ESPN Thematic Report on Social Investment Switzerland

2015

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The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries. The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.
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Summary

- The social investment perspective has inspired some recent reforms in Switzerland. However, the extent to which a reorientation of the Swiss welfare state in this direction is actually taking place is rather uneven.
- The highly decentralised federal structure of the Swiss state is partly responsible for the uneven development of the social investment approach in social policies. Generally speaking, the reorientation has been more visible in federal programmes than in those run by cantons or municipalities.
- Early childhood education and care services are being developed in response to parents' (mothers') demands for better reconciliation of work and family life. However, supply remains inadequate and the cost borne by parents is very high – among the highest in Europe.
- As a result, parents tend to rely on informal care arrangements. This is even more the case for disadvantaged parents, particularly those on low incomes and with a migration background. Various studies have pointed out the existence of a clear social gradient in access to childcare services.
- Pre-school education (4–6 age group) is compulsory in the majority of cantons (15 out of 26). However, any attempt to make it compulsory elsewhere has failed because of lack of public support.
- Under such circumstances, reconciling work and family life is difficult. As a result, most women work part time, and often work very few hours. In addition, those who can tend to rely on informal care, provided often by the grandparents.
- Social security for working-age people has been reoriented towards the active/social investment perspective through reforms adopted in the 1990s and 2000s. The reorientation was most successful in the large federal programmes: unemployment and invalidity insurance.
- The reorientation is less clear in the field of social assistance. This policy is a responsibility of the cantons and the municipalities, and the degree to which it is being reoriented towards the active/social investment perspective is limited and uneven.
- Given a more or less continuous increase in the number of social assistance clients – which has continued to increase even in the recent period of economic expansion – more innovative approaches are being tested in several cantons and cities.
- The highly decentralised federal structure of the country may constitute an obstacle to the development of a fully-fledged social investment welfare state, as subnational units have an incentive to free-ride rather than invest with a long-term perspective.

1 Assessment of overall approach to social investment

As in other Continental European welfare states, social policies in Switzerland have traditionally been strong on income maintenance and status protection, and less strong on services and employment-promoting interventions. There have, however, been some precedents that are proving to be assets in the current reorientation towards an active, social investment approach in social policy. First, on paper, social security policies were always strongly oriented towards the promotion of labour market re-entry, often using social control rather than activation as the main tool. Second, like other German-speaking countries, Switzerland has a dual vocational training system that has always been understood as having a social-integration function. These two characteristics of the Swiss welfare state and skill-formation regime are proving important assets in the current reorientation.

The general principles behind the notion of social investment are generally accepted by most political parties and by the general public. However, in political debates and confrontation, both left- and right-wing parties tend to prefer traditional approaches: income guarantee programmes and stronger incentives, respectively. Social investment-oriented reforms are often the result of political compromises, where both left- and right-wing actors choose second-best options (Bonoli 2001; Häusermann 2010; 2012).

As a result, large sectors of the Swiss welfare state today are in line with the social investment approach. This is the case with unemployment insurance and invalidity insurance. These two programmes are run by the federal government (though the implementation is mostly a cantonal task). In the 1990s and the 2000s, reforms of these two schemes significantly reoriented them towards an active/social investment perspective. In both schemes, substantial efforts are made in terms of training, job search assistance, and rehabilitation (for invalidity insurance). The activation system is relatively modern, and includes all the main tools that are found in other European countries, including training programmes, job subsidies, job search assistance, monitoring of job search efforts and sanctions, as well as publicly subsidised jobs.

A social investment orientation is less visible in two other important areas of the Swiss welfare state: family policy and particularly childcare services, and social assistance. It should be noted that these two fields of policy are essentially under the responsibility of the cantons and the federal government has relatively little influence on them. One consequence of this situation is a large degree of variation across the country. In addition, as will be argued below, both family policy and social assistance seem to be less inspired by an activation/social investment understanding of social policy, and are rather rooted either in a market-based vision (childcare) or a traditional social vision (social assistance).

Overall, one can say that there are elements of social investment in the Swiss welfare state. These concern above all the activation and pro-employment dimension of social investment. They are found predominantly in the large federal programmes, such as unemployment and invalidity insurance. In contrast, canton-run programmes, such as social assistance and various family policies, are less consistent with the social investment perspective.

One possible interpretation of the uneven development of the social investment approach within the Swiss welfare state would emphasise the institutional obstacle constituted by the highly decentralised form of federalism that structures the country's institutions (Bonoli and Champion 2014). Under such conditions, incentives to reorient social policies towards social investment are probably lower, since lower-level units can free-ride on each other or on higher levels of government (the federal level), rather than bear the cost of investing and then wait for returns to materialise.

2 Assessment of specific policy areas and measures/instruments

2.1 Support for early childhood development

In Switzerland, family policy in general is a responsibility of the cantons. The federal government and federal law play only a limited role in this important field of policy. The most important federal-level interventions are a federal framework law on family benefits and time-limited federal subsidies for setting up new day-care centres or for expanding the supply of childcare spaces (both discussed below). The bulk of provision for families – including the detailed regulation of cash benefits and the provision of long-term subsidies for childcare and other services – is the responsibility of the cantons and/or the municipalities. This means that there is a large degree of variation across the country.

2.1.1 Early childhood education and care

Childcare (0–3 years)

Childcare (for the 0–3-year age group) is a municipal and/or cantonal responsibility. The federal government has been running a programme (*Anstossfinanzierung/Programme d'impulsion*) meant to help expand the supply of childcare services by financing part of the initial costs, i.e. up to 3,000 CHF per new place per year and for up to three years. The programme, which started in 2003, was initially meant to last eight years, but given that childcare services remain in short supply, it has been extended until 2015, and a further extension to 2019 is planned. The programme is generally considered successful, even though it is difficult to estimate its real impact because of lack of a counterfactual. A recent evaluation study showed, nonetheless, that the new childcare places created are very stable: between 95% and 98% of the federally subsidised places "survived" the end of the subsidised period (Walker et al. 2013).

Given the low degree of federal involvement in the provision of childcare services, policy can vary substantially across cantons. In general, French-speaking cantons have gone further in institutionalising childcare financing, whereas in German-speaking cantons a stricter understanding of the notion of subsidiarity means that the municipalities play a bigger role. Some French-speaking cantons (Vaud, Fribourg) have introduced a financing system that includes a contribution paid by employers. These contributions, however, are rather limited and the bulk of the costs are still borne by parents.

In spite of a strong degree of cantonal variation in this policy field, one can point to a number of trends that seem to span the cantons. The first is a shortage of childcare places. While there is no way of knowing exactly the number of places that would be needed to satisfy the demand for childcare services, there is ample evidence to suggest that the current level of supply is largely inadequate. A study based on experimental and econometric evidence came to the conclusion that approximately 50,000 extra places were needed in the early 2000s (INFRAS 2005). A survey-based estimate for the canton of Vaud only came to the conclusion that some 1,300 places, equal to approximately 20% of the current supply, were needed to cover the explicit demand (Bonoli and Vuille 2013). In urban areas, access to services is difficult and there are generally long waiting lists. In sum, it is clear that the current level of supply, which results in a coverage rate of around 29% (source: Eurostat on the basis of EU-SILC data), is inadequate.

The second clear trend that spans the cantons is the fact that the financial contribution required from parents is quite substantial. Simulations made by the OECD show Switzerland to be the country where childcare is most expensive: for a full-time childcare place for a two-year-old, parents are charged the equivalent of 60% of the

average wage (OECD family database,[1] Chart PF3.4). It should be noted that the figure for Switzerland refers to the city of Zurich, and while there is substantial variation across cantons and municipalities, costs tend to be rather high everywhere.

Research has also highlighted the existence of a clear social gradient in access to childcare services. Schlanser, for instance, showed that it is mostly the children of high-skilled mothers who are taken care of in childcare centres. Low-skilled immigrant families, in particular those of Turkish origin and those from the former Yugoslav republics, are less likely to have access to this type of service (Schlanser 2011). A study for the canton of Vaud showed a strong positive relationship between household income and the likelihood of a child being cared for in a day-care centre (Bonoli and Vuille 2013). The effect is particularly strong in those municipalities which have a less-progressive fee schedule, suggesting that high childcare costs for parents constitute an obstacle to access for low-income families (Abrassart and Bonoli 2014)

Pre-school (4–6 years)

Primary and pre-primary education is a responsibility of the cantons, which means an absence of federal legislation in this field and important cross-cantonal variation. However, an inter-cantonal coordination body in 2007 produced an agreement that tries to harmonise practices across cantons, not least in order to facilitate the transfer from one school system to another in the event of a family changing canton (CDIP 2011). The agreement includes the provision of pre-school education for the 4–6-year age group. In the agreement, it was foreseen that participation in this pre-school programme would be compulsory. This generated a fair level of controversy, as a result of which the agreement was accepted by only 15 cantons. These provide two years of compulsory pre-school. In the other cantons, pre-school may be shorter (one year) and/or non-compulsory. In general, pre-school is available only for a few hours every day, so that parents still need to organise childcare, even if just for a part-time job.

2.1.2 Family benefits (cash and in-kind)

Family benefits are also a responsibility of the cantons. However, a framework law adopted in 2006 imposes some minimum levels on all cantons. Before the adoption of the framework law, all cantons provided near-universal family benefits. These are generally financed by employers' contributions, and before the 2006 law were available only to children of employees (not to the children of the non-employed or the self-employed). Part-time workers, in some cantons, were entitled to partial benefits only.

The 2006 law forces cantons to provide full benefits to all children, regardless of the employment status of the parents (except for the self-employed, for whom cantons can decide whether or not to include this group). Part-time workers are entitled to full benefits, and minimum amounts are also specified (200 CHF per child aged 0–15; 250 CHF per child aged 16–25 and in full-time education).[2] The 2006 law has certainly moderated cross-cantonal variation in family benefits, but differences are still substantial.

A small number of cantons run additional means-tested schemes for disadvantaged families (Geneva, Vaud, Solothurn, Ticino). These benefits generally target families with some income from work, but for whom overall household income is insufficient to make ends meet. These benefits are somewhat more generous and less stigmatising than social assistance.

In a comparative perspective, families in Switzerland seem to fare relatively well. With a rate for those at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE) of 17.3% for children younger than 18 in 2013,[3] Switzerland is just slightly above the best performers (the

[1] Available on: www.oecd.org/social/family/database

[2] See: http://www.bsv.admin.ch/themen/zulagen/00059/?lang=fr

[3] Eurostat, EU SILC.

Nordic countries), but does better than most Continental European countries. This result is probably due to the overall relatively high levels of labour market participation.

It is difficult to say how effective the income support system is in protecting children from the risk of poverty, because of lack of a counterfactual. However, one can point to the fact that large families (three children and more) and single-parent families are some of the groups that are most exposed to the risk of poverty. This suggests that there is still room for improvement.

2.1.3 Parenting services

Parenting services are provided by cantons and municipalities. Often the actual providers are not-for-profit associations that receive subsidies for the provision of parenting services. Since these services are provided by many different actors on a small scale, it is difficult to have a clear view of their overall development. What is clear is that parenting services have not so far gained much prominence at the national level.

2.2 Supporting parents' labour market participation

2.2.1 Childcare

As seen above, childcare services are underdeveloped, and there is currently a clear shortage of childcare places in much of the country. As a result, Swiss parents tend to turn to part-time work and to informal care as solutions to reconciling the work and family life dilemma. In Switzerland, 36.5% of employment is part time, the second highest figure in Europe (after the Netherlands). More than 60% of women who are in employment work on a part-time basis. In many cases, it is in order to reconcile work and family life (21% of all part-time employees).[4]

According to information published by the Swiss statistical office, the use of informal care arrangements (mostly the grandparents) exceeds that of formal arrangements. More than 60% of children aged 0–3 are cared for in an informal setting, and only around 40% in a formal setting.[5] A study for the canton of Vaud found that the grandparents were one of the most widely used childcare arrangements, and also one of the most highly valued by parents (Bonoli and Vuille 2013). It seems clear that, given the dire situation as far as formal care is concerned, grandparents are playing a very important role in supporting parents' labour market participation. Of course, some groups of parents, in particular immigrants, are generally unable to count on informal support of this type (though they may have access to other forms of informal care).

2.2.2 Long-term care

The responsibility for long-term care rests with the cantons, which have the possibility to delegate this responsibility to the municipalities or private organisations – an option with they use frequently (Kocher 2010; OECD 2011). Health insurance, cantons and municipalities directly finance about 40% of long-term care costs. The remaining 60% is covered by households. The provision of care occurs either in medical nursing homes, nursing departments of old age or disability homes, or is ambulatory care. An organisation called Spitex (acronym for the German phrase *Spitalexterne Hilfe und Pflege* – care services provided outside hospitals) is responsible for the provision of ambulatory care (Gmür and Rüfenacht 2010). In addition to services of formal care, informal care also plays an important role in Switzerland. Informal care entails care services that are provided by volunteers, families and dependants of the needy person (Zumbrunn and Bayer-Oglesby 2010).

[4] Figures for 2013. Source: Eurostat.

[5] Estimates based on EU-SILC data. Source: www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/fr/index/news/01.Document.188061.pdf

2.2.3 Parental leave

Switzerland does not provide any form of parental leave as a statutory right. The only form of income replacement related to children is maternity insurance. Introduced in 2004, maternity insurance provides a benefit equal to 80% of insured earnings (with a ceiling) for a period of 14 weeks.

Under the influence of the experiences of other European countries, a debate has developed on whether or not Switzerland should introduce some form of parental leave. Some companies provide short "paternity leave schemes", but these seem to be rather exceptional. Various bodies have made proposals for the introduction of a paid parental leave scheme. However, it should be borne in mind that these types of policies are generally politically very difficult to introduce in Switzerland. For example, maternity insurance was introduced only in 2004, even though such a scheme had been initially planned at the end of World War II. Previous attempts at introducing it had been stopped by majorities of voters in referendums. As a result, the introduction of paid parental leave seems rather unlikely in the near future.

2.3 Policy measures to address social and labour market exclusion[6]

As in other European countries, the key trend in social security for working-age people over the last decade has been a reinforcement of its employment-promoting function (Bertozzi et al. 2008). This has happened through a series of reforms that have pursued a two-pronged strategy to put beneficiaries back into employment: the strengthening of work incentives and the development of active labour market programmes. It should be noted that in terms of formal legislation, Swiss social insurance programmes did put much emphasis on labour market reintegration well before the recent wave of reforms. But this objective had remained somewhat in the background.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, unemployment insurance remained the main point of activation for non-working individuals. However, the sharp increase in the number of social assistance and invalidity benefit beneficiaries prompted developments in these two areas, too.

2.3.1 Unemployment insurance

Unemployment insurance was introduced in 1982 and already had an "activation" orientation, for example by requiring recipients to produce evidence of their job search efforts. However, it was only in a reform adopted in 1995 that the emphasis on active labour market policy became central. Three features of the 1995 reform contributed to this reorientation: 1) the reform imposed a time limit of 18 months on receipt of the benefit (before the reform, it had been possible to renew the entitlement to unemployment insurance by simply participating in a labour market programme; but this possibility was now ruled out); 2) the reform set up a network of regional placement offices (about 100 for the whole country) that replaced municipal employment agencies. The new offices were supposed to be (and actually are) more professionalised and efficient than the former municipal employment agencies; 3) substantial means were made available for active labour market policy (Giriens and Stauffer 1999).

2.3.2 Invalidity insurance

Concern for rising caseloads and expenditure on *invalidity insurance* rose in the early 2000s. In fact, the invalidity insurance scheme had been making a loss since 1993. In addition, the image of invalidity insurance had been shattered by continuing media

[6] This section draws on Bonoli and Häusermann (2011).

reports of abuses.[7] In response to these issues, a profound reform of the invalidity insurance scheme was adopted by parliament in 2006. Its main aim was to improve the prospects for labour market re-integration, entailing a variety of measures such as an early detection system for workers who are experiencing health problems that could lead to invalidity, or new measures aimed at facilitating labour market re-entry. The reform also contained some elements of retrenchment, such as a reduction in some additional benefits. In parallel, invalidity insurance offices had been tightening access to the benefit, by applying medical criteria more strictly. The reform was unsuccessfully challenged in a referendum in 2007 and is now law.

2.3.3 Social assistance

With regard to *social assistance*, cantonal legislation had been gradually adapted to the new context throughout the 1990s, by including some form of activation, such as incentives for those who agree to follow labour market programmes. However, in many cases (especially in French-speaking cantons), the objective of these activation programmes was not labour market participation, but "social reinsertion". An important development was the adoption, in 2005, of a new set of guidelines by the influential SKOS/CSIAS.[8] The new guidelines explicitly encouraged cantons to introduce activation measures in their social assistance legislation. These included incentives to take up employment, such as an earnings disregard, or incentives to participate in training programmes, such as "activation supplements". At the same time, the recommended amounts for benefits were reduced, so that, in order to obtain the previous benefit level, recipients would have to accept activation programmes.[9] This new set of guidelines is not legally binding, and its adoption has proved rather controversial, with the strongest resistance coming from the French-speaking cantons. The guidelines are nonetheless being adopted in a growing number of cantons, but the extent to which social assistance is genuinely reoriented towards activation and employment promotion is probably limited and varies by canton.

For example, there is evidence that, for many years, at least some cantons continued to use cantonal (or municipal) employment programmes not to help people back into jobs, but to reopen an entitlement period to federal unemployment insurance.[10] This possibility has been ruled out in a reform of unemployment insurance adopted in 2011. However, activation measures for social assistance beneficiaries are often unrelated to labour market participation, aiming more at providing them with some sort of occupation than at enhancing their employment chances (Wyss 1997; Pfister 2009; Bonoli and Champion 2013).

In recent years, continuing rising numbers of social assistance beneficiaries, including in a period of good economic performance, have pushed cantonal and municipal authorities to promote a bolder activation and social investment agenda. Some cantons have been innovative, too. In the canton of Vaud, for example, a new programme started in the mid-2000s which aims to provide full vocational training for young social assistance clients.[11] In the city of Zurich, partly subsidised jobs are available without time limits to social assistance clients who are deemed unfit for

[7] One example of those reports was a series of articles published by the daily tabloid *Der Blick* on the lives of Swiss invalidity benefit recipients who lived comfortably in Thailand and displayed no sign of physical or psychological impairment to work (see *Der Blick*, 18 May 2006).

[8] SKOS/CSIAS is an association of cantonal and municipal social services and non-governmental organisations involved in the fight against poverty (such as Caritas). This association, which is neither a state nor a state-recognised body, periodically issues guidelines with regard to how the cantons should run their social assistance schemes. These guidelines are not binding, but tend to be followed by cantons. For more information, see www.skos.ch

[9] There are a few exceptions to this rule, such as lone mothers of children below the age of three, who are entitled to the activation supplement regardless of participation in a programme.

[10] While the true extent of these practices is unknown, the federal government estimates their cost for the unemployment insurance scheme at 90 million CHF per year (Conseil federal 2008, p. 7046).

[11] The programme is known as FORJAD (Formation pour Jeunes Adules en Difficulté).

unsubsidised employment.[12] Various cantons are experimenting with activation projects based on collaboration between social assistance offices and regional placement offices. Collaboration is sometimes difficult, since the institutions that must work together belong to different levels of government (Bonoli and Champion 2014).

In spite of the recent wave of innovations, Swiss social assistance maintains a mostly "social" orientation. Pressure and real assistance to re-enter the labour market is probably relatively low, in comparison to EU countries which have fully reoriented their social security system toward activation.

[12] The programme is known as *Teillohnjobs.*

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