

Fertility Trend and Family Policies In Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands

Toshihiko HARA

According to the analysis, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Netherlands have common denominators in historical view of fertility development, i.e. a decline in the 1930's (partly because of economic recession), a short rise in the early 1940's, a little delayed baby boom in the mid-1950's and -1960's, an abrupt decline and long-term stagnation at below replacement level in 1970's (partly except for former East Germany under socialist regime) to present.

In addition, their important characteristics are the relatively low proportion of consensual unions and extra-marital births. The cohabitations and the out of wedlock births in these countries have still only premarital character, and the traditional bonding between marriage and childbirth remains stable. The dominant value orientation that little children under 3 years old should be cared at home by (married) mother didn't change. These social norms on marriage, childbirth and childrearing restrain the recuperation of fertility, in contrast to Nordic and Anglo-Saxon countries. In this aspect, one can see some similarities with Japan.

Regarding socio-economic factors, there are several common denominators with Japan. While the rise of higher educated women and the increase of female labor participation continue, the relatively large part time job proportion in working mothers and the stable income gap by gender are still predominant. However, the direct impacts of these factors on the fertility trend could not be attested in time series macro data. It seems more natural to interpret, that the strong bonding between marriage, births and childrearing would affect the female working style and labor circumstances in these societies.

Even though the family policies in these countries vary in many aspects, their basic concepts show the certain similarity in concern with strong bonding of marriage, childbirth and childrearing. Nevertheless, the early childhood education and care are organized not adequately for working mothers and the parental leaves system are designed in principal to promote the child rearing by mothers at home. Thus, the take up rate of parental leaves in males remains at extremely low level in spite of promotion campaigns. In context to the policy implications for Japan, it is a difficult question, if one can change these social norms on marriage, childbirth and childrearing. The family police in each country itself reflects strongly the cultural and social norm in each society and it shows a high consistency with them. It is not expected that the former would change the latter.

Nevertheless, the quantum index calculated in this report shows 1.8 in the Netherlands, 1.7 in Switzerland, 1.5 in Germany and 1.6 in Austria in 1996. Therefore, it is very possible that the TFRs of these countries will recover these levels, if not the replacement level, with diminishing tempo effects.