

Revue française des affaires sociales

**Call for multidisciplinary papers on
“Social protection reforms in Germany since the 1990s:
challenges, compromises and outcomes”**

For issue no. 4 -2015

This call for contributions is of interest to researchers in the fields of philosophy, political science, history, geography, law, economy and sociology, as well as to professionals and other players involved in social welfare.

Contributions must be submitted by **15 April 2015**.

Germany’s thriving economy with its low unemployment figures as well as its social welfare and labour market reforms have sparked off considerable interest in France, whether it is to extoll the virtues of this system or to point out its weaknesses and limits (increased social inequality, a growing number of insecure or low-paid jobs and an increasingly segmented labour market). Underpinning these debates and controversies, there is one question: although certain categories of the population have been hard hit by social welfare reforms, have these same reforms also contributed to the dynamic economy in Germany today? Or, if despite the current crisis, the performance and the competitiveness of the German economy remain unscathed, were the cutbacks (or reprioritisation of spending) and “sacrifices” made in the area of social protection the price to be paid for this?

This interest in the German social protection goes back a long way. Germany was in fact a forerunner in this field: Chancellor Bismarck created the Social Security system in 1883. Accident insurance followed and finally an invalidity pension scheme was introduced in 1889. Unemployment benefits only appeared in 1927 but the addition of a fifth branch to its social welfare system in 1994 meant that once again Germany was once again among the European trailblazers.

With the aim of further developing knowledge of this country that is closely linked to France in many different areas, the RFAS decided to dedicate an issue to the questions raised by the specific nature of the German social protection systems. These questions will not be limited to the five key risks, which are age, illness, accident, unemployment and dependence. We shall also explore child protection, assistance to families and the fight against poverty.

We will specifically focus on identifying the underlying issues of the reforms. Analysing changes to the different sectors of the social protection system viewed through the lens of current changes in the labour market and their links with demographic and economic questions lie at the core of this topic. The time lapse between the decision to introduce these reforms and their actual implementation is long enough to assess their consequences. What were the real, explicitly stated objectives? Who was involved in the definition of these objectives and in which conditions? On which points were compromises reached? Did these reforms help to reduce or on the contrary accentuate social inequality not only in terms of income but also other criteria? Were there any other perverse effects?

A quarter of a century after the fall of the Berlin Wall, what is the current state of play concerning divergences between the former and the current Lander in this respect?

In order to address these issues, this edition of the RFAS will focus on:

- reviewing findings in the form of *literature reviews* covering the different topics presented in this call for papers.
- publishing articles on specific research subjects. Below we have made some suggestions for areas of research grouped under broad themes. Please note that the RFAS wishes to receive *original and innovative* contributions on these subjects.

THEME 1: Changes to expenditure and financing structures in the different areas of social protection

In the current climate of cutbacks and expenditure control (in the area of health insurance and retirement in particular) it would be useful to analyse any changes in income and expenditure patterns. How can we explain the fact that Germany has no Social Security deficit, particularly in this unfavourable demographic climate which has seen an increase in the number of elderly people (especially those who are dependent). What are the current priorities for both the government and social policymakers? For the last two decades we have witnessed changes to the financing structure to the detriment of social contributions and in favour of public contributions. What role did moderate wage policies and price competitiveness within the framework of the Eurozone possibly play in these changes? And to what extent did demographic issues feature in the decision-making process related to the reforms? Did employment policy overshadow social policy?

Recent OECD data shows that even if Germany is ranks high in Europe in terms of social protection expenditure per head, the share of the GNP given over to social public expenditure has remained stable since 2000 (26.6% et 26.2% en 2013, whereas in France it has progressed from 28.6% to 33.0%). How can this difference between France and the majority of other countries in the European Union be explained?

THEME 2: Health insurance and nursing care insurance reforms

Increased life expectancy goes hand in hand with an older and increasingly frail category of the population and we could question whether the German social protection system is able to cope with this demographic shift that occurred in the space of generation and is now picking up speed. Are corporate reform measures - in particular those concerning disability and the loss of autonomy (insurance schemes) - adequate to face these challenges? Seen through the prism of current debates in France on this subject, what can be said of Germany's decision to create new branch of social insurance? How have the category of population concerned and their families reacted to the care given to the dependent elderly, particularly from a financial point of view? Have there been innovative measures at local level to provide care for dependent people?

In the area of health insurance, can we identify the expenditure items and the underlying regulatory mechanisms that could explain the sustainable expenditure control exercised by our German neighbours? Did these budgetary restrictions meet with resistance from the unions, bearing in mind that trade union membership – although higher than France – has clearly decreased?

The existence of a private health insurance scheme accessible to a minority of financially secure individuals alongside the obligatory universal insurance coverage brings up the question of social inequality when it comes to access to treatment. Another point that could be explored is the respect of the solidarity principle between the sick and the healthy, in the light of the ORA (outstanding remaining amount) and the recent changes that it underwent. German reforms have led to the emergence of fiercer competition between the different health insurance bodies. The question is: have these resulted in an improvement or, on the contrary, deterioration in quality of care?

THEME 3: Public pension system reforms

After two decades of public pension system reforms (*Gesetzliche Rentenversicherung*, laws of 1989, 2001, 2004, 2007), what social and economic conclusions can be drawn concerning the effect of the different measures introduced (delaying the legal retirement age, reform of indexation methods, spreading contributions over a larger segment of the population in order to “cap” the contribution rate) and their consequences? The poverty level of retired people in German is once again making the news, so how can we explain the recent reforms aimed at extending family allowances for mothers and the introduction of early retirement at 63 for long careers?

At the present time what are the current procedures for caring for the dependent elderly with no income? What were the trade-offs between insurance and solidarity?

THEME 4: Assistance for families and the life-work balance

What are the new family policy priorities? In the context of a shrinking working age population, is it primarily about enticing more women back onto the labour market?

As for the recent divorce reform, does this push women to go back to work or enter the labour market following a divorce? Or, could this be interpreted as a new measure in the policy aimed at fostering gender equality in all areas?

THEME 5: Entitlements to social rights and labour market reforms

Current key topics are changes to both Labour Law and employment risk coverage (especially long-term employment) introduced over the last decade, more specifically since the beginning of the economic crisis in Germany (as in other EU member countries) and the impact on individuals working in insecure jobs.

There is no shortage of publications on atypical employment, which is on the rise, especially since the Hartz 4 law came into force. That said, an update would nevertheless be useful, especially in the light of changes introduced by the Federal Agency concerning the management of the long-term unemployed.

These atypical jobs bear the stamp of “insecurity” and generally offer a lower level of job security, lower wages and more difficult working conditions. Freshly qualified or unqualified individuals, women and young people are over-represented in this category. To what extent and in what way could we consider that they might be subject to discrimination and in a situation of inequality as regards social rights compared to the rest of the working force? One such example are the long-term unemployed who since quite recently are no longer entitled to the *Elterngeld* (paid leave a for parent following birth of a child).

Will the introduction of a minimum hourly wage of 8.5 Euros (before tax) as of 1st January 2015 help to improve the plight of low wage earners and alleviate poverty, bearing in mind that in certain cases, several categories of workers will be excluded from this measure? This will be the case for apprentices under the age of 18, certain trainees, newspaper delivery staff or agricultural seasonal workers. In addition, the long-term unemployed will only be eligible after a six-month wait period. Finally, how will this measure impact social protection entitlement for employees by concerned by this minimum wage in the longer run ?

In these areas an analysis of entitlement – or lack of entitlement granted to new immigrants (on the rise with a positive net migration of 473,000 people in 2013, according to Destatis) would be welcome.

Another point meriting attention would be the role of “derived” or “secondary” rights which are granted to spouses of beneficiaries, especially old-age insurance schemes (spouses’ pension) or supplementary health insurance cover. Does the prospect of benefiting from these

derived rights (especially in the case of married couples) make it easier to accept the creation of so-called “insecure” or “precarious” employment?

Further information on the contents of this call for submissions may be obtained by contacting Jeanne Fagnani or Brigitte Lestrade who have been charged with drafting this edition at the following addresses:

fagnani@univ-paris1.fr

and

brigitte.lestrade@u-cergy.fr

If you wish to submit a paper on this question you are requested to send it, together with a résumé and presentation of the author (*cf.* "instructions for authors") to Aurore Lambert, Secretary General of the RFAS:

rfas-drees@sante.gouv.fr

Before 15 April 2015

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<http://www.drees.sante.gouv.fr/recommandations-aux-auteurs-rfas,10913.html>