals. Therefore, the OMC and other soft policy initiatives have helped Spain in its convergence with EU social targets (Guillén and Álvarez 2004). There is a certain “Europeanization of social policy that has evolved over time and to which Spain is attracted” (Guillén and Álvarez 2004). As Spain introduces new efforts for family policy, the EU seems to exert a more direct and significant influence on Spanish social policy (Guillén and Álvarez 2004: 5).

It is difficult to assess to what degree the OMC has ‘Europeanized’ Sweden because many of the Nordic countries already score well on EU targets. Sweden is eager to place employment high on the EU agenda (Jacobsson 2003), yet Sweden and Denmark
have surpassed the EU employment targets consistently for years. In many cases, these countries have set more ambitious goals than the EU. For instance, Sweden wants to have 80% of the population aged 20-64 in regular employment (Jacobsson 2003). The EU recommends that Sweden reduce the gender segregation in the labor market, which has resulted in some government action programs. Gender segregation in Sweden, however, does not mean that female workers earn lower wages in the way that women working in female sectors in other countries do. Overall, Hemerijck suggests that Scandinavia represents a ‘best practice’ in the availability of “women-friendly policy” (2002: 200).

There does not seem to be a clear causal link between the OMC and greater convergence in Sweden. The goodness of fit between EU social targets and Sweden’s existing policy makes it difficult to discern a clear impact of the EU’s OMC (Jacobsson 2003: 24). In particular, EU goals for female employment, reconciliation, and gender equality strongly resemble the existing Swedish targets. In fact, Sweden seems more willing to support cooperation when it already has implemented the objectives in question (Jacobsson 2003: 17). Interviews confirm that Sweden is interested in greater information exchange, learning how other countries’ policies function, and in the exchange of best practice (Jacobsson 2003: 14). In a sense, Sweden regards its measures as a “good practice” which it is willing to share with others (Interview with the Swedish Ministry of Social Affairs, as cited in Jacobsson 2003). This sense of sharing their good system without feeling much pressure to converge could explain the favorable attitude of Sweden toward the OMC.
3. IMPLICATIONS

There is evident divergence on family policy in the mere two states examined in this work. It has been suggested that there is more variation between European countries than between the EU and the US (Alber 2006). Considering that there are twenty-five other EU member-states with their own inherent social issues, any conceptualization of a single European Social Model (ESM) is extremely complex. Also, there is doubt on whether states would be willing to coordinate on sensitive issues like welfare and social policy if they feared an EU social track might jeopardize their national welfare arrangements (Mau 2005). In this way, it is not surprising that this “Achilles heel” (Delors, as cited in Mau 2005), European social integration, has been difficult to define and develop. Yet there does seem to be a common thread to European social policy, a shared prioritization of the social dimension that offers collective unity and identity to most EU countries (Moreno and Palier 2005). The European-wide continued concern for insuring social well-being enables the establishment of goals and targets for social policy progress.

The EU increasingly encourages common targets for families and advancement toward mutually agreed goals. These targets strongly resemble the family-friendly policies of Sweden and the Nordic states. In particular, the emphasis on increasing employment for all adults suggests that convergence in EU social policy will more closely follow the Swedish system (Annesley 2007: 195). However, this minimizes Sweden’s need to converge. In contrast, most of the pressure to converge falls on the countries of the Southern Mediterranean. The OMC seems desirable and productive for the straggling member-states, like Spain, whose traditional policies result in strains for
modern families. Indeed, it is easier to discern progress toward EU targets in countries like Spain, where more progress is needed.

Traditional welfare states that struggle to address NSRs, like Spain, can use EU policy initiatives as an excuse to introduce much-needed reforms. The EU coordinates different national approaches to address common demands. It also helps states recalibrate their family policy to follow ‘best practice’ targets for reconciliation and gender equality. In this way, the new social risks facing families present an opportunity for the EU to become more involved in social policy. With regard to these risks, the EU influence is “not insignificant, and contrasts with its otherwise limited capacity to intervene in policy areas in which the member states feel they must keep under national control” (Palier 2003). Of course, member-states have their own historical legacies that appear to be path-dependent, especially in relation to their approach to family. The social-democratic countries’ traditional practices led them to generally fare well with these new risks, becoming a model of “best practice” within the EU. Countries with more traditional national welfare systems did not address the new social risks as well and struggle to introduce reform on a national level. It is in these countries, however, where the EU targets and peer review seem to have a more clear influence, albeit moderate and slowly developing. This suggests that the EU can have a positive influence in recalibrating family welfare and improve the reconciliation standards more generally. Indeed, as these new social concerns continue to have economic and demographic significance, the EU’s targets female employment, reconciliation, and gender equality become more influential.
CONCLUSION:

This essay argues that the European Union can potentially help its member-states that are weak on family policy to recalibrate their welfare to address the new social risks facing families. The first part describes how the new social risks facing families generate a debate on proper social responses that is answered with varied success by different welfare regimes. Social transformations from “old social risks” to “new social risks” strained traditional welfare systems, especially with regard to family concerns. Debates on social protection that would address these challenges for families suggest that modern welfare programs should promote the reconciliation of work and family life, gender equality, and family support. Welfare regimes respond to these new social demands with varying levels of state support; the Southern Mediterranean states struggle to adapt while the Scandinavian welfare states seem better prepared.

The second part of the essay examines national approaches to family as seen in Spain and Sweden. It argues that distinct historical legacies acted as a determining factor for modern welfare arrangements, focusing particularly on their divergent approaches to family policy. Sweden’s state support and Spain’s reliance on the family are reflected in their policies toward labor force participation, reconciliation, and other family policies. Fertility levels underline the respective success and failure of these national welfare states to resolve the risks facing families. Sweden, with its long-established programs for female employment, daycare, and gender equality, appears more capable of sustaining
both female employment and high fertility levels. In contrast, familial Spain struggles with high unemployment and low fertility rates, underlining the long-term strains of little reconciliation policy. Success in dealing with new social risks appears to result from their respective historical legacies, and states continue to make the final determination of national welfare policy.

From considering this need to recalibrate family welfare policy, the third part transitions to argue that social projects increasingly emerge on a European level. By clearly addressing new social risks and identifying targets for improvement, the EU has taken preliminary steps toward establishing an influence in the social policy realm. In fact, both Sweden and Spain are now actively participating at the EU level to increase the exchange of information and best practice in the Open Method of Coordination. The European Union increasingly plays a greater role in policy coordination as it targets improvements in female labor force participation, reconciliation, and gender equality. The ‘Europeanization effect’ of these targets and the Open Method of Coordination are more evident in lagging countries (Spain) than those who already fare well on the new social risks for families (Sweden). Consequently, this exchange has reinforced the Nordic states (Sweden) as best practice and brought much pressure to bear on Southern Europe to improve their family policy. Spain does reflect this ‘Europeanization effect,’ which suggests that there now is an increased EU influence on social policy more generally (Guillén and Álvarez 2004, Moreno and Palier 2005). Spanish progress, although moderate, toward resolving the new social risks facing families now seems significantly bound to targets on an EU level. As national welfare states like Spain assimilate EU
targets, it implies that the European Union has the potential to exercise a more pronounced role in social policy convergence.
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