

**Innocenti Working Paper**

**OVERVIEW OF CHILD WELL BEING IN  
GERMANY: POLICY TOWARDS A SUPPORTIVE  
ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN**

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# OVERVIEW OF CHILD WELL BEING IN GERMANY: POLICY TOWARDS A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

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**Summary:** Children's opportunities to develop according to their talents and competencies and to establish trust in the adults with whom they live their neighbourhoods, kindergardens, schools and municipalities also crucially influence the future of the society in which they grow up. Yet, international comparisons have until recently centred on resource availability, material wellbeing and health outcomes. However, initiatives such as the OECD/PISA and WHO surveys of 'healthy lifestyles among school-aged children' have explored child well-being along several dimensions. Building on these surveys, the Innocenti Report Card No 7 (20076) 'Child Poverty in Perspective; An Overview of Child-wellbeing in Rich Countries' compares child wellbeing along six dimensions including material wellbeing, health and safety, educational well-being, family and peer relationships, behaviours and risk, and children's subjective sense of wellbeing.

The UNICEF framework is a starting-point for the present study of child well-being and development in Germany at the level of the individual state. The analysis reveals that child well-being differs across the States and along the various dimensions. The framework provides a more extensive understanding than is possible through attention to material factors or the school situation alone. Overall, however, child wellbeing appears to be more advanced in the western than the eastern regions of the country, and in the south compared to the north. On the basis of the analysis a series of policy recommendations may be identified for the federal states and the municipalities concerning dimensions of child wellbeing which deserve special attention in their particular regional context. The comparison also demonstrates that only limited data relevant for the (international) comparison of child wellbeing is available at the state-level for comparison in all six dimensions. Such information is necessary to enable a meaningful appreciation of the prospects for the country's future, through its children. This study attempts to contribute to an increased appreciation of the importance of children's well-being for the creation of the future of the society, at the level of the federal state, the states and the municipalities, suggesting as well possible directions for further research.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 1. THE FORGOTTEN MODERN AGE

According to German Federal Chancellor Merkel, a child-friendly society is one that is capable of looking into the future, and has confidence in itself with citizens which face challenges with courage. “A society which treats children fairly considers both sustainability and the future. Child and family friendly societies think not only of the present, but look beyond the current generation” (Merkel 2006). The current debate in Germany about children’s opportunities is however not boldly forward-looking but is firmly in the present and focused on individual problems. The increasing childlessness of young men and women and the disappearance of large families are now part of the public and political debate, and have become the subject of extensive research (Schirrmacher 2004). Some fear a collapse of the pension and health insurance systems while others worry about the international competitiveness (Research Deutsche Bank, 2006) or a lack of carers within an ageing society.

Also lacking in boldness and vision forward are the discussion about school performance of the young generation, and the integration of children of migrants into the German school system. Issues that dominate the public debate which the failure of the school system, the unwillingness of parents to give their children proper support at school and the reluctance of foreign-born parents to learn German; issues that were discussed in exactly the same way in the 1960s and 1970s. Since Picht (1964) ‘the German education disaster’ has been an enduring topic of the media and politicians. Even the debate on language as the root cause of poor integration of disadvantaged groups into the education system has a 40 year history behind it. In earlier times the explanations concerned lower social class (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg 1975), while today it emphasises families of foreign origins.

It now becomes a national issue if a school has discipline problems and the teachers complain that they are not getting the support they need from the school’s administrators. There is an agonising discussion about whether today’s parents are bringing their children up properly. The belief that parents lack parenting skills is also not new and the call for a ‘parental driving licence’ (Nave-Herz 2004) has a long history.

Even recent positive accounts about the family and family relationships (Köcher 2004) stress that although there is a marked willingness to provide mutual support across the generations, childless adults will not be able to count on support in future.

These examples illustrate that the public debate about children and the family is dominated by concern about potential problems and waste in the present; they also demonstrate that the suggested solutions in the debate differ only slightly from those suggested 30 or 40 years ago.

Both the public debate about the future of the German economy and her international competitiveness in research and technological developments, and the discussions concerning the younger generation, leave the impression of considerable acceptance in media and among politicians that in a united Europe and a globalised economy different challenges count than

those in the traditional nation state. The certainties, security and traditions of an industrial society can only to a limited extent be maintained in knowledge-based service economy. In today's economy different work processes, time flexibility, and rapidly-changing tasks demand different qualification as well as greater adaptability by employees as well as employers and independent entrepreneurs than previously.

However, opportunities for children and adolescents and their position within the family tend not to be considered in the public debate even the social changes outlined above, but rather on the basis of personal experiences as children and parents in an industrial society. Thus for most German children up to the age of 14, their lives are still organised as they would have been in the 19th century (Gottschall and Pfau-Effinger, 2002). Parents alone are responsible for child-rearing, which is generally understood as primarily the responsibility of the mother. Between the age of 6 and 14 German children generally attend school in the morning and are expected to go home for lunch. The only recent change has been the entitlement of 3-6 year old children to a place at nursery school for three hours in the morning. Today a large proportion of children continue school beyond the age of 14. As a result it is parents who are mainly responsible for homework, meals and children's recreational activities, compared to earlier when a youth was in apprenticeship or employed. In agrarian society it made sense to organise time this way so that children could attend school in the morning, and help in the fields in the afternoon. In the industrial society of the 1950s and 1960s there was little need for change as the gender-based division of labour between father and mother meant that when the children came home in the afternoon, the mother was there to prepare lunch and oversee homework.

In a knowledge-based service economy, incorporating well-qualified women and mothers into the labour market is important for success in an internationally competitive environment. Most of the new fast-growing sectors in highly developed societies, such as financial services, telecommunications and the media, personal services and the expansion of education have only been possible through the use of human capital provided by women (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg 1995). In many European countries this has led to a debate about how family upbringing affects children's opportunities and about the new roles of men and women at work and in the family. Similar discussions took place in Germany, but they were generally centred on the industrial society's image of motherhood as the standard for how young women and mothers should act. The 'good mother' (Mantl 2006) is the mother who dedicates herself almost exclusively to her children and family. Working mothers are often seen in Germany as not devoting themselves quite adequately to their children. According to ISSP data from 2004 (Bertram et al. 2006), the role of the working mother and the role of wife and mother are not highly regarded, whereas in the USA both roles are seen in a very positive light.

This traditional thinking stands in marked contrast to economic principles. OECD data may provide an explanation (OECD 2004). On average OECD countries invest about 1 per cent of their GDP in the pre-school, while Germany invests only 0.4 per cent. The reason for this view of child rearing and the division of labour between family and society is described by the French historian, Donzelot (1977) drawing on examples taken from 19th century French society: on the one hand the family is considered the most important and best place for child development. Successful socialisation depends crucially on the parents' behaviour and their

devotion to the child. This encourages the child's development in such a way that the child can also stand up for him- or herself outside the family according to society's expectations. Donzelot argues however that by society seeing the family as the best possible place for child socialisation, it can on the other hand also hold the family responsible if the child has problems growing up, fails at school or behaves badly.

Without judging whether such an attitude about the central and nearly exclusive parental responsibility for child development in the 19th and early 20th century was reasonable, it is a concept that should certainly be questioned in the 21st century. In a service-based economy both parents must contribute to household income and financial security, as there is as little certainty that both partners continuously be employed or spend their whole lives together. Migration and cultural changes have contributed to the co-existence in all developed countries of many different forms of family structure and ideas about the role of the family. Therefore it can no longer be assumed that all children receive the cultural background within their families that they require, for example, if they are to be successful at school.

The economic dynamics of many European societies have also meant that within the individual nation state there are areas that are economically dynamic and prosperous next to areas that have suffered not only serious economic upheavals in recent years and decades but have also witnessed the decline of entire industries. Growing economic disparity within society means that families with children live in very diverse conditions. Areas of high unemployment exist alongside areas with full employment. Regions with relatively high levels of poverty are next to regions which are near the top of the table in the OECD comparison (Bertelsmann 2005).

This growing disparity, in part due to economic development, cannot be bridged by parents when raising their children or developing their life skills. Using Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner 2005), the view has evolved that in knowledge-based service economies children's opportunities and their ability to shape their own future depend not only on their parents creating a stable setting. While this is one of the most important factors in a child development, it is now the task of the local authority, federal state and central government to ensure that parents are able to create such a reliable environment for their children, as well as to create dependable environments for children outside the family, so that they can truly realise the developmental potential that is nurtured in the family sphere.

## **2. FRAGMENTATION OR SUSTAINABILITY: THE BIO-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH**

In a report on current research into early childhood development, the American Academy of Sciences concludes that the major social and economic changes outlined above seriously affect the ability of parents and other carers to provide children with economic security, protect them from hazards outside the home, ensure their healthy development and support their language and cognitive skills. The authors state that the needs of children themselves are rarely considered in this context (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). Later other academic groups (Thornton 2001) express similar views. These could stem from the fact that child policies tend to be piecemeal, because the different needs of children – which have to be met if they

are to develop socially, intellectually and in terms of their health – are addressed by different institutions and specialists. The observation that children’s living environment outside the family is characterised by relatively un-integrated infrastructures, certainly holds true for Germany (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg. 1990; Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg. 2005b).

The sharp division between nursery school and primary school and the inadequate collaboration between the health and education systems in Germany illustrate this point. Similarly, the fragmented approach among the different child agencies that make up the child support system, urban planning and school development planning, reveals an absence of an integrated perspective. The authors maintain that research in this area is also fragmented, that only rarely do inter-disciplinary teams combine developmental psychology and biology with medical research and sociological considerations.

Germany which has not managed to establish longitudinal research on child development in different social settings similar to that carried out at National Institute of Child Health Development (Alexander and NICHD 2005) on early childhood development. There is discussion about establishing life sciences research groups, but human life is considered almost exclusively from a biological-natural science approach, whereas the American Academy of Sciences provocatively entitles its report ‘From Neurons to Neighbourhood’ (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000).

This divide between everyday practice and policy responsibilities, and the inability thus far of research to propose integrated approaches, may stem from the fact that in Germany the question of planning the child’s environment outside the family, particularly for young children, has not been a mainstream issue for politicians, town planners, child support workers or researchers. This is reflected in the current debate about extending child day-care, which focuses on reconciling family and work rather than on the issue of child development and encouraging the child to develop his or her personality.

Germany ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992, and since that time it has been part of German law. This Convention commits both private and public bodies, administrative authorities and social welfare providers to base their approach on the best interests of the child, which means the whole child with all his needs and interests, not simply individual aspects that fit with the goals of a given organisation. It logically follows that institutions should not over-specialise, as this would cause them to work in a disjointed manner, but instead develop working relationships with other institutions on an integrated and cooperative basis. The Convention also commits the public and private institutions of the contracting states to support those responsible for the child, i.e. parents, foster-parents or guardians, and give the child all help necessary for his well-being. This also implies that both parents (article 6 German Constitution) are jointly responsible for their child’s education and development. Recent discussion about the introduction of paternity leave in Germany suggests that both the media and politicians have not fully recognised this connection.

An approach to child development based on the BIOTC can only be realized if child policies are based on principles of sustainability. Sustainability in this context means that children are supported in their emotional, social and intellectual development to enable them to be all they

can be, based on their competences and capabilities, and that their views are considered along with those of adults. Just in this perspective it also implies that society and her institutions provide support both to parents and families, and through an enabling environment for children, give them the opportunity within and outside the family to develop according to their competences and capabilities.

The American Academy of Sciences and the majority of the research groups in the US dealing with child development and the societal context in America, have been guided by the socio-ecological approach and later by Bronfenbrenner's broader bio-ecological concept (Moen et al. 1995, Ceci and Hembrooke 1995, Goodnow et al. 1995, Flaxman and Passow 1995, Waldfogel 2002). This approach assumes that family and children generally have access to an abundance of resources that permit them to deal with difficult living conditions and complex challenges. Particularly in the first years of life, however, child development is marked by an increasingly complex process of reciprocal relationships between the human organism, the person and the symbols in the immediate environment. These processes can best succeed if the child has the opportunity, according to his evolving capacities, to discover the environments beyond the narrow confines of the family.

Because of the child's still limited cognitive capacity and the relatively poor resources he commands despite all that he does, this process can only succeed if the environment surrounding the family, which involves the child, guarantees a high level of reliability and security. According to the findings of the NICHD longitudinal study a reliable environment for children is the immediate neighbourhood or places like the crèche or nursery school, but these are not always readily available. Efforts must be made to motivate the institutions that make up these environments to take the best interest of the child as their starting point in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

A sustainable policy for children is one that endeavours to place the child's well-being at the centre, and applies a socio-ecological approach in an attempt to overcome the fragmentation of the child's environment. This means that alongside reliable parent-child relationships there are also reliable relationships linking the family with its environment and between the development needs of children and their living environment. Such a policy can use only child development and child support to determine the success or failure of the measures taken. If for example some local authority or federal state is spending more in particular policy areas than a comparable area or state, it is only justified if it results in better child development for measuring the success of sustainable child policy.

Child well-being in its various aspects has been applied successfully as criteria to assess German education policy in recent years. In the past, discussions on inequality in opportunity of children from different social backgrounds in the school system tended to centre on which school structure to choose. The various comparative international school surveys carried out in Germany such as IGLU (Bos et al. 2005), TIMSS (Baumert et al. 2001) and PISA (Baumert et al. 2006) have helped shape the current discussion on improving the learning environment for children in such a way that the disadvantages suffered by certain social groups can be overcome and the potential of each child can be promoted.

This new change in perspective has replaced earlier ideological disputes of the 1970s about the correct institutional form of school and led to a view that above all places the best interest of the child at the centre of education and upbringing. Different types of schooling can provide the children with development opportunities as long as corresponding changes are made in how the school promotes child development opportunities. However it should not be ignored that these surveys are not based on child well-being as reflected in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but are focused on the child's skills in reading, arithmetic and the natural sciences.

### **3. RELIABILITY, SUSTAINABILITY AND THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

Reflections on the international PISA survey illustrates how an approach that considers bound by the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child well-being gain significant breadth even when applying a scientific method. A social or bio-ecological approach based on the best interest of the child and aimed at supporting a sustainable child policy is based on the development of the whole child. Only the competences and capabilities that influence success at school are central to analysis, but also those aspects that are known to be fundamental to overall child development, and child health, material security, growing up in a safe environment, education and upbringing as well as dependable and stable relationships with his or her own family, with friends and the neighbourhood.

These variables, which are also quoted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, are those considered as central factors of child development by researchers who work in the area of early childhood development (Ridley 2003, Fthenakis 2004), and this regardless of the researcher's background, be it medicine, biology, development psychology, educational sciences and sociology. As important as representative and international comparisons of specific aspects of child development are, such as reading, science and mathematics skills, they represent a limited aspect of a child's well-being. Concentrating on only these skills involves the risk, although this may be far from what the researcher intends, of reinforcing fragmentation and specialisation of child and youth agencies, which the Convention was supposed to have overcome by virtue of being founded on child well-being using scientifically accepted analysis strategies based on the approach developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Owens and Settersten 2002, Brooks-Gunn et al. 2000).

This has practical consequences for policy. For example discussion in Germany about how children of immigrants tend to concentrate on their language skills. It is certainly important to improve these skills, yet consider if language alone brings better integration of children and adolescents into society. If these children live in neighbourhoods where there are few remaining German children, then language coaching at school will be only partially effective. In other European countries children from immigrant backgrounds encounter major problems entering the labour market or integrating in other areas, despite a good command of the language.

To overcome this fragmentation, the parameters referred to above must be part of the comparisons between societies. This is the intention of current research by UNICEF (2007) that attempts to compare the central factors in child development in highly developed

industrialised countries such as health, economic security, school competences, social relationships with family and friend, personal behaviour risks, and subjective well-being. A comparison of this type is demanding and requires empirically comparable data from all these areas. The piecemeal approach and institutional segregation of research on child development in many European countries has meant that the data available has not been comparable. The authors have therefore combined several international data sets from different fields into a common design. Such comparisons should regularly be updated to track developments and improvements in individual countries.

International comparison of child well-being is of value for any society planning a sustainable future. It allows comparisons between countries and highlights differences when the exercise is repeated. To explore the situation in Germany the UNICEF (2007) model has been applied to the situation of children in different States.

A society that improves the living conditions of its children enhances its own sustainability. The investments planned in Germany for research and development, the agreement with universities and the improvement of teaching from parts of the policy to safeguard Germany's competitiveness. The model suggested by UNICEF based on child well-being is equally important for Germany's future performance, because children can only go on to become successful adolescents and young adults in areas such as research, science and the business sector if they have been able to develop all of their abilities and social skills in line with their potential.

In a knowledge-based service economy parents cannot achieve this alone. The UNICEF model opens the possibility of using the comparison of international developments to frame a sustainable child policy, which is just as important as research policy in what it can do to secure a bright future for German society. It goes beyond Germany's national action plan for a pro-child society (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg. 2005a). The action plan states the intention to regularly collect data related to areas such as health and simultaneously 'to commission a data module system' covering certain areas of a child's life using existing official data, with the good intention of preventing poverty. However, these areas are not fully brought together in the action plan. Moreover, data covering the activities of institutions working on poverty prevention are generally not based on child well-being but on the activities carried out by the participating institutions. The institutional fragmentation remains, because it is focused on the activities carried out by the institutions.

This is not a fundamental criticism of the Government action plan; on the contrary, such activities should be broadened so that all this information can be used for purposes of comparison by not focusing on what the institutions do but on child well-being and development opportunities. Even though the international comparative studies of pedagogy have been criticised because of their concentration on basic school competencies, it is important not lose sight in all these discussion on child well-being of the fact that it is not an institutions' activities that really matter, but the child's development and the clear progress the child makes as he or she develops.

Moreover the integrated approach also offers an opportunity to set priorities. A country doing well in one area will not necessarily do as well in others. The approach encourages

consideration of where and how investment should be made to improve children's living conditions and prospects.

#### **4. GERMAN MID-LEVEL STANDING ALSO TO LACK OF POLICY MIX**

If a policy based on child well-being tells something about a society's future sustainability, then the international comparisons contained by UNICEF are as sobering for Germany as the earlier PISA Study (Baumert et al. 2001, Cortina et al. 2003). Bringing together all the individual parameters into a common ranking it makes clear that Germany stands out thanks to its middling position.

Considering all areas, namely material comfort, health, safety, education, relationship with family and peers, and risk behaviour, Germany comes 11th out of 21 countries, average ranking in all individual areas. Germany receives its highest score when adolescents and children assess the own situation and well-being, coming in 9th. In the area of material wealthy Germany is only 13th in the ranking, although in terms of GDP per capita Germany is ahead of some countries. UNICEF correctly emphasize that such data must be interpreted with care because the findings depend on the indicators and consequently on the studies which have been selected, but certain central arguments can be derived from it.

A future-facing child policy cannot be successful if it concentrates on one area or aspect of child development. For example a successful school policy as pursued in Canada (2nd place of all countries considered) does not simultaneously guarantee that child health will improve or risk behaviour and other threats be reduced.

Some of the countries at the top of this table, such as the northern European countries, began a lot earlier to see family and children as a policy mix, combining different initiatives for economic development, infrastructure and for the re-allocation of tasks between family and child institutions, all of which has been beneficial for child development in these countries. The Swedish demographer, Hoem (2005) goes so far as to assume that it is only this policy mix that stabilised the traditionally rather low birth rate in northern European countries and prevented the major reduction in births clearly observed in most central European countries and partly in southern Europe (Hoem 2005, Livi-Bacci 1999, Castles 2002). Due to this policy mix families are placed on a new economic footing, allowing both parents to work less providing reliable, child-centred environments that are attractive for children and their development needs, while corresponding health policy has lead to the reduction of child health risks.

Table 1 also shows that polices built on the principle that only the family can deal with the challenges of the future will probably fail. For example, countries such as Portugal and Italy, where children and adolescents report an above-average relationship with their family and peers, are not among the table leaders because in other areas, for example health or education, they score low. An integrated policy mix enables children to encounter a reliable environment that enables them to plan their own future independently of their family in line with their level of development. Reliance on schools to address the problem that the family cannot cope with can be tackled by school, is probably a misplaced hope. Three of the leading countries,

Belgium, Canada and Poland, score relatively well for education and learning, but their overall ranking places them in the middle of the table. In contrast Spain with a low education score is above these countries in the overall ranking.

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Table 1: An Overview of Child Well-being in OECD Countries

		Dimension 1	Dimension 2	Dimension 3	Dimension 4	Dimension 5	Dimension 6
Dimensions of child well-being	Average ranking position (for all 6 dimensions)	Material well-being	Health and safety	Educational well-being	Family and peer relationships	Behaviours and risks	Subjective well-being
Netherlands	4.2	10	2	6	3	3	1
Sweden	5.0	1	1	5	15	1	7
Denmark	7.2	4	4	8	9	6	12
Finland	7.5	3	3	4	17	7	11
Spain	8.0	12	6	15	8	5	2
Switzerland	8.3	5	9	14	4	12	6
Norway	8.7	2	8	11	10	13	8
Italy	10.0	14	5	20	1	10	10
Ireland	10.2	19	19	7	7	4	5
Belgium	10.7	7	16	1	5	19	16
Germany	11.2	13	11	10	13	11	9
Canada	11.8	6	13	2	18	17	15
Greece	11.8	15	18	16	11	8	3
Poland	12.3	21	15	3	14	2	19
Czech Republic	12.5	11	10	9	19	9	17
France	13.0	9	7	18	12	14	18
Portugal	13.7	16	14	21	2	15	14
Austria	13.8	8	20	19	16	16	4
Hungary	14.5	20	17	13	6	18	13
United States	18.0	17	21	12	20	20	-
United Kingdom	18.2	18	12	17	21	21	20

OECD countries with insufficient data to be included in the overview: Australia, Iceland, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, South Korea, Turkey.

Spain youth show a very positive self-assessment sense. According to data on education development in the past 20 years, Spain has devoted considerable attention to adolescents, with the result that the number of adolescents who obtain a higher qualification has clearly risen and has now overtaken Germany. Forecasts predict that by 2010 Spain's GDP per capita will be above Germany's. These forecasts underscore the principle that a society develops if young adults are given genuine future prospects, even if the country is starting from a relatively weak position. In this way these countries overtake others economically (Research, D.B. 2006).

However, even though such comparisons help in contrasting child development opportunities in different countries, they – and this goes also for international comparisons as PISA and IGLU are not suited for policy development as countries contain very diverse and disparate structures within them.

Table 1 show that except for Spain, only small countries (in terms of their population) are in the top third and, except for Germany and Italy, all the large countries surveyed are in the bottom third. It can be argued if averages produce an accurate comparison of a country of 5 or 7 million inhabitants with much more populous countries and if political lessons can be drawn from it. Because of their size, small societies generally hold fewer disparities between their people. In addition, small countries from an industrial to a knowledge-based service economy have been very different in these societies. The change from an agrarian society to a post industrial society was easier to manage in Finland than for example in Germany or the UK with their extensive industrial heartlands. The Ruhr district with its remnants of industrial society could not simply start afresh. The existing buildings, the infrastructure and particularly the people with their industrial skills first had to be addressed to create something new (Pfau-Effinger 2001).

Within Germany, something similar happened with Bavaria's rise to become one of the most important business centres in Europe. Bavaria was a predominantly agricultural state but with a current population of about 11 million its experience of the transformation into a post industrial knowledge society was shared by few European economic zones. Bavaria could use the population growth following World War II, the expansion of education in the 1960s and the opening of European markets to spur new economic development, it did not first have to confront an ailing coal and steel industry with its customary hinterland and infrastructure.

It is important to supplement national-level comparisons with an analysis of regional disparities within big countries. National comparisons are based on averages that are produced by combining the individual regional performance within these respective nations. It is important to be aware of these regional differences within a country when working to improve child welfare, because of policy mix for improving the lives of children often varies a lot between the regions. This is true for example in Germany for the infrastructure for the under-threes and under-sixes, who score very highly in European comparisons. In the former East Germany, supply sometimes outstrips demand, whilst in other German regions the infrastructure for children under 3 scores so low that they are really fall off the scale. The same applies to material well-being in society. After German re-unification, income, unemployment and even family structure differ widely, and a levelling out is unlikely given the different demographic trends in Germany (Bertelsmann 2005, Berlin-Institut 2006).

In addition to these historical grounds, there are sound political reasons to deal systematically with child well-being and child welfare at regional and municipal level. Creating a reliable environment for children is not merely a national issue. Reliable environments for children do not originate at the national level, but within the municipality as the actual environment of family and children. To this extent any policy that seeks to improve the living conditions of children and child well-being in the future must involve municipalities and federal states. To guarantee equal opportunities in society, the central government must create an enabling environment for municipal action, use model programmes to trial new methods and support particularly disadvantaged areas. But the fact remains that a child's environment is not the state, but the region and municipality.

Germany has seen an array of significant measures in this area over the last 3 to 4 years. In many places family leagues have been established and have made it their task to improve the living conditions of families and children by working with the ruling political parties, business sector and the appropriate state institutions. There is a growing realisation that creating a dependable living environment for children is the task of the neighbourhood and municipality and that it cannot be simply left to the parents. It is here suggested that the sustainability of a society's future depends upon whether it can improve child well-being in all its aspects, from material security to risks within the neighbourhood and exposing children to environments outside the family that accept them and give the space to develop. Simultaneously a policy mix of time, money and infrastructure can be used to bridge the disjointed nature of the support that has been given in the past.

## **5. REGIONAL DISPARITIES AS A CAUSE OF THE MIDLING AVERAGE**

It is beyond the scope of this paper to break down all the indicators used by UNICEF by individual federal state in Germany. Moreover, as observed, even large scale representative studies on child living conditions, such as the Robert Koch Institute study on health trends among children and adolescents, are not designed in a way that allows for adequate regional differentiation (Klocke et al. 2005). An integrated approach based on child well-being will face far greater coordination difficulties in international comparison than the already complicated coordination process of studies such as the international PISA study that concentrates on one specific aspect of child development. Despite these provisos, the following should make clear that the thesis developed above explaining that the cause of Germany's middling performance is the great variation within the country, can now be proven using a limited data base.

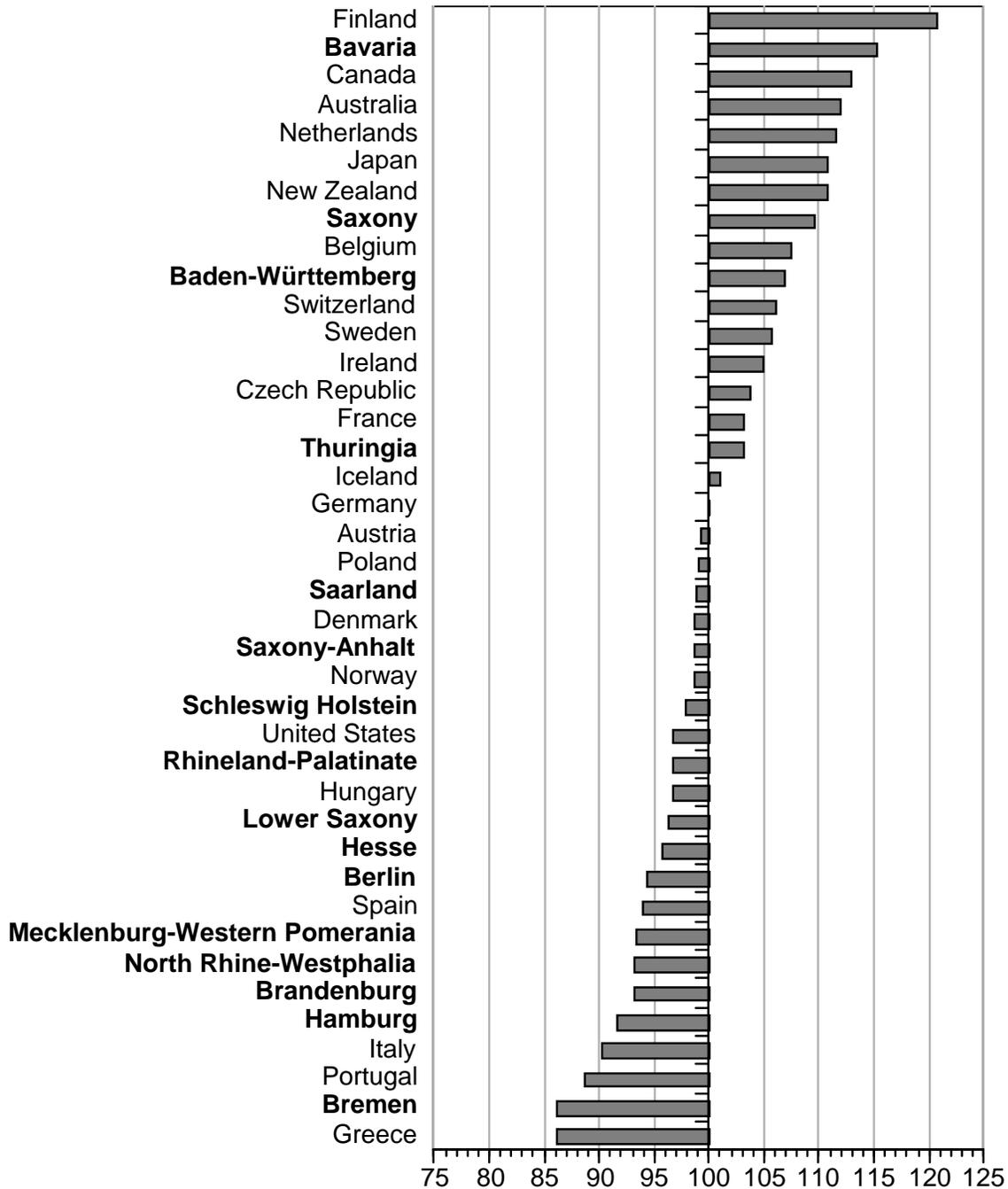
The thesis has profound consequences for family and child policy. Many of these disparities in children's living conditions could be reduced if Germany's federal states and municipalities acted. However, the real question is whether the sometimes very startling differences between Germany's federal states can simply be reduced using the resources of the federal state in question. Some of the problems show that there are limits to what can be done if tasks are divided along federal lines. In some federal states the various factors build up to such an extent that the state's capabilities and economic resources are simply overstretched when it comes to ensuring that the children there have access to the dependable

living environments that give them the same future prospects as those enjoyed by children in other federal states. Politicians have to give a steer on this issue because Germany has signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes it a duty of the nation state.

### **5.1 Education – Upbringing – Care**

The international PISA and IGLU studies (OECD 2001, Bos et al. 2003) had both a major impact on the discussion of education policy in Germany and helped bring about a very positive development. Their differentiated analysis of school competences of adolescents aged 15 showed the performance level of German children in international comparison. In addition, by extending the differentiated analysis to individual federal states, PISA also enabled detailed disclosure of the regional variations and differences in pupil performance. It is important to understand that the ministers of education have decided to make this system permanent, including the regional comparison (KMK 2006, Ramm et al. 2006). Even though Germany improved slightly in PISA 2003 compared with PISA 2000, it is important to point out that it was slightly below the average of the compared countries in both studies. These national findings however conceal that a federal state such as Bavaria leaves the other compared countries far behind in the three PISA skills of reading, mathematics and science; in Bradshaw/the UNICEF study it comes just behind Finland when compared with other participating countries. Other federal states such as Saxony, Thuringia and Baden-Württemberg are above the average of the participating countries in PISA 2003.

**Table 2: Education attainment of 15 year-olds, a composite of reading, maths and science literacy in OECD-countries and German Federal States, 2003**

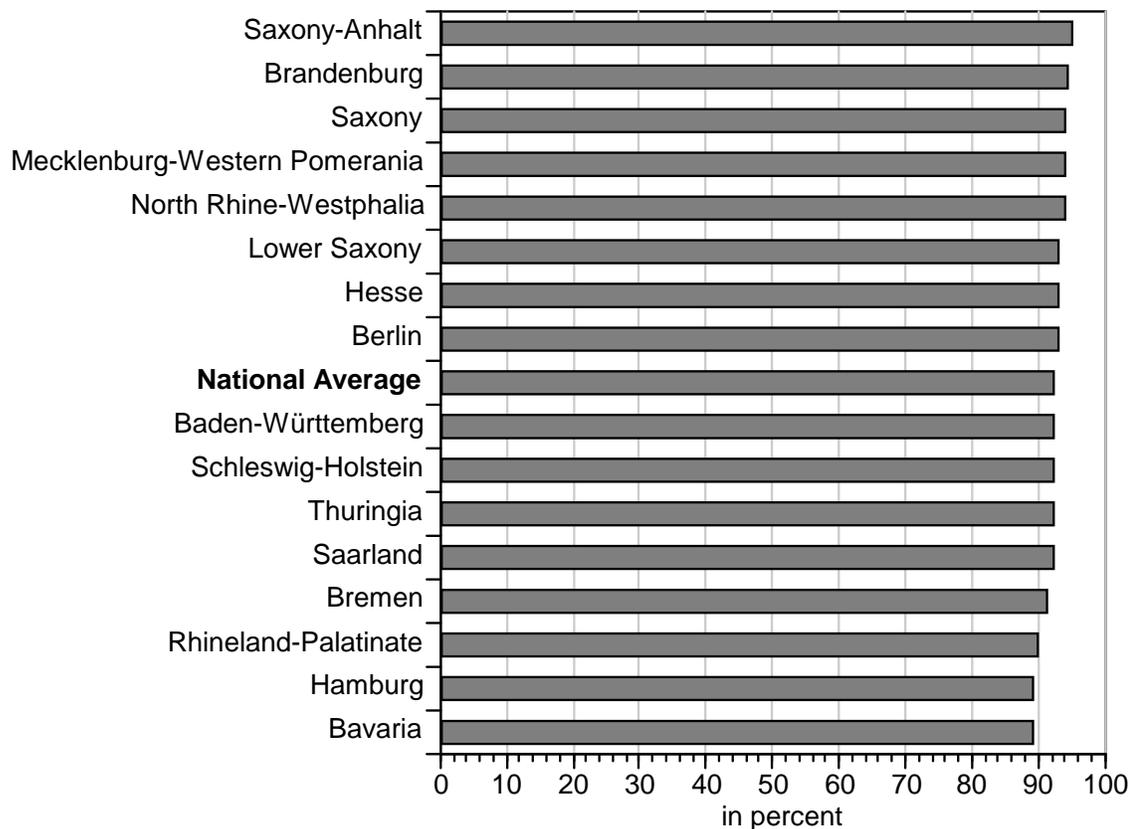


Source: Pisa 2003, Youth Education Standards in Germany. Results from the second international comparison. Notes: The somewhat divergent placement of OECD countries results from the fact that UK is named in the OECD study and is therefore part of the calculation of relative values. However UK was excluded from the official Pisa evaluation in 2003 because it did not meet the prescribed minimum number of tests to be included in the study. Therefore we do not have any official scores for the UK, and this explains why the scores differ slightly between the countries. Performance in maths, science and reading are incorporated in this table. Problem-solving competence is excluded for better comparability.

By contrast pupils' performance in federal states such as Bremen, North-Rhine Westphalia, Brandenburg, Berlin, and Hamburg are below the average, at times in the bottom third. These scores illustrate the disparity of education opportunities enjoyed by children in different federal states. Children in Bremen lag far behind children from Bavaria, Saxony or Baden-Württemberg, and in fact they lag as much as Portuguese children lag behind those from Finland or Japan in terms of their skills development. These differences in performance at school may also be connected to the fact that in individual federal states different teaching methods, different teacher expectations and other factors influence the development of the child's skills (Ehmke 2004).

However, as the other indicators that Bradshaw/the Report Card use to compare child well-being in education indicate similar differences between the federal states, the real question is whether they can in fact be attributed only to school. Whilst in Saxony, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg just below 3 per cent of 15-19 year olds neither attend school nor have a job, the figure for Berlin, Bremen and Hamburg is between 5 and 6 per cent.

**Table 3: Percentage of 15-19 year-olds in full time or part time education in German Federal States, 2002**

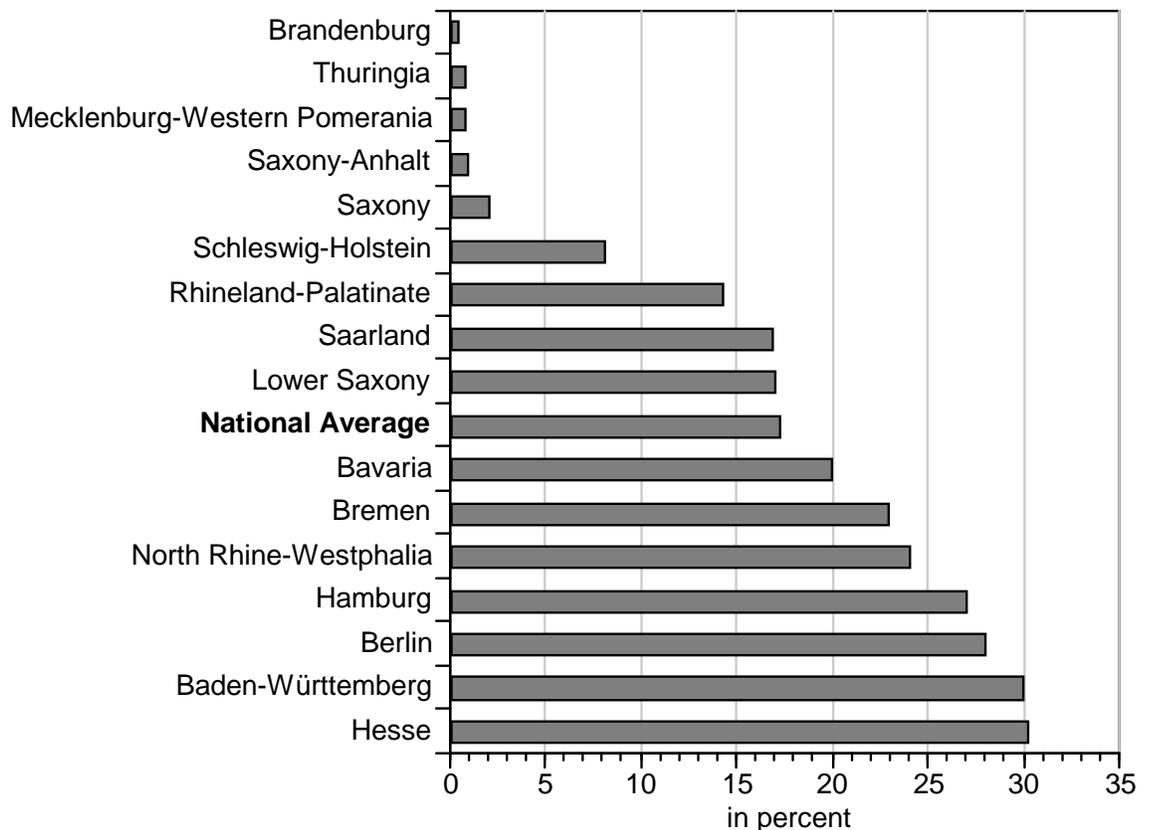


Source: Micro-census 2002, own calculations.

According to UNICEF (2007), German pupils (girls and boys) aged 15 have a very low aspirations regarding how well they will do in their school leaving examinations; they score in the lowest third. Given the importance of self-assessment for school performance, the question arises who is de-motivating German children to an extent that causes such low aspirations. PISA put forward a number of analyses on these questions that basically refer both to the importance of the parental home for school performance and to the behaviour of the teachers within the school (Baumert et al. 2002). The PISA report and the recently published education report (KMK, 2006) are silent on the child's environment outside the family and school. The American Academy of Sciences' ideas on the importance of reliable child environments are not used in German research.

A central question for a child-friendly, sustainable German society is going to be the integration of children of non-German descent, particularly those from a non-European background. According to the PISA findings (OECD 2006), Germany has so far not managed to integrate these children into the school system and provide them with the same opportunities as children from German homes.

**Table 4: Percentage of non-Germans of all school leavers who leave school without any qualifications in German Federal States, 2001/2002**



Source: Federal Statistical Office, Special Series 11, Section 1 Mainstream schools, academic year 2002/03 p 136ff; own calculations.

The percentage of 15-19 year-olds from immigrant homes is as follows: high in Berlin with 22 per cent, Hamburg with 20 per cent and Bremen with 16 per cent; in Bavaria however, the figure is just 9 per cent. In most federal states the number of children of foreign origin who leave school without qualifications is far higher than their proportion of the German population. In Hesse for example non-German children account for 15 per cent of this age group, but 30 per cent of those who leave school without qualifications are from a non-German background. According to the OECD analysis of the situation of migrant children, these findings for Germany are a cause for concern. The skill differential between children of Turkish background in Germany as compared to Turkish migrant children in other countries is particularly wide (OECD 2006). According to the findings, children from some countries find it particularly difficult to develop their potential appropriately in the German system. However, the same study also states (page 65ff) that particularly in Germany the educational level of non-German and German parents varies very widely. This is the result of a specific immigration policy in Germany that, unlike other countries such as Canada, aimed at bringing workers with a low educational level into the country to do the menial jobs. Clearly, no school system can set right the decisions made 30 years ago.

The question here is the wide disparities in the performance of the German school system and the extraordinarily poor integration of children from a non-German background might also be explained by the prevailing view of the education system as basically an institution for imparting academic skills, whilst all other aspects of child and adolescent development are delegated to the family. It is obvious that in such a system, social selection is particularly marked, because it is ultimately only successful if the parental home has the necessary attitude to learning as well as sufficient mastery of the language as a basic prerequisite for successful schooling. A system of this type is inevitably socially selective because it is mainly children from homes that attach high importance to education who bring the necessary core skills with them.

The Twelfth Child and Adolescent Report (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg 2005b) argued that in Germany education is clearly separated from upbringing and care, along the lines of the fragmentation theory set out above. The report illustrates this using the theoretical distinction drawn between crèche, nursery and school. In the crèche the child is cared for, the nursery brings the child up, and the school educates. The same view applies to the relationship between school and parental home: school educates while care and upbringing remain the job of the parents. These expectations are not important in a society with a very homogenous population or one where it is assumed that only those children whose parents who have brought them up 'properly' will do well at school. In a society with a diverse population from very different cultural backgrounds, such an idea is not only questionable but is in fact at variance with the approach based on a socio-ecological development model for children and adolescents. This is based on the idea that there has to be a reliable environment between the parental home and the institutions children attend, in which children are able not only to build up their individual skills but to develop as a whole person.

The process of child development affects the child's whole personality and this split between care, upbringing and education is not a model that lends itself to future planning. This is particularly apparent with children from migrant homes as they need special support because of their tendency to fail at school. In the 1960s, when Dahrendorf and Peisert identified the

education gap between rural and urban areas, all federal states invested considerable resources to reduce the gap. We now act as if such educational variance could be resolved through appeals to parents, language testing and perhaps language courses. This strategy sadly reflects the enduring partition of education and upbringing whereby parents should make sure the child is motivated to learn German and the school provides remedial classes. As in the 1960s, the attempt is made to get the parents to understand something that is not necessarily part of their own life experience.

This is why children need dependable environments in which they have the chance to develop independently of their parents and with children of their own age and in which German culture is made accessible in an appealing manner. This is very important in urban centres because of the high concentration of families from a non-German background in some city areas. This in part explains the poor performance of children from urban centres such as Berlin, Hamburg and Bremen. Unless integration assistance is provided to children and adolescents at all ages, the trends described here will not just continue, they will get worse.

The Seventh Family Report has shown that most major German cities must now deal with two contrary trends (Strohmeier et al. 2006). On the one hand middle class families are moving away from urban centres to the suburbs, while simultaneously the number of children from a migrant background is growing in certain districts, be they in Berlin, Gelsenkirchen or Duisburg. Migrant families prefer areas where other migrant families already live and the birth rate among migrant families is on average twice as high in the major cities as among families of a German background (Lebhart 2006).

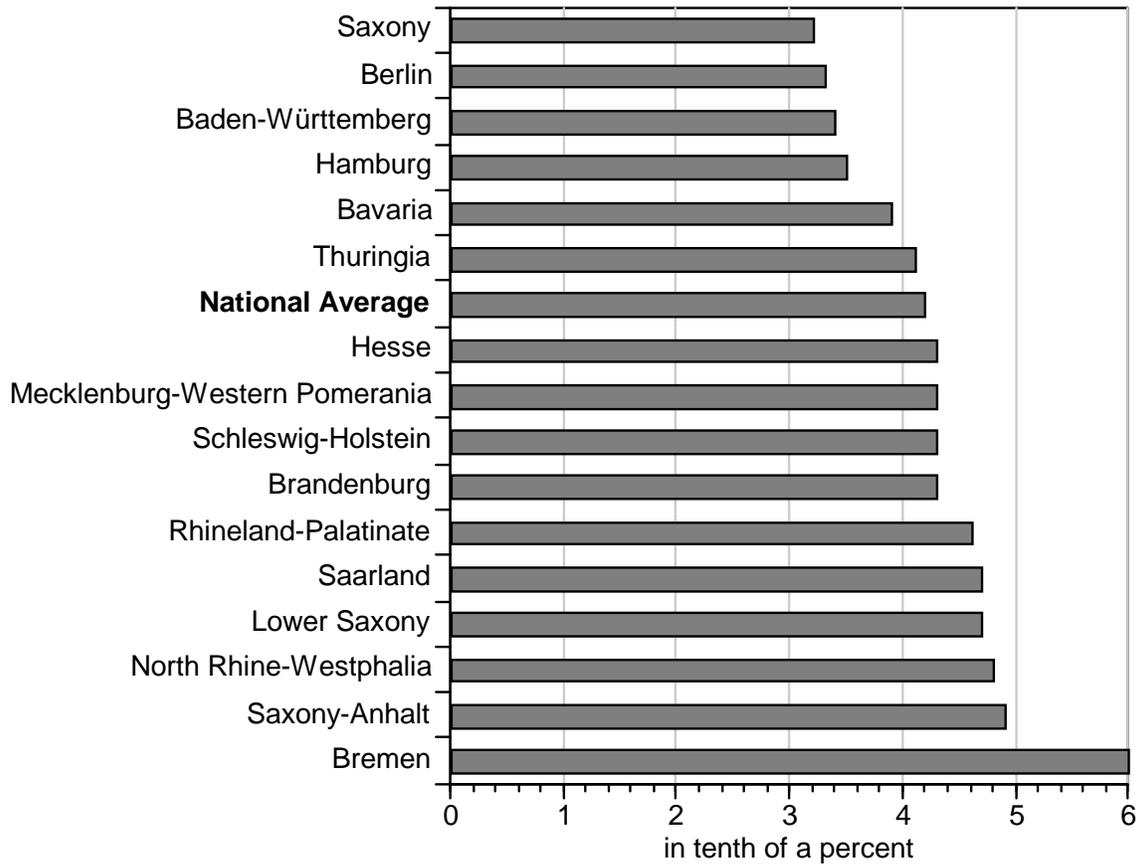
If nothing is done to help children to see themselves as part of society outside the parental home and outside the classroom and to find places where they can develop in line with their chronological age, the disparity between the affluent suburbs and the inner cities will grow. At the same time the performance of children from different areas will continue its inexorable drift far apart, widening the gap that already exists. It must be recognised that Germany is a country of immigration and consequently accepted that the development potential of these children and the integration of them and their parents into society requires a special effort.

## **5.2 Health and risks**

This section contains a digest of two areas: health and risk behaviour or safety. It was not possible to differentiate between regions for all indicators that UNICEF (2007) present internationally; in neither area was it possible to fully replicate the parameters applied by UNICEF.

In highly industrialised societies the IMR are very low. They vary between 3 deaths per 1000 births in Japan and Iceland and 7 per 1000 in Hungary and the USA. The regional variations in educational performance in Germany are now well known to the public thanks to the PISA reports. However, official statistics show that Germany has considerable regional fluctuations in infant mortality that are as high as any found in all the countries surveyed by UNICEF (2006) Saxony has 3.2 deaths per 1000 births while North-Rhine Westphalia and Saxony-Anhalt just under 5 deaths and Bremen at 6 death in 1000 births which places it low in international comparison among OECD countries.

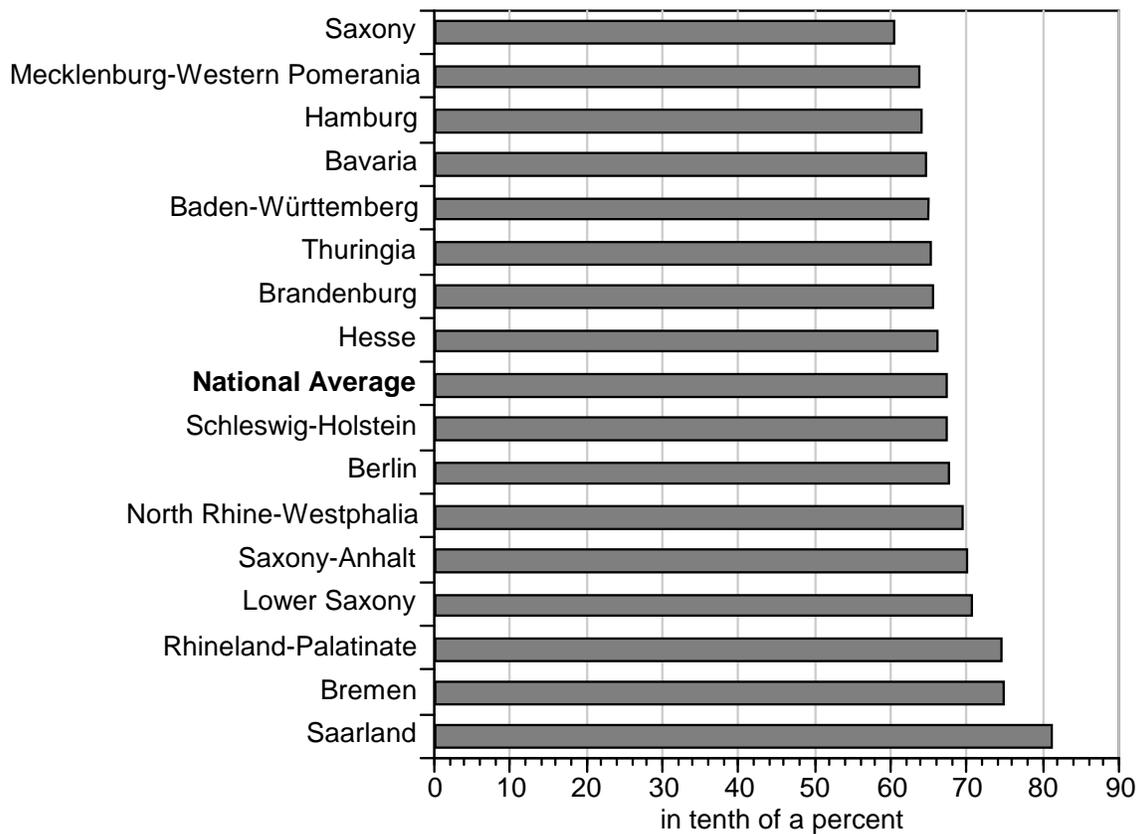
**Table 5: Deaths before the age of 12 months per 1,000 live births in German Federal States, 2002**



*Source:* Federal Statistical Office; statistics of natural population movement 2002.

Low birth weight is an important indicator of maternal health and it shows similar variations. Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Hamburg do relatively well and again Bremen and also Saarland score poorly.

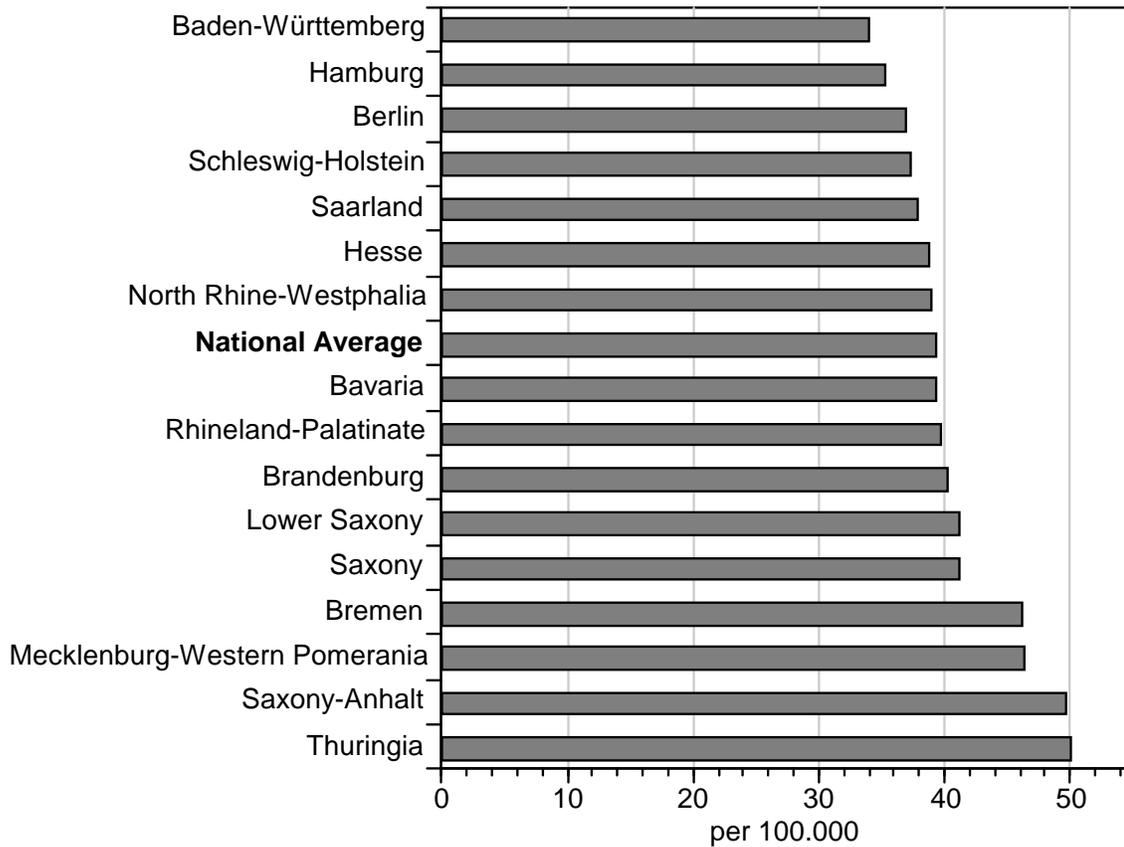
**Table 6: Number of babies born with low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams) per 1,000 live births in German Federal States, 2002**



*Source:* DJI Regional data base using data from statistical offices of the federal states 2002.

Such data should not be viewed in isolation, but the question of what causes these variations arises. Even more so given that death through accident and other causes in children and adolescents to the age of 20 show similar variations; again Bremen together with Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony and Thuringia score low while other federal states show greater variation for these indicators.

**Table 7: Accidental and non-accidental deaths under the age of 20, per 100,000 in age group in German Federal States, 2002**



*Source:* DJI Regional data base using data from statistical offices of Federal States 2002.

*Notes:* Please note that the age in our statistics differs from the UNICEF (2007) statistics by one year.

It is not possible to assign weighting to the health status of the individual federal states, but it is right to say that the risk factors facing children born and growing up in Germany seem to vary a great deal from region to region. Therefore these few indicators should be seen indicating the need to discover the reason for such variability, along the lines of the work being done in the education area. Even with very few incidents for individual federal states and their population, it amounts to several hundred cases per federal state. The national action plan expressly emphasises that a system for monitoring child well-being is under consideration and that current research might be continued. The small amount of data indicates that it would be sensible to develop an indicator chart based on a health policy concept and to analyse these differences regularly between the federal states using available data and current research, so that we can develop strategies for reducing the differences.

Germany's moderate score suggests weaknesses in the health system. OECD data (2005) shows that although Germany spends considerably more on health than say Denmark or

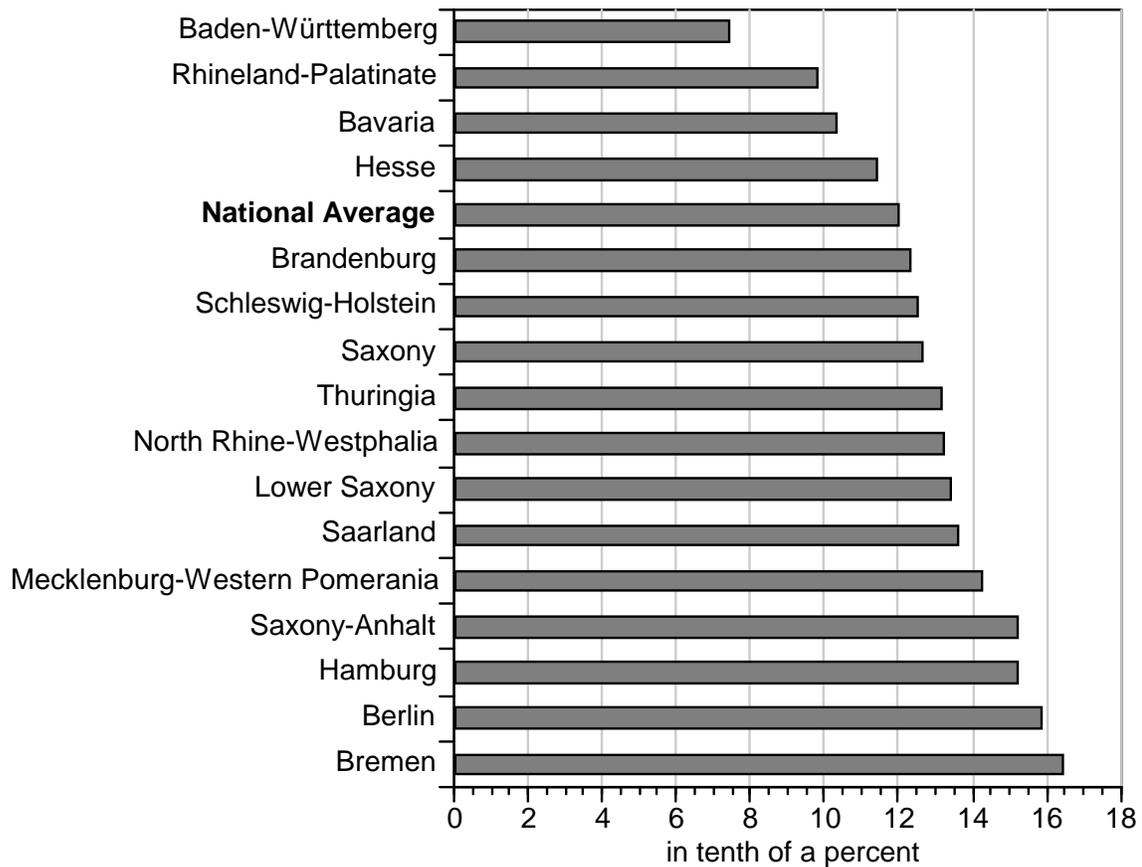
Sweden – who are fourth and first respectively for child health – does not achieve their level in individual federal states or the country as a whole. Rising health costs are readily justified on the grounds of medical progress and an ageing population. The question arises why reliable data cannot be collected for child development as already happens in the area of epidemiology for many adult diseases. Here prevention is not only good for the child's well-being, but in the long run in the interest of society as a whole. The proposal from the Robert-Koch Institute to compare only north with south and east with west is particularly unpersuasive because the Ministry for the Family in one of its recently produced family atlases highlighted the regional differences between children's living conditions (Prognos 2005). The first family atlas (Bertram et al. 1993) had already covered the regularly collected data on health care for children. The reason why this system did not continue is not poor research skills but rather that children seem to play only a subordinate role in the further development of the health system.

It should however be noted that it has not really been possible to analyse all German research in this area. However, turning to data indicators of health behaviour, such as regular breakfast, eating fruit, sport and overweight, data are also not available for individual federal states. Although the micro-census now measures overweight if the information is volunteered, the other indicators are simply not collected regionally, and the same goes for alcohol and drug consumption and the sexual behaviour of 15 year olds.

One may consider the lack of data as unimportant were it that adolescents in Germany hardly differ from each other. However a few studies on the risk behaviour of schoolchildren in selected states show considerable variation across these indicators (Kraus et al. 2004). In Brandenburg 8 per cent of 15 and 16 year olds report to having been drunk twice in the last 30 days, whilst in Bavaria the number was nearly 13 per cent. In Berlin cannabis consumption by 15 to 16 year olds is given as 17 per cent compared to approximately 12 per cent in Brandenburg; in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania nearly 50 per cent of 15-16 year olds claim to smoke regularly, but in Bavaria only 30 per cent (the tables are in the appendix). These figures are listed without further comment to show that children and adolescents face different risks depending on the region they live in.

An improvement in Germany's poor performance in international comparisons and moving it away from 12th position among all surveyed countries (Table 1) will only be achieved using targeted prevention tailored to the regional risk profile; this is yet to be done. Fertility of 15-19 year olds is one of the few statistics collected officially. Here Baden-Württemberg with its low figures by European standards is near the top of the table while the cities of Berlin and Bremen are in the bottom third. Germany appears to be among the countries with fewer problems in this area. Here preventive measures could be taken that would considerably improve the prospects of children and young women.

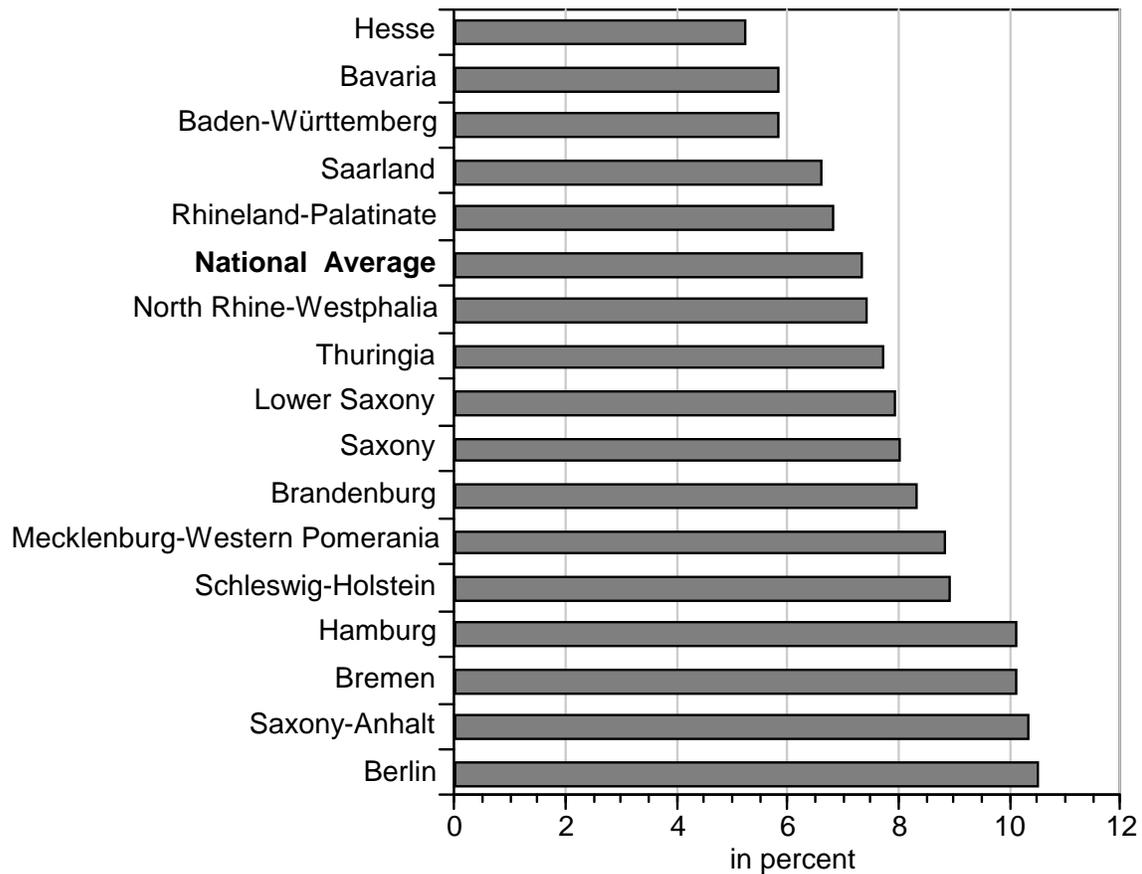
**Table 8: Adolescent fertility, births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 in German Federal States, 2002**



*Source:* Statistical Offices of the Federal States; statistics of natural population movement 2002.

The perception and experience of violence are not based on any reliable data, despite it being a major public issue. In spite of the public furore over many incidents of violence in recent years and months, the events are not subjected to systematic research. This is unfortunate, not only because improving Germany's position requires targeted regional analysis and prevention, but also because other indicators that can be used in support show considerable variation. Police statistics on adolescent suspects in Germany show that in Berlin out of 100,000 adolescents aged between 14 and 18 over 10,000 are recorded as suspects compared to 5,800 in Bavaria and only 5,100 in Hesse. This variation cannot be interpreted as a rural-urban difference, because Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Brandenburg, with suspect figures between 8,300 and 8,800, are only slightly behind the city states, and clearly differ from Bavaria, Hesse and Baden-Württemberg; Sachsen-Anhalt (Berlin's non-urban hinterland) comes second after Berlin.

**Table 9: Percentage of 14-17 year-olds suspected of committing an offence in German Federal States, 2002**



*Source:* Federal Criminal Agency, police crime statistics 2002, Wiesbaden 2003, p. 101.

*Notes:* Relevant numbers for non-German suspects cannot be calculated because data covering residents does not include illegal and legal foreigners (e.g. tourists, business, travelers, visitors, cross border workers, military personal and diplomats).

Suspect statistics do not necessarily tell us anything about the actual anti-social and criminal behaviour of adolescents (Pfeiffer et al. 2000) but simply record how conscientious and energetic the police is. A variation within Germany of between 5 and 10 per cent, even between the larger federal states, can be interpreted as meaning that the police in some states intervene more frequently and act as educators because other services and institutions are not available. It is also possible that behavioural problems among children and adolescents of this age prompt different responses. These big differences between the federal states may be of major theoretical importance. Socio-ecological research (Garbarino 1992, Brooks-Gunn et al. 2000) has clearly shown that single risk variables occurring separately might have only a slight influence on child development, but an accumulation of several risk variables that are weak if they occur in isolation can, in conjunction, restrict the child's opportunities and well-being in a profound way. Such socio-ecological effects within a given environment can only

be recognised if they are recorded together and if certain conclusions are then drawn for prevention and improving children's living environment.

Some municipal authorities have now developed finely tuned social reporting systems, but they still adhere to the piecemeal institutional approach that we criticised earlier. They concentrate on the performance and efficiency of the institution rather than child well-being. These municipal methods can be developed into a comprehensive system centred on child well-being, because of lot of the data presented in UNICEF (2007) in this area is available locally through the appropriate health services, youth services and schools. The same is true of the federal states that include social and economic data alongside health and education in their reporting on child welfare. This however would require that the existing data records are supplemented with personal input gleaned from the children and adolescents through questions, as was tried at national level by the German Youth Institute Children's Panel. As several ministries fund a number of the studies mentioned here, it would be relatively easy to integrate their systems which would give the promised monitoring of children's rights a sound and solid basis (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg 2005a).

### **5.3 Financial security and child well-being**

In recent years there has been a thorough and wide-ranging discussion in Germany about the economic situation of children and the consequences of economic deprivation (Butterwege et al. 2005, Hurrelmann 2002, Klocke et al. 2005, Second Government Report on Poverty 2005). In Germany, economic deprivation is seen as the factor limiting children's future prospects, and it creates the impression that economic penury is the main cause of child deprivation in highly diverse societies. The logical political consequence is to call for greater economic redistribution, a demand frequently made (Borchert 2002). UNICEF (2007) based on Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory adopts the approach that various factors accumulate to create both advantages and disadvantages. This socio-ecological model sees financial re-distribution as just one part of a policy mix that must respond to the specific accumulation of disadvantageous factors. As the socio-ecological deprivation profile in children and families (p. 49) differs according to their circumstances, policies for families and children have to respond to these specific profiles. This approach certainly sees financial transfer as an important strategy for improving child well-being and opportunity, but considers it to be just one instrument among others such as developing reliable environments and institutions for children which open up their educational opportunities and future prospects independently of their home background.

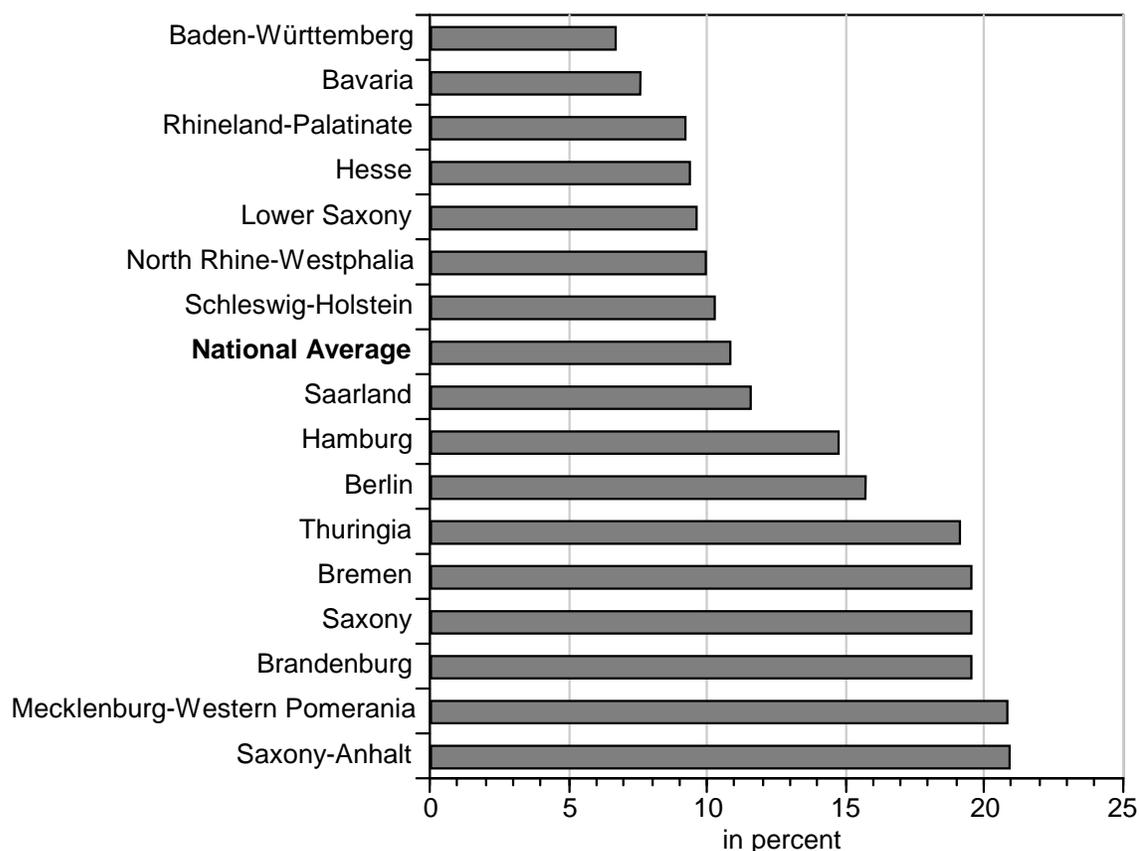
The UNICEF system measure child and family material well-being using the relative poverty indicators of low pay and unemployment among all household members. It also considers factors affecting the child directly such as his perception of the family's affluence or the possession of consumer goods that are important for education. It is clear that child well-being always depends on how children assess their own situation and opportunities, yet this is rarely discussed in Germany (Zinnecker 2001). In recent years the debate in Germany on the child's relative well-being has concentrated far more on success at school and on the family and child's economic situation.

Germany now possesses an unmanageable mass of literature on relative child poverty. It is usually based on the notion that economic disadvantage or relative child poverty reduce the child's prospects in life. Both longitudinal historical studies (Elder 1974) and current research (Leibfried et al. 1995) tell us that relative economic deprivation in a child's life can have different consequences depending on its degree and duration (Rainwater and Smeeding 2003). Furthermore, factors such as how the parents and family deal with their economic situation play an important role for child development. The few German studies (Meier et al. 2003) clearly show that families in an economically precarious situation react in their own way and therefore require support that is attuned to their individual circumstances. Sometimes specific debt counselling is enough for the family to manage its resources properly, or perhaps they need support when returning to the labour market. In addition they need more extensive help and services requiring the appropriate infrastructure. Such an approach can only be taken if reliable information about the families' socio-economic situation within their municipal area is available; here the Giessen working party has put forward suggestions (Meier et al. 2002).

Using the German Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), UNICEF (2007) last year presented a careful analysis of relative child poverty in Germany via the Rheinisch-Westfälisches Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung e.V. (Corak et al. 2005) and analysed the changes in relative child poverty since 1984, the differences between eastern and western Germany and the structure of families with children. Taking SOEP as a basis they calculated relative child poverty in Germany at 10.2 per cent, and they set the relative poverty line at 50 per cent of median family income.

Although the SOEP sample is relatively large it is not possible to break it down to the federal state or family structure because the number of cases per federal state and per family structure is too small to draw any empirical conclusion. However the micro-census that sampled 1 per cent of the total population was big enough to provide detailed findings. On the basis of micro-census data and using the relative poverty level defined by Corak et al. 10.9 per cent of children under 18 lived in 2002 in families with an income below 50 per cent of the household median. This only slight variation from SOEP speaks to its reliability and confirms their findings. The 10.9 per cent corresponds to position 13 in the international comparison. Corak et al have already shown that this result stems from the considerable income differences between Germany's east and west, so that the national average is also affected by the income variation between the western and eastern parts of the country.

**Table 10: Percentage of children under 18 living in relative poverty, in German Federal States, 2002**



Source: Micro-census 2002 (scientific use file - N=503075), own calculations.

Notes: Relative poverty was calculated on the basis of the median income of all incomes of families with children under 18 in Germany.

Those below 50 percent of the German median income are considered 'relative poor'. The net monthly family income includes both government and private transfer payments.

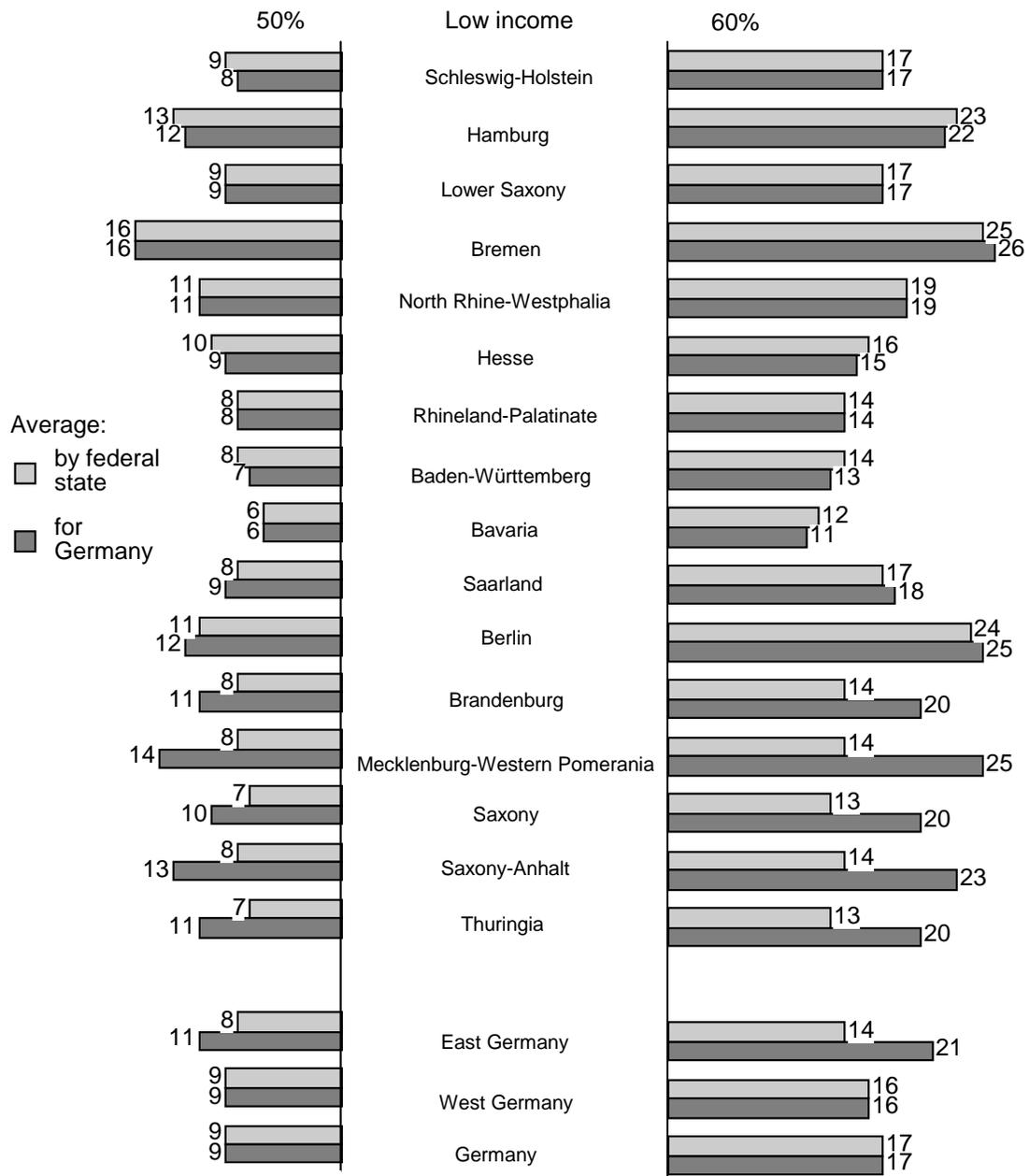
If relative poverty is measured using this system then the federal states Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg with a relative poverty of 7 per cent are at very much the same level as the northern European countries like Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, which score between 4 and 5 per cent, Switzerland about 7 per cent and the Netherlands around 8 per cent. It is contrasted by Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania at 21 per cent relative child poverty and Thuringia and Saxony-Anhalt. Germany therefore encompasses very diverse living conditions.

It suggests that in large, highly populated countries it is necessary to take account not just of national averages but to consider regional variations in individual federal states and municipalities. For example economic development in the south west of Germany has created not only higher incomes, but also a higher cost of living. This means that in regions with relatively high income there is at least a potential risk of underestimating child poverty in

comparison with the national average, while there might be the contrary tendency in poorer regions of overestimating it because of the generally lower level of incomes in those areas. UNICEF (2007) has already identified this tendency taking the USA as an example (2005). Some states such as New Jersey have overall incomes that are very high by national comparison, making relative child poverty low compared with the national average, but this does not say much about the actual situation on the ground. Such comparisons therefore require careful consideration of exactly what should be compared. A national approach makes sense as part of international comparison to establish a country's relative position, however if policy decisions and strategies are to come out of the exercise, then differentiation by region and municipality within a country will probably be far more useful.

In addition, family structure and family size are not evenly distributed throughout Germany. In the former East German states the number of single-parent families is higher than in the old West Germany, and child numbers vary a great deal between the large urban centres and the rural areas. This means that when comparing the regions, each region must get an additional weighting for household structures and lifestyles. This can be effectively represented using the OECD scale which weights the family income of a household at 1 for the first person, 0.5 for the second adult and 0.3 for children under 15, because this method of analysis takes regional household structures into account.

**Table 11: Children in low-income\* families in Germany and German Federal States 2003**



\* Low income 50 per cent and 60 per cent of median average per capita income

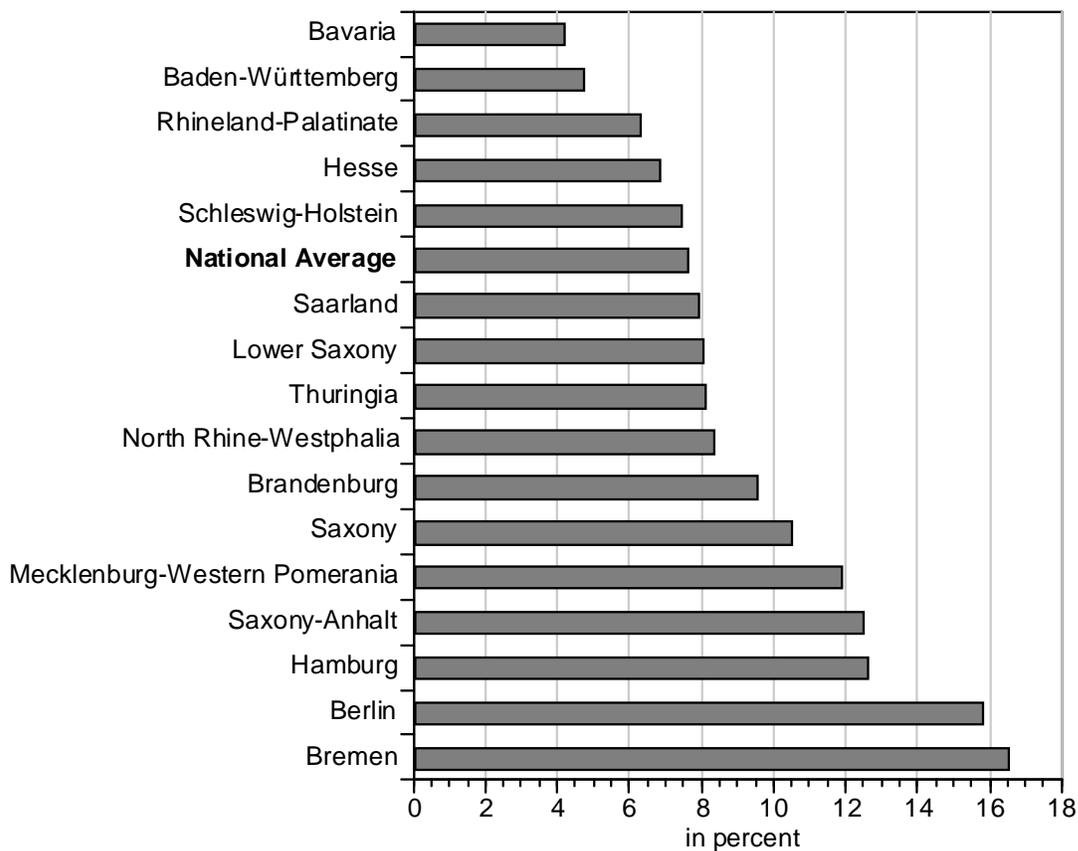
Micro-census findings. Data in per cent. Family Research Centre in the Baden-Württemberg State Statistical Office.

Table 11 shows the weighted median per capita income, on the left relative income poverty is based on the 50 per cent criterion and on the right on the 60 per cent criterion. Basically this table confirms the RWI results based on SOEP. Although the national average is 9 per cent lower, the east-west divide remains. Bavaria at 6 per cent and Baden-Württemberg at 7 per cent are well below the national average, but by contrast Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania at 14 per cent and particularly Bremen at 16 per cent have twice the rate. The picture changes considerably, however, if the individual average for the federal state is calculated at the basis of the state average of the median income. In that case relative child poverty, as found in the different states, is lower in the eastern part of the country than in the west, and here Bavaria at 6 per cent is at the forefront even when the issue is viewed on a state by state basis.

The extremely low scores in eastern Germany are partly the result of an overall lower income variation within the former East Germany. They are also partly due to the much higher number of working mothers in the east compared with the former West Germany. The consequence is that in the east single mothers generally have an independent income, whilst in the west single mothers generally claim the appropriate state allowances.

The table also makes clear something that did not show up in the SOEP. Regardless of the national or state average, children living in Bremen, Berlin or Hamburg run the highest risk of living in relative poverty. If calculations are done for the whole federal state, even those such as Hesse which are relatively affluent and have low unemployment rates, they show higher levels of poverty than the eastern federal states. The same ratio is found if the 60 per cent of median income criterion is applied. When considering relative child poverty it suggests that the comparative risk of children not benefiting from society's material growth is higher in the country's large urban centres. Whatever calculation method is chosen and whatever benchmark is applied, children in Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin are at a far greater risk of poverty, while other federal states that are poor when measured against the national average – such as Saxony-Anhalt and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania – do far better.

**Table 12: Workless households as a percentage of households of working age with children in German Federal States, 2002**



*Source:* Source: Micro-census 2002, own calculations

*Notes:* Households with children. Every household with children of any age. Households are classified with unemployed adults according to the EU definition of employment

There are two good explanations for what might at first glance appear to be surprising results, and they are both variables themselves. At the national level the average unemployment rate per household with children is 7.6 per cent. Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate at 4.2, 4.7 and 6.3 per cent respectively do very well in both national and international comparisons. Similarly the eastern states of Thuringia, Brandenburg and Saxony at 8 to about 10 per cent workless households with children do much better than the three city-states Hamburg, Berlin and Bremen that score 12.6, 15.8 and 16.5 per cent respectively. The risk of living in a household in which both parents are out of work is about four times higher in Bremen than it is in Bavaria. This data clearly shows that children living in a house with unemployed parents are at a greater risk of living below the relative poverty line.

These figures make it immediately clear that Germany should not only be analysed in terms of the difference between east and west. It is at least as important to consider the difference between Germany's north and south as well as the difference between the urban centres and

the more rural states, when looking at child well-being. Except for Saarland (which has particular problems because of its ailing industrial base) the southern German states are above the national average, while the states in the north are below it; above all the city-states Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin do particularly badly.

A more detailed analysis of population trends shows that in the city-states and the larger municipalities in the other federal states – such as the towns within the Ruhr – there has been a dual polarisation over the past 15 to 20 years compared with the less urbanised states (Strohmeier et al. 2006). On the one hand young, affluent families with pre-school children move to the outlying parts of town or – more and more – to rural areas. The situation is even more acute if considering children, rather than the population as a whole. The number of children and adolescents in these areas is often much higher as a proportion of the local population than the actual numbers of their ethnic group within the total population, meaning that the effects of ethnic diversity are much greater for children.

This socio-economic and ethnic polarisation makes it very difficult indeed in the large cities to provide the support to children, adolescents and families in certain areas that would at least attempt to give them equality of opportunity. A series of empirical studies has shown that children whose homes are in an area where over 20 per cent of the population is of non-German background live not only in a place which is economically disadvantaged in comparison with other residential areas, but are also at a considerable disadvantage in their language development compared with children from other districts.

Both factors, namely higher unemployment among families with children in the big cities and the higher concentration of certain ethnic groups in some areas also make clear that the indicator “relative poverty” and the economic deprivation of children it measures, is in fact only useful as an indicator to show how hard it is for children in such families to share in social progress. However, their non-involvement is not only due to the family’s lack of economic resources, but rather to the accrual of different factors for which relative poverty can at best be considered an imprecise indicator. Therefore, while not applied here, the socio-ecological concepts such as those used in the Giessen Municipal Poverty Report (Meier et al. 2002), gain acceptance as robust instruments for municipal analysis of the population in Germany and that the mix of different policy strategies frequently mooted throughout this report are applied.

Relative poverty in affluent societies – particularly child poverty – will only be tackled successfully if children and their parents are made to feel that they have a stake in a society that is developing and progressing. They will then feel intuitively that they are part of the society and have a future. Possible types of support include: advice, facilities for educating the children, job vacancies for the parents and neighbourhood support schemes.

## **6. CHILD POLICIES: SUSTAINABILITY AND RELIABILITY THAT SHAPE THE FUTURE**

The current analyses suggest that Germany's mid-level performance in international comparison is made up of wide national variations in economic development, family structure, living conditions and the make-up of the population. This high degree of diversity means that certain federal states rank with the countries that emerge particularly well from the UNICEF (2007) international comparison in a wide range of parameters, such as material well-being, health, the development of child and adolescent skills as well as the relationship with friends and family. Conversely, the findings for other federal states barely differ from those countries that compare less well. Therefore, Table 13 shows that child well-being in Germany is not uniform.

It is particularly the federal states in the lower part of the table, such as Saxony-Anhalt and Bremen that are among the lowest third when measured against four of the five parameters and in the middle of the table based on the fifth variable (relationship with family and friends). In these two states children's living and social conditions indicate a high accumulation of unfavourable factors, which have a seriously adverse effect on their well-being.

By contrast, Baden-Württemberg leads the comparative table of Germany's federal states for child well-being and is in the top third for all five variables; it reaches top of the table for economic well-being and health, and is also above the national average for educational opportunities and relationship with peers. The other federal states in the upper third have similarly high scores. Here in particular Saxony – a state in eastern Germany – has managed to reach fifth place based on its averages in national comparison thanks to a good health system and high achievements in child education, although its economic circumstances differs little from those of other states in the east. In particular the big variation in material affluence makes it clear that children's prospects and well-being cannot – as frequently happens in Germany – simply be reduced to a discussion of their family's economic circumstances because it clearly does not provide an accurate image of life in Germany. Why the neighbouring state Saxony-Anhalt – with an economic performance comparable to Saxony's – is not able to support its own children sufficiently to bring education, good parenting and health up to Saxony's standards is not clear. The difference between these two states clearly shows that child well-being can also be improved in poor federal states.

Without wishing to attach too much importance to the ranking of the individual federal states, we should however ask the critical question of whether indicators used in this analysis of the German situation provide an appropriate measure of children's well-being. The national comparison has showed that those states that have to deal with major economic problems and suffer high unemployment, have been able to improve the opportunities and prospects of their children considerably, and that they can do probably do so with a small financial outlay.

**Table 13: An overview of child well-being in German Federal States**

AN OVERVIEW OF CHILD WELL-BEING IN GERMAN FEDERAL STATES

German Federal States	Average ranking position (for 4 Dimensions)	Material well-being	Health-Safety	Educational well-being	Relationships with family and peers	Behavior and risks	Subjective well-being
Baden-Württemberg	2,3	1	1	3	4	n/a	n/a
Bayern	4,0	2	5	8	1	2	n/a
Hessen	5,3	4	7	5	5	4	n/a
Nordrhein-Westfalen	5,3	7	10	2	2	n/a	n/a
Sachsen	7,3	12	3	1	13	n/a	n/a
Rheinland-Pfalz	8,3	3	13	14	3	n/a	n/a
Hamburg	8,5	10	2	16	6	n/a	n/a
Niedersachsen	8,5	6	12	6	10	n/a	n/a
Brandenburg	8,8	11	8	4	12	1	n/a
Saarland	9,0	8	14	7	7	n/a	n/a
Schleswig Holstein	9,5	5	6	12	15	n/a	n/a
Thüringen	10,0	9	11	11	9	3	n/a
Berlin	11,0	14	4	10	16	6	n/a
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	11,3	13	9	9	14	5	n/a
Sachsen-Anhalt	13,5	15	15	13	11	n/a	n/a
Bremen	13,8	16	16	15	8	n/a	n/a

Note: The overview ranking of all federal states is determined by their average rank over four of the six indicators. There are no data available for the subjective well-being dimension and only data for six of 16 federal states for the dimension Behavior and risks.

This domestic comparison within Germany also reveals that in the political discussion about child well-being it is an oversimplification to concentrate on families' economic circumstances or to consider regional differences only in terms of the east-west divide. In both the mid-table and lower groups it is not possible to split the federal states clearly into east and west, or to distinguish between their economic performance. Berlin and Bremen are probably in the bottom third of all federal states because of the economic situation in those cities, which is worse than in Hamburg. Moreover it is probably also linked to the fact that these cities, like many others in Germany, have yet not found a way of getting families and children, regardless of their ethnic origin, to regard cities as places worth living in, both as a family and as a child or adolescent. For example over the past 15 years Berlin has experienced both urban development and a partial abandonment of inner city areas by families of the middle and higher income groups moving with their children to the outlying areas. They are not obeying a law of nature but simply expressing the fact that to date big cities have patently not provided for the needs of families in a way that attracts families with children to avail themselves of the generally excellent infrastructure on offer there. Simultaneously these big cities face the challenge of providing an infrastructure for the fast-growing number of children from a non-German background, providing them with the education and opportunities that are vital if they are to become involved as adults in Germany's social development.

This general survey can be no more than a first attempt to investigate child well-being in Germany and much more research is needed to judge policies. Finally, the analyses consider two areas, as they may well contribute to improving child prospects in an extremely heterogeneous society to such an extent that despite regional economic and social differences that probably cannot be removed by systems of wealth re-distribution, the living standards of children can be improved to bring child well-being in Germany out of the midfield in international comparison and raise it to at least the top third of the compared countries.

## **6.1 Reliability of children's living environments**

Throughout this paper the Bronfenbrenner model is used to point out that children even those who grow up within families on welfare or family support, need reliable and stable environments surrounding their family – such as their neighbourhood and municipality – in which they can develop. This is an idea that runs through all the work done by the American Academy of Sciences on early childhood development and it was described as early as the 1970s by James Coleman (1986) in the “asymmetric society”. Coleman points out that in both agrarian and industrial society, families always depended on the support of their relatives and neighbours, who had a considerable influence on child development. Coleman assumes that in modern, knowledge societies it would simply put be a too great strain on families to bring up their children without those support systems, certainly not because they are raising their children badly but because without the support from the environment outside the home, they can only partially influence their child's development. These very old insights are confirmed by all empirical studies that have illustrated the effect of environment on child and adolescent development.

Such dependable environments for children can only be created if child policy at municipal, state and national level supports the family through the provision of crèches, nursery schools and schools in such a way that children and parents see them as belonging to their own living environment and are keen to use them. However, this means that at the planning stage children and parents need to be asked to give their opinion on the organisation and effectiveness of these institutions. The institutions and facilities must be organised to give parents and children a feeling of partnership. In Germany there is an abundance of ideas on the importance and practicalities of involving parents in running institutions. The UK's Early Excellence Centres provide a good role model as they try to work with parents by putting child development at the heart of cooperation between the parents and the centres. It is important that parents understand what such schemes can accomplish for themselves and their children. It is often difficult to get the support in the big cities with a high number of children from a non-German background, because the educators and teachers working in the institutions are nearly all German, and therefore not readily able to understand how families from a non-German background view their family and traditions.

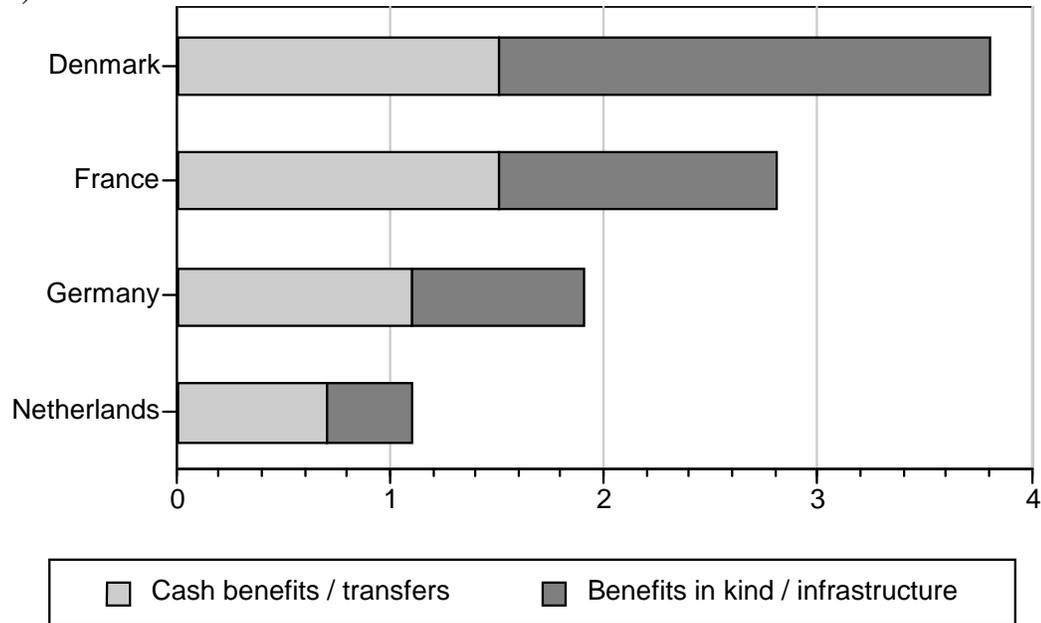
This idea has also attracted a wide range of trials in which volunteer mothers of non-German background have worked with the respective institutions in an attempt to reach the mothers who tend to be unresponsive to such programmes. Unfortunately many of the projects are currently receiving only temporary funding, despite empirical research showing that they are successful if planned on an on-going and long-term basis. For example, Brooks-Gunn and Duncan showed (2000) that where mothers remained motivated to read aloud to their children – which suggest continuous contact with the mothers – children from poorer families in New York had about the same attainment profile when they entered high school as children from middle class families. These findings correspond to the results from a similar project organised by the German Youth Institute, which however only ran for a short period. The experience of integrating young immigrant families in Israel – where similar projects have run – has shown that this combination of voluntary commitment and professional support can be a very effective method for involving even young children early in the cultural potential of a modern society.

However such policy will only be successful if local authorities understand that the parents who now tend to move out of the city with their 4-7 year old children to the surrounding area are an important part of their human capital, because these are the families and children who provide the opportunity for children of different ethnic backgrounds to be educated together. It should be noted that researchers on migration see language development in children up to the age of 12 as an important factor in opening up the opportunities that our society offers.

Despite this positive development brought by an improvement in early childhood provision in recent years, Germany lags behind other countries when it comes to willingness to invest in this field. According to OECD data (Bundesministerium für Familie, Hrsg. 2006) Germany's economic transfers to families with children place it at about the same level as other European countries in that it spends overall about 2 per cent of its gross domestic product on redistribution of income to children. The major difference with other countries, such as France and Denmark, is that they have invested considerable sums in child facilities in addition to transfer payments. For example Denmark invested nearly 3.8 per cent of its GDP in financial transfers and institutional support payments for families with pre-school

children and France spends 3 per cent of its GDP in this field, in other words 50 per cent more than Germany.

**Table 14: Government support for families: Money and services (as percentage of GDP in 2001)**



A basic premise in the public debate in Germany about developing child and family support is that no additional costs may be incurred, whilst it is generally accepted that Germany’s healthcare costs – already very high by European standards – should rise further at a time when they are being brought down in northern European countries like Finland. This inconsistency in public discussion illustrates that investment in the future of children is not seen as important as other areas within society.

In recent years family alliances – particularly at municipal level – have formed a popular movement which hopefully will generate enough political pressure at local and state level to get more investment in this area. Apart from infrastructure, developing the required facilities and the money to pay for them, the question is whether and to what extent in Germany even childless people devote sufficient time to children in the sense that working time is arranged so that parents and children have time for each other and that time can be set aside for those who have no children. The American After-School Movement (Noam 2004) has shown that an industrial culture benefits if top managers are expected to be involved in crucial social issues involving children and the managers take up the challenge. The children from poorer backgrounds also benefit from this kind of social commitment. Child policy based on infrastructure for children that has a high degree of voluntary commitment and which also receives the necessary funding cannot be dealt with in detail here. Such policy components can simply be set out as suggestions here to make it clear that creating a reliable environment for children does not just mean making sure that children do well at school. In fact reliable environments always mean that children have the feeling that not only their parents but the whole neighbourhood, their relatives and the surrounding world are looking out for them, and this is particularly true for disadvantaged children. Without such provision the social capital

within society – which is just as important as the economic capital – will dwindle in the long term.

## **6.2 Sustainable child policy to plan a society's future**

The purpose of sustainable child policy is to shape children's living conditions in such a way that when they become adolescents and young adults they can make independent decisions about how to form their own lives and set their life goals using their own skills and abilities. As early as the 1960s, Ralf Dahrendorf described these opportunities for free and independent development on the basis of one's own competences as a civil right. This is not based on the idea that it serves the national economy if children and adolescents develop to the best of their abilities and independently of the social restrictions such as social background or place of residence, but derives from the role of the citizen within society.

This idea is seldom mentioned in the current public debate in Germany. The political discussion about the interests of children generally centres on their usefulness in paying for social security or in economic growth. Discussion about children's living conditions repeatedly stresses the shortcomings in education, parenting and the environment in the home or at school. Even associations trying to promote children's interests deal mainly with the economic disadvantages children suffer and other deficiencies which they believe hinder child development.

Rather than considering shortcomings, the UNICEF (2007) approach concentrates far more on resources and opportunities for child development. Therefore child well-being and children's subjective perception of their environment are central to this approach. It is only when children believe in their own future and are able to hope that they can shape it that they can use the opportunities they are given and their innate abilities to plan their own lives independently when they are adults.

This resource-based approach in no way ignores the problems and disadvantages that children experience even in affluent societies, but it gives greater attention to the question of how more resources can be found in sometimes difficult situations, so that these children can use and build on the opportunities which are their civil right. This resource-based approach neither approves of nor accepts the material disadvantages suffered by children in some German regions. But instead of simply levelling out the economic differences as frequently demanded in German public debate, a resource-based approach considers more closely the question of how to improve the opportunities of children in such situations and regions so they can develop their own abilities and realise their potential. This approach means for example that in regions with a high proportion of economically deprived families, the educational provision should be considerably extended to give the children the opportunity to move out of poverty in the future. Or, as shown by the example of the Giessen study, strategies can be developed that allow parents to deal effectively with circumstances that put their children at a disadvantage. Given its nature this resource-based approach cannot be reduced to a few empirical indicators, such as the skills measured in the PISA study. In fact it should contain an indicator model that considers the different aspects of child development and children's future prospects, because this is the only way to marshal the different resources available to deal with economic disadvantage. In adopting this approach, UNICEF (2007)

has used the parameters that cover the most important factors affecting child development such as material well-being, ability to learn at school, health, risks to the child in the immediate environment, the relationship with friends and family and the subjective perception of well-being.

It is unfortunate that within Germany it is not possible to replicate all of these variables, particularly those on children's subjective well-being at national and state level. Germany now has an abundance of data for all interested parties about demographic development and many big foundations are working in this field. But simple questions such as how children and adolescents see their relationships with others, how they perceive risk in certain areas and how they assess their own well-being currently elicit only very provisional answers in Germany.

It appears to be the case that this is not due to a lack of resources but rather is the result of poor co-operation between different competent authorities at national and state level. It is therefore to be hoped that as part of the monitoring that Germany has undertaken for 2010 within the national action plan, a precise and complete presentation of the model approach in this paper will be available for Germany in the country comparison. The conference of the State Ministers of Education and Federal Minister for Education and Science has worked with a number of research institutions and the German Statistics Office, as well as the statistics offices of the federal states to produce a report on education (2006) which shows that if the right organisations were established, integrated approaches would be achievable. It would be valuable if as part of this national action plan, the Federal Ministry for the Family together with the Federal Ministry for Education and Science and the Health Ministry and the State Ministries for Adolescents (which are generally those in charge of education) or the Minister of Social Affairs responsible for health, adopted a similar approach. This would permit then, as part of sustainable child policy, to go beyond counting existing facilities created for pre-school children and to set out child well-being at national level using regional comparisons, as has been attempting internationally.

Such an approach, which has been outlined here, could contribute to the national debate on how to improve children's health in individual federal states, whilst in other states more serious attention could be given to educational institutions. The regional distinctions make it clear that, when compared internationally, Germany should not report only mid-level performance in all parameters and regions. In view of the considerable variations between the different regions, Germany's overall position would improve decisively if the particularly poor results in certain regions could be individually discussed and addressed locally. Such an approach would also mean that the scarce resources that society has for improving children's living conditions would be allocated to federal states or regions in such a way as to achieve their greatest regional impact.

If investments are made in children's futures and in their opportunities and skills, and if the development of their skills and child well-being form the benchmark of the analysis, then society can rest assured that such child-centred investment will produce great benefit, including economic, for society as a whole. Everything that empowers children to wrest control of their own lives with competence and trust in the future is generally beneficial for the older generation.

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