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FAMILIES IN THE GLOBAL WORLD: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF FAMILIES IN GERMANY AND THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA (CASE STUDY ANALYSIS)

Abstract

This paper analyses families, their status, and the family support they receive in two different countries. The analysis is performed through several aspects. The first aspect are the indicators related to families such as: marriage, divorce, birth rate, the current infant mortality rate in both countries, fertility, and life expectancy. The second aspect is qualitative research of four case studies which includes four families, two from Germany and two from Macedonia. And the third aspect regards the analysis of a questionnaire on 30 respondents. Through this research, a comparison will be made about the life of families in these two countries and the way the two countries treat families. The basic hypothesis is that families in Germany have better living conditions than families in the Republic of North Macedonia. Through the analysis of indicators and the analysis of case studies, it will be possible to conclude which country offers better conditions for family development, provides better family support and more efficient management of family problems.

Keywords: *family, family support, Germany, Republic of North Macedonia, social support.*

Introduction

In the last three decades, the processes of globalization, individualization and accelerated technological development, have caused significant changes in all segments of modern society. These changes considerably affected the role and position of marriage and family in our societies. Complex and unfavourable social trends such as unemployment, vices, rising domestic violence, declining moral values, and general poverty have increased the challenges families today are facing, as well as the need for multidimensional family support.

Changes in family models, roles and functions and negative trends in birth rates, marriage versus divorce, the weakening of the family as a community have long been considered in most European countries. Those changes are inevitable considering the conditions in which the contemporary families

develop, such rapid technological development, urbanization, democratization, social alienation, social inequality etc... However, if we recognize family as one of the most important institutions in our societies and our strongest pillar and safest place, then such changes become even more important.

Family policies are becoming a central issue in the countries of the European Union, as a result of the current changes taking place in the industrialized world. In general, the European Union sees family as a source of economic prosperity and therefore encourages countries to incorporate family policies into their economic and social policies. However, the general decline in the birth rate and aging of the European population contributes to the unification of the three key dimensions of family policies in all member states: children welfare, gender equality and work-life balance.

It is assumed that Germany as one of the founding countries of the European Union bases its family policies on these dimensions and has many instruments for their realization, such as financial help, family benefits, different types of leave, etc. On the other hand, given the aspirations of the Republic of North Macedonia for membership in the European Union, family policies are expected to follow the examples of other member states and the recommendations of the European Union. Although these two countries differ in size, population, level of economic development, standard of living etc. both face significant family changes, declined number of marriages, reduced fertility, and an aging population.

Additionally, the choice for analysis of these two countries is the fact that statistics in recent years shows that Germany is a favourite destination for Macedonian migrants within the EU. More specifically, in 2018, out of a total of 24.442 new residence permits issued within the 28 EU member states to Macedonian migrants, most were issued in Germany (11.594 or 47.4%), while out of a total of 215.244 residence permits issued to Macedonian migrants in the period from 2008 by 2018, again most were issued in Germany or 85.398 residence permits (Enlargement countries - statistics on migration, residence permits, citizenship and asylum, Eurostat, October 2019).

Comparative analysis of family-related indicators in Germany and the Republic of North Macedonia

Indicators show us in which direction families and demographic trends are moving. In this paper the subject of analysis is marriage, divorce, birth rate, fertility, infant mortality rate and life expectancy and their indicators are therefore analysed. We have made a comparison between two European countries: Germany as one of the founding countries of the European Union and the Republic of North Macedonia, as a candidate country.

1. Marriage

In 2018, there were a total of 449.466 marriages in Germany, according to the Federal Statistical Office. The average age of marriage for women in Germany in 2018 was 32.1 years, and 34.6 years for men (Anzahl der Eheschließungen in Deutschland von 1991 bis 2021).

According to the data of the State Statistical Office in Macedonia, the number of marriages in 2018 compared to the previous year was reduced by 2.1% and amounted to 13,494 marriages. The average age at first marriage is 26.9 years for the bride and 29.6 years for the groom (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2019).

2. Divorce

According to the statistics which show the divorce rate in Germany from 1960 to 2018, in 2018, the divorce rate in Germany was around 32.94%, i.e., approximately 0.3 divorces occurred for each marriage (Scheidungsquote in Deutschland von 1960 bis 2020).

The number of divorces in Macedonia in 2019 increased by 22.8% compared to 2018 and amounted to 1.990 divorces. According to the duration of the marriage, most divorces occurred from 5 to 9 years after the marriage (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2019).

3. Birth rate

According to data from the State Statistical Office of North Macedonia, in 2019 a total of 19.986 children were born, of which 19.845 children were born alive. The number of live births in 2019, compared to the previous year, decreased by 7.0%. The average age of the mother in the total number of births is 29.2 years, and 27.5 years in the first births. In 2019, 16 live births were registered from mothers under the age of 15, and the number of illegitimate live births was 2.454 or 13.4% of the total number of live births were illegitimate (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2019).

In Germany, the birth rate has been steadily declining in recent years, with a growth documented for the first time since 2013. In 2019, according to the Federal Statistical Office, a total of 778.129 births were registered in Germany. Compared to the previous year, the number of births dropped by approximately 1.2 percent (Anzahl der Geburten in Deutschland von 1991 bis 2021).

4. Life expectancy

Life expectancy in Germany is 81.9 years, for women is 84.1 years, while for men it is 79.6 years. In terms of age, the largest percentage of the population or 38.9% are aged 25-54 years, and the average age is 45.9 years (Germany population, 2020).

Life expectancy in Macedonia is 75 years. For men it is 73 years, and for women 79 years, the expected number of years of healthy living is 63.4 years.

5. Infant mortality rate

The infant mortality rate in Germany in 2019 was 2.1 per 1000 live births, and the mortality rate for children under the age of 5 was 2.6. (Germany Demographics, 2019).

According to the State Statistical Office in Macedonia, for every 1000 new born in Macedonia die 7.5 on average, in 2011 it was 11 per thousand, and in 2018 the total number of new born deaths was 122. (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2019).

6. Fertility

The fertility rate in Germany in 2018 was 1.57. (Zusammengefasste Geburtenziffer*: Entwicklung der Fertilitätsrate in Deutschland von 1990 bis 2020) while the total fertility rate (2018) in Macedonia is 1.42 live births per woman (State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2018).

Qualitative research

For the purposes of this paper, qualitative research was conducted on four case studies of four families, two from Germany and two from Macedonia, with different life stories. The families were asked questions related to marriage, divorce, pregnancy, childbirth and raising children. The aim was to get a picture of how familiar the respondents are with these issues, what their personal experiences were and what family support they receive from the country in which they live. The basic hypothesis is that families in Germany are more satisfied with the living conditions and family support they receive than families in the Republic of North Macedonia. The research was conducted through the online platform "ZOOM" through interviews with family members. Open-ended questions were used. The survey was conducted during December 2020.

Family analyses in Germany 1

This is a family of four, a father, a mother and two children. The father is 38 years old; the mother is 35 years old; the children are female and are 5 and 6 years old. The father is employed, the mother was unemployed at the time of the survey. Both parents were born in North Macedonia while the children were born in Germany.

Spouses were married in Macedonia, but now they live in Germany. They did not attend marriage counselling in Macedonia. However, they know the procedure for getting married in Germany as well as the necessary documents.

They consider that pregnant women are protected by the German state and receive free medical care. Pregnant women have the right to choose who will attend the birth of the baby, meaning a family member is allowed to attend

the birth, however, they did not use that right. After the immediate birth, family members are allowed to see the baby. The baby is with the mother all the time and the hospital provides everything needed for the first days of the child's life. The mother stays in the hospital for up to 3 days if everything is fine with her and the child. After the mother leaves the hospital, a midwife appointed from the hospital visits the baby and the mother. She teaches the mother how to bathe the child properly, how to hold, to put on clothes on the baby, how to breastfeed the child correctly, how to put it right when it sleeps etc. The midwife comes twice a week for an hour or two for three months. Women can use maternity leave for up to 3 years after the birth of a child. Women who do not work receive an income of 300 euros per month for the baby.

Children can be brought to kindergarten from the age of one, but most often children attend kindergarten from the age of three. It is very difficult to enrol a child in kindergarten and sometimes you must wait for a long time. Preference is given to children whose parents are employed. Kindergartens usually work until 2 pm, but there are also kindergartens that work until 6 pm. The family from this study stated that they pay 257 euros per month for kindergarten, of which 80 euros are for food. According to these parents, kindergartens have strict rules about the arrival and departure from kindergarten, nutrition, and activities of children.

When the child reaches school age, the kindergarten teachers go to present their school to the parents and the children and so that they can decide which school they will enrol in. Parents also have the right to go to an interview at the school to see what it is like, what opportunities it offers, but teachers also have the right to ask a child to enrol in their school. In the neighbourhood where this family live there are 7 different schools for children with special needs. There is a children transportation to school, there are also schools where the children spend all day doing homework, have time to play and relax. Parents are constantly informed about the child's progress.

Regarding divorce, if the spouses want to divorce, they need to live separately for one year and then file for divorce. According to this family, women have greater rights when allocating property. If there is a situation of division of property, it is usually the woman the one who remains in the home, and the husband must leave. The children usually stay with the mother, the father is obliged to pay a minimum alimony of 260 euros per child. If the mother is unemployed, she receives a social allowance of approximately 700-800 euros and the state pays for her apartment. If the husband does not work and is not able to pay alimony, the social service gives the mother 150 euros for the children, and when the father will be employed, he should return those money.

This family is satisfied with their life in Germany, and they say that they lack nothing, except the fact that they miss other family members who live in Macedonia. They believe that Germany offers much better opportunities for the development of the family and would not like to return to Macedonia.

Family analysis in Germany 2

This family consists of a grandmother (55 years old) and granddaughter (5 years old) who live together. The girl's parents were married in North Macedonia, and then left to live in Germany. The 5-year-old girl is left without both parents. Her mother was killed by her father, which is in prison. The girl is an indirect victim of domestic violence and a witness to the murder of her mother. The murder was committed in the home where they lived. This case study directly shows how Germany cares for orphans and children victims of violence.

After the unfortunate event, the girl was immediately taken care of by the Centre for Social Work, and later under custody of her grandmother, who also lives in Germany. Since then, the Centre for Social Work, responsible for this case, continuously visits this family, makes checks on the psycho-physical health of the child, and offers them all kinds of support. The grandmother says that in Germany, every guardian of a child is obliged to sign an agreement with which he / she undertakes to take care of the child and provide him / her with everything he / she needs. The guardian must attend educational and counseling classes in order to learn how to provide everything that child needs and to learn their rights and obligations as guardian. Every 6 months, social services check the family to see how the child is doing and to give the family every kind of support (food, clothes, books, medications etc.). In this case the child was given furniture for her own room, clothes, eyeglasses, musical instrument, etc.

The families that take care of children are entitled to 870 euros of allowance of which 270 euros are for the caregivers, and the rest of the money for the needs of the child - says the grandmother. If the caregivers / guardians are close relatives, they are entitled to 600 euros in financial assistance. Even in cases where parents do not take good care of their children, custody may be revoked. The children are assigned to another family, and the parents are referred to appropriate treatment and counselling. If the parent's condition improves, there is a possibility of returning custody.

The grandmother says that in Germany *there is a special organization for children who are victims of domestic violence, which covers all costs, provides counselling, and gives the child a pension of 132 euros.* This organization is an additional support to this family.

Family analysis in North Macedonia 3

This family of seven consists of a father of 44 years, a mother of 40 years and children of 19 years, 17 years, 13 years, 9 years, and 6 years. Three of the children are boys at 19, 9, and 6 years old, and two are girls at 17 and 13 years old. This couple has not attended premarital counselling, they are not familiar with that concept, and their wedding took place in 2000.

When they met, the man was employed as a construction worker. One year after their marriage, they became parents of a boy, he was born naturally

like all other children, without any complications. The woman was alone during the deliveries, no one from the family was allowed to attend. All the expenses for delivery in the hospital were free, but she was unsatisfied by the hospital conditions. All other expenses for all the children, such as diapers, baby formula, clothes etc., were bought by the parents themselves. This family lived well until the father became alcoholic. He lost his job, and this family was left without income. He went to work in Montenegro, but the problems with alcohol continued and he lost his job there and soon returned. In addition to financial problems, there was also a violence by the father. The woman left her husband several times, but kept coming back, because as she says: *I had no choice, I did not find any support from the institutions.*

The only help from the state was the social allowance of 3.000 denars. After the birth of the fourth boy, they receive the so-called allowance for fourth child of 12.400 denars.

The family often faced incidents of violence by the father that were reported to both the police and the Centre for Social Work. But the wife said that she didn't have any support. *The police would always arrest him for 24 hours and then release him. Afterwards he would come back even more violent. The centre for social work offered us shelter for a few days and then we had to manage on our own.*

Because of the conditions in which their children lived, they often had health problems in terms of both physical and mental health. But they also faced closed doors in health care institutions. The mother says that she is not satisfied at all with the attitude and support from the health professionals. *We often encountered arrogant and inhuman treatment when I asked for help for me and my children's health conditions ... she says.*

The family is still dysfunctional, and their problems continue nowadays.

Family analysis in North Macedonia 4

This study is about a young couple, the man is 30 years old, and the woman is 24 years old. These spouses have not attended marriage counselling. Their marriage is concluded only in the municipality, they are not religiously married. After 1 year of marriage, they became parents of a boy. The delivery took place in a private hospital in North Macedonia, costing about 800 euros. The husband was allowed to attend the delivery, but he refused. The costs of the birth and expenses for the baby after the delivery were paid by the parents. They did not have any support from the state even though they were both unemployed. The woman said that she did not receive any education on how to take care for the baby and she had a visit from a midwife only once. The man failed to get a job in North Macedonia and therefore went to work in Germany. Then the problems in the marriage began. The woman says: *I did not want to be alone with the child and his family, I began to suspect that he was cheating on me.*

Their marriage is turbulent and full of fights, separations and reconciliations. Although they all went to Germany together, after a while the woman

filed for divorce and returned to North Macedonia. There was no disagreement on either side on the divorce and the two agreed that they could no longer be married. The divorce process took place in North Macedonia. The court ordered them to go for counselling, but the man did not appear explaining that he was unable to attend because he was outside North Macedonia. A contract was made that he would see the child whenever he want and leave his custody with the mother, but this decision is not final until a court decision is made. The trial is not over yet. The mother is not informed about the opportunities she has as a single mother and hopes to live with the support and financial help from her parents. She doesn't expect help, support, and social allowances from the institutions.

Quantitative research

In addition to the qualitative analysis of the research, we conducted a survey with 30 female respondents, 15 of which have emigrated and live in Germany and 15 who live in the Republic of North Macedonia. All respondents were female, married and with children aged 3-15. They answered questions on the topics similar to the previous case studies.

Our general conclusion is that family is deeply important to most Germans, according to respondents living in Germany. For many Germans, having a harmonious family home is very important. Parents and relatives are expected to help foster a person's aspirations, to help him or her reach his or her full potential. But the same is expected from the state. When asked *whom the families in Germany receive the most support from*, 10 answered from the state, 3 from relatives and 2 respondents answered from neighbours and other relatives. However, Germans are also generally encouraged to rely on themselves during childhood in order to be prepared to be independent as adults. Most children move out of their parents' home when they go to university studies or as soon as they are financially able to do so. Respondents from Germany express great satisfaction with the education system and the preparation of children for life as adults. When asked *if the education system offers any family education*, 11 answered that content related to family, family life and preparation of children for independent living is present from kindergarten as well as in primary and secondary education. 4 respondents think that family education is existent, but do not give additional explanations. As for the North Macedonian respondents, most of them answered that they receive the most support from the close family (13) and from other relatives. They also believe that the education system does not offer family education, but parents are the ones who teach children about family life. All 30 respondents were married in North Macedonia and did not attend premarital counselling / education.

20 out of the total number of respondents answered that they are familiar with the divorce procedure, and 10 answered negatively to the question *Are you familiar with the divorce procedure?*

Respondents from Germany who gave birth to their children in this country (12) are very satisfied with the treatment they received in the hospital (public health institutions) where they gave birth. The costs of medical examinations and delivery were free. 8 respondents also received a refund for medication and vitamins used during pregnancy. As for the respondents in North Macedonia, the opinion is divided. Those who gave birth in a private health institution (6) expressed satisfaction and answered that they were very satisfied with the treatment during pregnancy and childbirth, however, they had to pay for it themselves. The other 9 who gave birth in public health institution expressed dissatisfaction, although the services were free. Although patronage service is provided in both countries, only 3 mothers from North Macedonia had a visit from patronage nurse in the first two weeks of delivery, at the opposite of all 12 mothers living and giving birth in Germany.

Regarding the family roles, the respondents from North Macedonia stated that in their families the roles are traditionally divided into male and female roles (12), while those living in Germany think that the hierarchy division of roles has evolved and most answered that they are trying to share roles equally in the home (13 respondents). Nevertheless, although there is an impression that women in Germany enjoy equal rights and the opportunity to choose their own form of contribution to the dynamics of the household and share the decision-making power in the household as soon as children are born, a German mother is statistically more likely to stay home and lose or postpone her career than a German father. This is the general impression of the respondents in Germany when asked *who takes care of the child after birth, the mother, the father or both parents*, most of them answered that it is the mother (12), 3 respondents answered that the care was divided among both parents. In general child care is on the mother's shoulders in both countries as all respondents from North Macedonia answered as well that they take care of their children on their own.

All respondents from Germany used kindergartens and preschool institutions. They consider that quality conditions are good, kindergartens are available, close to their home, and there are kindergartens that take care of children in the afternoon. All respondents brought their children to kindergarten. 7 respondents from North Macedonia do not take their children to kindergarten because they do not have a kindergarten near their home, 4 take them there occasionally. Four of the respondents do not bring the children to the kindergarten because they were not satisfied with the conditions offered by the state kindergartens, and they did not have enough money to pay for a private kindergarten. Usually grandmothers take care for the children who do not attend kindergarten.

When asked *whether they use financial assistance from the state*, all respondents living in Germany answered that they use social allowance or some other kind of financial assistance. 10 received allowance for the birth of one child in the amount of 210 euros, and 2 allowances for twins in the amount of 420 euros. 11 respondents receive social allowance in the amount of 440 euros. 9 respond-

ents from North Macedonia do not receive any financial assistance, 3 receive social allowance in the amount of 4.000 denars, and three receive an allowance for a third child in the amount of 8.300 denars.

The last question in the questionnaire was *what kind of support does your family lack the most?* Several answers were offered: *financial help, home help, child-care help, help from close relatives*. Most of the respondents living in Germany (13) answered that they lack help from their close relatives the most, while most of the respondents living in North Macedonia (14) think that they lack financial help the most.

Conclusion

Every family is different and can face problems and challenges regardless of the country in which they live. The analysis of the indicators in the two countries that are a subject to analysis shows that the trends of decreasing marriages, increasing divorces, decreasing fertility and birth rates are present in both countries. In Germany, these trends are more emphasized and have been observed for a long time. What is different are the conditions offered by the state to help and support families. Case studies show four different families facing different problems and thus can get a broader picture of how the country is prepared to meet the different needs of families. This picture is getting clearer with the results from the quantitative survey.

It can be concluded that in Germany family education as a concept is present throughout education and is useful in educating young people about future family life. Marital and parental counselling before marriage and the birth of a child is present in Germany and the families who attend it, consider it useful. While families from North Macedonia are not familiar with these concepts at all. They generally did not attend premarital counselling / education before getting married and believe that the children get the knowledge about family life from their parents. In Germany the birth and upbringing of children is accompanied by state support (presence of family members at the act of childbirth, training for parents, financial assistance and developed midwifery service to help in the first days of life of the child etc.). The conditions for giving birth in North Macedonia are similar to the conditions in Germany, when it comes to private hospitals where the family has to pay the costs. Mothers who gave birth in a public health institution in North Macedonia are dissatisfied with the treatment, as opposed to mothers who gave birth in Germany. Families from Germany have received financial assistance from the state for the birth of children and the results show greater efficiency of the patronage service. From our case studies we can monitor that families facing alcoholism and domestic violence do not receive health and psychological support and appropriate assistance from institutions in North Macedonia. Germany, on the other hand, is a country that provides special assistance and support to single parents, orphans and respondents from surveyed families are satisfied with the assistance they receive.

It also makes it easier for families who face problems in their functioning to reintegrate. Emigrant families in Germany are generally more satisfied with the conditions for family development and family support. They miss their close relatives and friends the most. The families in the Republic of North Macedonia show dissatisfaction with the family support system from the state and for their better functioning they need more financial support. Although the number of surveyed families is small, so additional analysis is needed to get more representative data. This paper confirms the hypothesis that families in Germany have better living conditions, development and advancement, and the family support they receive from the state is higher.

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