

## The Patterns of Family Policy to Enhance Fertility: The Comparative Analysis

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### Abstract

Thailand has recently had fertility rates below replacement levels. Similarly, numerous OECD nations have had a low birth rate for decades and have worked to address this issue. The family policy is a realistic measure applied to address this issue. The purpose of this study is to compare the family policies of seven significant OECD nations with Thailand to determine the position and direction of Thailand's family policy. Based on Thévenon's family policy model, the pattern of chosen OECD members can be divided into three categories: promising, steady, and problematic. The study reveals that Thailand's pattern is comparable to that of the problematic group and may worsen due to the clarity of policy instruments. To improve the fertility trend, Thailand should follow the advice of the promising group, which has a clear policy direction and invests heavily in family support programs, work-life balance, and gender equality.

**Keywords:** family policy, low fertility, birth rate, OECD countries, Thailand

### Introduction

Population reduction owing to low reproduction is currently one of the most pressing worldwide challenges. The United Nations (UN) advised the country to have a replacement fertility rate of 2.1 births per woman to preserve population sustainability (United Nations et al., 2017). Several nations, including high-income

and high-middle-income states, have fertility rates below the replacement level. The low birth rate has negative effects on both social and economic elements, including the labor force, the ageing population, the education system, tax revenue, and long-term economic growth (Adsera, 2003; Bloom & Sousa-Poza, 2010; Lin et al., 2020; McDonald, 2008).

Members of the OECD and other developed nations have faced this dilemma for decades. Similarly, a country with a high middle income, such as Thailand, has also confronted a similar problem, as its fertility rate has been steadily dropping. Currently, Thailand's fertility trend is 1.53 live births per woman, which is lower than the United Nations replacement rate and the average rate of high-income states, OECD members, and East and Southeast Asian nations (See Figure 1).

Members of the OECD are among the pioneering nations seeking to address the problem of low fertility. Some can increase or maintain their fertility rate, while others cannot promote their birth rate. Numerous researchers, such as Neyer (2003), Luci-Greulich and Thévenon (2013), Reibstein (2017), and Kolk (2021), have suggested that the "Family Policy," the policy emphasizes family well-being and work-life family balance, is a potential policy instrument that could positively affect fertility growth. However, each country's family policy programs are distinct. Therefore, it is advantageous to explore their techniques to comprehend family policy's function better.

This study's research questions aim to examine the patterns of public policy to support fertility and family by comparing the family policies implemented in Thailand with those of several significant OECD countries. In this paper, the family policy characteristics offered by Thévenon (2011) serve as guidance. In addition, this study aims to compare Thailand's existing family assistance policy to those of other OECD nations, particularly those with rising fertility rates, to develop a practical solution for Thailand's family policy scheme. The structure of this document is as follows: The first two sections present an introduction to family policy and a literature assessment. Then, a comparative study is performed on the outcomes of the analyses conducted on the policies enacted by Thailand and key OECD nations. The final section consists of a discussion and conclusion that leads to policy recommendations for further research and implementation.

## Total Fertility (lives birth per woman)

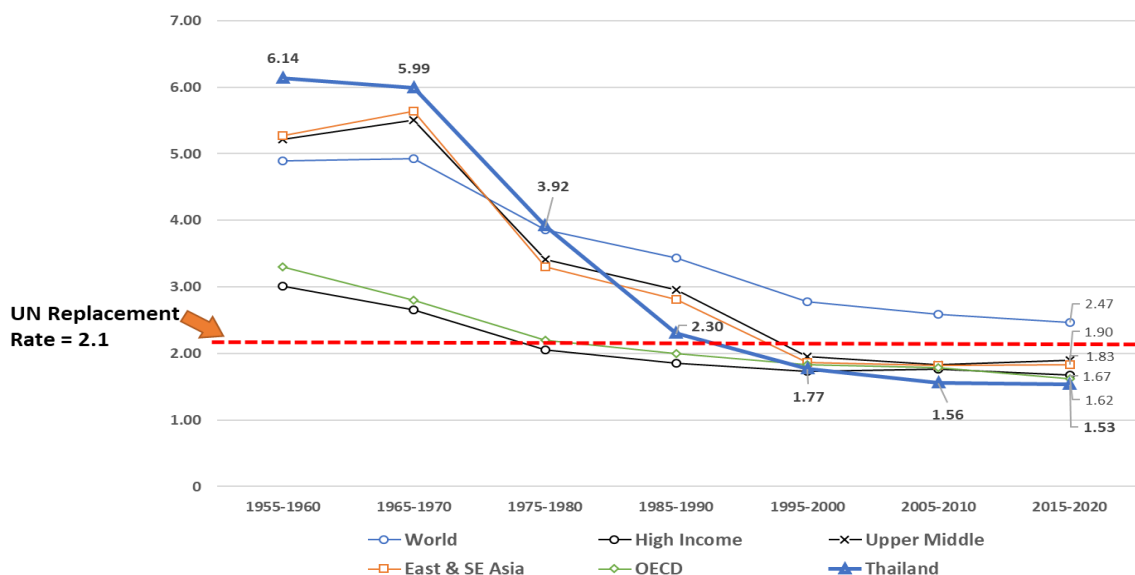


Figure 1: Global Trend of Total Fertility Rate (including Thailand)

Source: The UN's World Population Prospect and the OECD database, good self-esteem, social relationships, and Employees' Decisions

## Literature review

### The Overviews of Family Policy

The family has always been an important social and economic institution. Family law, includes marriage and divorce, family succession, and gender, is one of the earliest examples of law adopted since European feudalism, custom, and canon (church) law (Grossberg, 1985). However, from the 1870s to the 1920s, modern public policies about the family were formed to reduce widows' and orphans' poverty through child-related transfers. During the 1940s, several countries extended the policy to family or child benefits (Anne H el ene Gauthier, 1996). Then, the post-World War II notion of state welfare encouraged the government to provide universal child-rearing support benefits, income and employment protection for new mothers, income subsidies, and job leaves. In addition, from the end of the 20th century, the family policy has investigated the responsibilities and behaviors of family members, such as gender equality and work and family reconciliation, which may help support fertility increase (Daly, 2020; Ferrarini, 2006).

It is challenging to describe the family policy precisely. The family policy is viewed by Kamerman and Kahn (1978) as a field and perspective concept. The field serves as the metric for certain objectives, such as population policy, transfer payments, employment, health, and mother and child. Therefore, a nation that views family policy as a field will have a broad policy that serves only the essential or moderate level. However, a country with a perspective idea will evaluate the policy's effects on the family and quality of life. As described by Zimmerman (1995), family policy is a collection of policy options to resolve family-related societal issues.

In addition, it is debatable which measurements constitute family policy because practically all public programs have direct or indirect effects on the family. The extent and breadth of each policy vary from nation to country. Kamerman (2010) proposed categorizing family policy into two categories (explicit and implicit policy). The explicit one is the policy that is actively enforced concerning family patterns of behavior for all family members. The implicit one is the broad policy that does not directly target family issues but may affect children and the family. Therefore, this study will focus on the explicit family policies established in each nation to compare their fertility policies.

### **Family Policy on Fertility**

Due to "Delayed Childbearing," the birth rate has been steadily declining in several affluent nations for decades, prompting their governments to establish initiatives to promote fertility and family. Numerous studies have discovered that financial transfer and child allowance help to increase the birth rate (D'Addio & Mira d'Ercole, 2005; Anne Helene Gauthier & Hatzius, 1997), as well as tax exemption, child tax credits, and childcare provisions (Georgellis & Wall, 1992; Hilgeman & Butts, 2009; Takegawa, 2009; Whittington et al., 1990; Zhang et al., 1994). Jones and Hamid (2015) While Kalwij (2010) In addition, investigations conducted by Luci-Greulich and Thévenon (2013) indicated that each of the strategies mentioned above positively affects fertility. Thus, modern nations have recognized the significance of family policy to reproduction and strive to establish a sustainable fertility rate. However, countries have unique and distinct characteristics, such as family and work cultures,

that lead them to develop their patterns. In contrast to industrialized nations, nearly all relevant works in Thailand focus on specific policies about the family, such as population policy, health policy, or education policy, without addressing the connection with family welfare completely. Thus, very few works specifically examine the family policy in relation to fertility and family.

### **The Background of Thailand's Family Policy**

Since the 1940s, Thailand has had a national policy around family and fertility for several decades. Muthuta's research demonstrates that related policies may be divided into three distinct phases: the Pronatalist period, the Family Planning period, and the Challenging period. Global trends have profoundly influenced Thailand's policy formulation. The nationalism and statism prevalent at the time were one of the primary drivers in the first phase of population growth (Reynolds, 2004). During the second period, however, the global concern with the high birth rate in the 1960s necessitated population control in numerous nations (Berro Pizzarossa, 2018).

Similarly, the Thai government accepted this concept and incorporated family planning into its national strategy to curb population increase. Numerous financial and non-financial incentives and mass media instruments were used to encourage people to enrol in the family planning program. In addition, the public and commercial sectors collaborated well to support family planning efforts, such as the "Meechai Condom" project, which helped successfully promote condom use for contraception and sexual health in Thailand (Pillai & Kelley, 1994).

The success of Thailand's family planning strategy has reduced the fertility rate from 6.13 live births per woman in 1960 to 1.77 in 2001, below the United Nations' replacement rate of 2.1. Thus, the third phase (2002 to the present) has been a difficult time for Thai society as it confronts numerous threats such as the alteration of the population structure, the decline of the workforce, and the ageing of the population. Thus, the policies to maintain the birth rate, as well as the policies to support children and families, and the sustainable development goals (SDGs), were incorporated into two major policy plans: the 20-year National Strategy and the 12th National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) (2017–2021).

Although the Thai government has prioritized the issues of a low birth rate by introducing different family-friendly or fertility-supporting initiatives, such as cash subsidies, child health care, and parental leave, the fertility rate will continue to decline to 1.53 live births per woman by 2020. Muthuta (2021) discovered that Thailand has no direct goal against infertility. In addition, the current family policy orientation is rather vague because family planning measures are still implemented and included in the Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Program, even though there are several incentives to encourage fertility and family. In addition, fertility promotion programs are likely to target low-income households, reducing the incentive for middle-income families to have more children.

### Research Methodology

This analysis was conducted using documents from relevant international organizations, national development plans, and various published material retrieved from numerous electronic databases. This was done to uncover trends, developments, policies, and policy implications associated with family policy in several selected nations, including Thailand. Science Direct, Springer Link, Google Scholar, Web of Science, SAGE online, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley Online Library were searched for peer-reviewed literature. The Thai Journal Citation Index (TCI) Database and Thai institutions' E-Thesis databases from 1980 to 2021 are also utilized to locate information regarding the policies enacted. In addition, government, United Nations, and OECD websites, literature, official papers, and databases were utilized extensively. The facts and examples of family policy patterns among selected individuals and Thailand are then compared using Thévenon's family pattern model. Figure 2 depicts a summary of the research flowchart for this study.

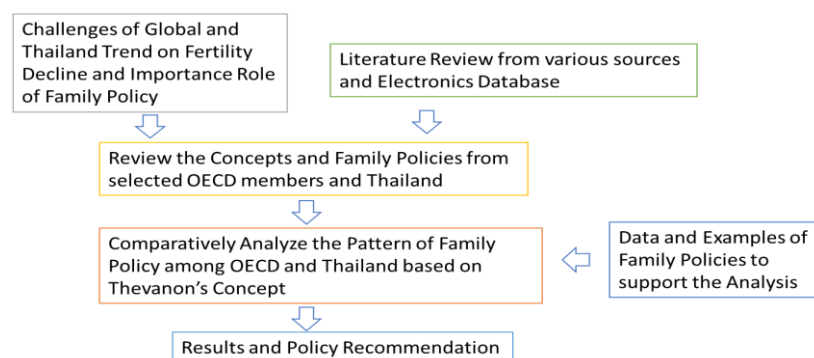


Figure 2: Research Flowchart

## Research Results

This session will compare and discuss the family policies of several important OECD countries and Thailand using Thévenon (2011)'s family policy model. Several countries, such as OECD members, have improved their family policies to reconcile work and family life and foster fertility growth. According to the model, there are six primary goals of family-support policies: (1) poverty reduction and income maintenance; (2) direct compensation for the economic cost of children; (3) employment promotion; (4) gender equity improvement; (5) support for early childhood development; and (6) increasing birth rates. The combinations of six policy objectives vary between nations, resulting in varied policy patterns and outcomes.

Thévenon proposed the indicators to summarize these characteristics into the three dimensions used in this session: (1) In-cash, such as financial benefits or fiscal transfer; (2) In-kind, such as childcare or housing help; and (3) In-time, such as leaves associated with childbirth or childbearing.

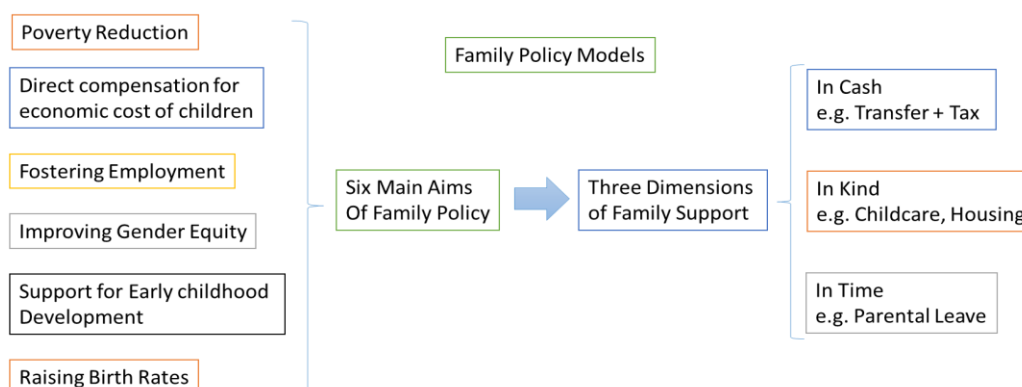


Figure 3: Family Policy Model, Source: Applied from Thévenon (2011)

This study examines the family policies of seven OECD countries and classifies them into three groups based on their fertility and policy trend (See Figure 4): (1) Promising Group (Germany and France), (2) Stable Group (Nordic Countries: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden), and (3) Challenging Group (Japan and South Korea). Then, we will compare Thailand's current family policy to those of the three groups mentioned above to determine the policy's similarities and differences. Based on the experiences of OECD nations, this will help estimate the future trend of Thailand's fertility and enhance the current policy options.

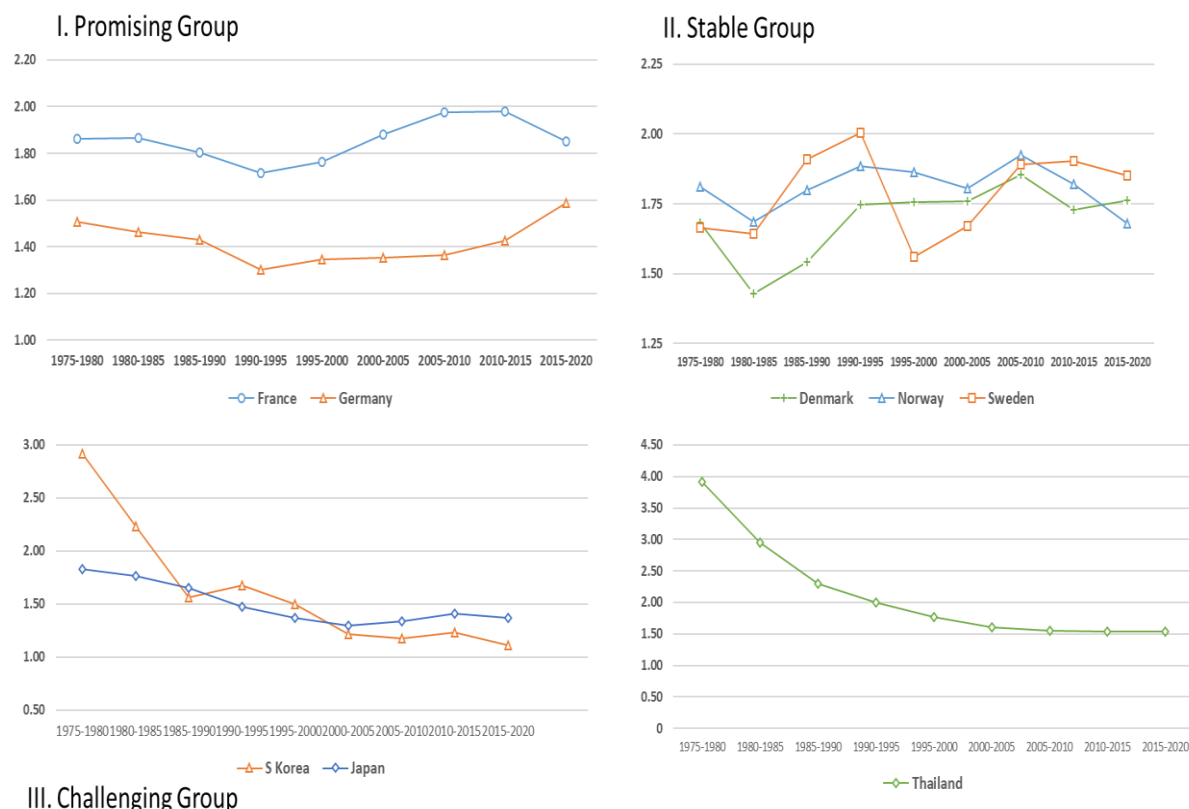


Figure 4: The Total Fertility by Groups of Countries (including Thailand)

Source: The UN's World Population Prospect and OECD database classified by the authors

### 1. Family Policies of the Promising Group (Germany and France)

The two countries have the highest birth rates among OECD members. They can attain a fertility rate comparable to the 1980s, which decreased during the 1990s and 2000s (see Figure 4). They use explicit policy forms and invest substantially in the family support program. However, there are differences between the two, most notably the welfare system and birthing culture, which will be examined in further depth later.

Using Thévenon's family policy perspective: Both nations offer financial help to families through a universal child benefit and a family allowance that increases proportionally to the number of children. France prioritizes large families (three or more children) with monetary assistance, whereas Germany prioritizes low-income families. In addition, tax incentives are applied in both nations to lower parental childbearing expenses. Under the notion of the breadwinner, Germany employs tax mechanisms to support high-income and single-earner families, but France provides benefits to married and unmarried couples with children.



France is a pioneer nation for childcare providers in the European Union under the In-kind scheme. The French in-kind initiatives aim to improve the ability of parents to balance work and family life. The program provides a tax credit for families with two-month-to-three-year-old children raised at home or in child care. Additionally, additional forms of assistance are provided to the household. The first is the free-choice childcare supplement, which is intended to partially cover childcare costs for children under the age of 6 and is provided to households or working parents. The second is housing assistance, deemed a crucial aspect in starting a new family and having children.

Consequently, a family with children will receive this assistance through rent or monthly payments. In contrast to France, Germany does not promote childcare services. Using the male breadwinner norm, it is advised that children under the age of three be reared at home. Thus, the government supports childbirth by providing a parental stipend for 14 months to a full-time mother or father or a part-time parent.

Both nations provide In-time assistance, including prenatal and postoperative maternal leave, while keeping the health of the mother and child into account. Comparing the two nations, France provides more paid parental leave, but Germany emphasizes longer, partly paid leave. However, the French father will receive paid leave for paternity support, but the German father will not.

## **2. Family Policies of the Stable Group (Denmark, Norway, and Sweden)**

All three selected Nordic nations are capable of sustaining a stable fertility rate. The general model for their family policy is the welfare state system. The dual-earner/dual-caregiver paradigm is created to encourage parents to remain employed. In its family policy, gender equality plays a vital role, resulting in a balance of childbearing between parents (Rostgaard, 2014). The family policy aspect will be examined in the next section. The In-cash system implements financial support programs through universal child benefits and family allowance based on the number of children and parental status (more children and single-parent children will receive more benefits). This conforms to the Nordic welfare model, which encourages the public sector to offer welfare services and social security to its citizens (Anttonen, 2012). For instance, a Danish single parent will receive an additional allowance, as will

a Norwegian single parent with a kid younger than 3 years of age. In the In-kind dimension, which includes services such as child care, all children have the right to access such services. All children aged six months to five years are provided with subsidized childcare in Denmark, which has a strong heritage of public childcare (Abrahamson & Wehner, 2008). The Swedish government subsidizes around 15 hours per week of preschool programs and child care for children aged 1 and older.

Similarly, Norway gives services to children older than one without regard to parental employment status (World Economic Forum, 2019). The Nordic group's In-time regulations promote gender equality in parental leave (Eydal et al., 2018). The father and mother are granted parental leave (15 to 18 weeks for maternal leaves and 2 weeks for paternal leaves). Moreover, during the nine to fifteen months of vacation, significant benefits of up to 80 to 100 percent of income are made. Nonetheless, the father's quota payments are questionable, as Norway and Sweden supply this paternal quota, but Denmark does not.

### **3. Family Policies of the Challenging Group (Japan and South Korea)**

Both nations have experienced a persistent fall in fertility, with South Korea having the world's lowest birth rate (United Nations et al., 2019). Japan and South Korea are not members of the European Union (EU) and have a less favorable family policy than those countries (Boling, 1998). Consequently, the elements that may influence family policy formation, such as social and cultural standards, may differ amongst EU nations. The family policy aspect of this group will be examined in the following section. In-cash measurements in Japan and South Korea are similar. The Means-tests accessible to parents with incomes below a specified threshold are used to provide financial support and tax credits to low-income children and families (OECD, 2022).

Unfortunately, the social acceptance of unwed or single mothers with children in both nations is unfavorable due to cultural norms, causing them to struggle with their employment status and job search, as well as receive fewer financial benefits and be subject to stringent aid application requirements (J.-E. Kim et al., 2018; Tamiya, 2019). Japan funds childcare services via a means-test mechanism based on parental income, but South Korea uses more widespread subsidies. Instead of receiving child care assistance, Japanese children under two receive a municipal tax exemption (Zhou et al., 2003). In contrast, South

Korean children are eligible for this benefit for up to five years. In addition, Korean families with two or more children would receive an energy subsidy to minimize their living expenses (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2022). Although both nations provide In-time family support, parental leave use is below average. Japan gives around 14 weeks of parental leave with 67 percent of the base salary paid, whereas South Korea provides approximately 13 weeks with 84 percent of the base salary paid. However, Japan offers partially compensated homecare leave for fathers instead of paternal leave.

In contrast, South Korea provides two weeks of paid paternity leave and half-paid homecare leave. As a result of their work ethic, the employees of both nations typically take less leave than the law requires. Less than ten percent of Japanese fathers employed in the private sector take homecare leave, whereas less than five percent of small business employees in South Korea take paternity leave (E. J. Kim et al., 2021; Vainio, 2015).

Table 1: Three Family Policy Dimension Comparison among Group of Study

I. In Cash	Thailand	France	Germany	Nordic	Japan	South Korea
1. Financial Assistance	Targeted low-income families	Targeted large family	Target low-income families	Universal	Target low-income families with means-test	Target low-income families with means-test
2. Child tax credit	Yes*	Yes	Yes (Target high-income families)	Yes	Child tax credit (Means-tested) **	-Child tax credit (Means-tested)
3. Single Parent Support	No	- Child Maintenance - Single-parent benefits	- Child Maintenance - Single-parent benefits	- Child Maintenance - Single-parent benefits except Sweden	- Child Maintenance	- Child Maintenance (Means-tested)
4. Large family benefits	No	- Large Family allowance	No	No	No	No

Note \* Only legitimate children can be tax deducted.

\*\* Unmarried parents are not able to have the child tax deduction

II. In Kind	Thailand	France	Germany	Nordic	Japan	South Korea
1. Childcare services Subsidy	No support for 0-2 years old	2 months to 3 years old	No support (Parental allowance during first-year parental leave.)	Universal for 6 months or one year old up	No support for 0-2 years but received local tax exemption	0-5 years old
2. Preschool-Kindergarten	free public center but no support for private -Partially subsidy	Universal free from 3 years old	- one year up Partially subsidy by state - Day care voucher based on parent's income	-	3-5 years old free for public centers but subsidy for private ones based on means-test	3-5 years old partially subsidy
3. Financial Assistance	Targeted low-income families	Targeted large family	Targeted low-income families	Universal	Target low - income families with means-test	Target low-income families with means-test

III. In Time	Thailand	France	Germany	Nordic	Japan	South Korea
1. Paid length of maternity leave in weeks	- 14 weeks with 46% paid maternity leave from private employers - 50% of estimated 3 months income	- 16 weeks of paid maternity leave - 26 weeks Partial Paid parental and home care leave available to mothers	- 14 weeks of paid maternity leave - 44 weeks Partial Paid parental and home care leave available to mothers	- 13-18 weeks of paid maternity leave - 32-68 weeks Partial Paid parental and home care leave available to mothers	- 14 weeks of 67% paid maternity leave - 44 weeks 60% Partial Paid parental and home care leave available to mothers	- 12.9 weeks of 84% paid maternity leave - 52 weeks 33% Partial Paid parental and home care leave available to mothers

III. In Time	Thailand	France	Germany	Nordic	Japan	South Korea
2. Paid length of paternity leave in weeks	No paid paternity leave	- 2 weeks of paid paternity leave - 26 weeks of partial paid parental and home care leave for fathers	- No paid paternity leave - 8 weeks of partial paid parental and home care leave reserved for fathers	- 0 - 2 weeks of paid paternity leave - 13-15 weeks of partial paid parental and home care leave reserved for fathers	- No paid paternity leave - 52 weeks of 60% paid parental and home care leave reserved for fathers	- 2 weeks of 100% paid paternity leave - 52 weeks of 39.8% paid parental, and home care leave reserved for fathers
3. Others			- Long parental leave with job protection for up to three years			Breastfeeding Break 2 times 30 minutes break/ day for mother of under 1 year old child.

Source: Summarizing from European Commission (2022), OECD Family Database (2018), Splash Database (2014), Bokjiro (2022)

Comparing Thailand's fertility and family policy trend with the three selected groups in Figure 4 and Table 1, we discovered that Thailand's path is comparable to that of the Challenge group (Japan and South Korea) in several respects. First, Thailand and the Challenge type have built a welfare system based on the residual model of social welfare that attempts to assist low-income or impoverished households. Thus, the policy is insufficient for all members of society, such as middle-income families, to have incentives for having new children. Other parallels include the inadequate availability of childcare leave and the application of gender equality in the family policy, both of which significantly affect working parents' decision to have children. Despite this, both

Japan and South Korea are attempting to improve incentives for all three of Thévenon's dimensions by making the welfare regime more universal for various individuals. Thailand continues to operate the same welfare system aimed at low-income families; its strategic orientation is unclear. Therefore, if Thailand does not immediately reform her family policy, the fertility direction will go in the same or a worse way than the Challenge group. The Thai government should adopt the Promising group's policies. First, the family tools should be differentiated to create incentives and disincentives; for example, families with more children should receive higher advantages than those with fewer or none. Second, the policy should provide flexible and sufficient monetary subsidies, daycare or home care services, and more paid paternal and maternal leave to families with middle or high-middle incomes and single or unmarried parents to encourage more work-family reconciliation. Lastly, the implemented family policies should be continuously amended to manage other social and economic unpredictability and disruptions effectively.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

In several nations, low fertility has been a serious issue involving numerous social and economic aspects. The OECD members have been dealing with this issue for quite some time. The family policy is one of the potential methods by OECD nations to increase fertility. This study categorizes OECD members into three groups depending on their policies and trends in fertility. Then, the three patterns of In-cash, In-kind, and In-time offered by Thévenon (2011) are utilized to compare the family policies of a subset of OECD countries and Thailand. The outcome demonstrates that the promising group (Germany and France) use an explicit type of policy and can integrate policy patterns that are consistent with their objectives. The stable groupings (Nordic nations) can sustain their birth rate by employing a more liberal, universal, and gender-equal assessment method. The difficult group (Japan and South Korea) that faced a sustained fall in fertility adopts the residual model of the family policy focused on low-income families and uses fewer explicit forms of regulation than other groups. The analysis also reveals that Thailand and the third group share a similar fertility and family policy pattern. The In-cash programs prioritize low-income families above middle- and upper-

class families. In addition, the In-kind program's childcare service does not include the postnatal period, nor is it provided at a reasonable price.

Additionally, childcare leave has uncertain guidelines. Although this study presents a comparative examination of family policy in several dimensions, it is limited by a lack of data, so many variables, such as education, health, and cultural differences, are omitted. Therefore, it will be useful to incorporate these topics and expand the scope of future research to include other developed and developing nations.

### Notes:

- 1.) Replacement level fertility is the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next. The United Nations suggests the replacement level requirement at an average of 2.1 children per woman (United Nations et al., 2007).
- 2.) The residual model sees government support for people's well-being as a safety net of last resort. When poor people cannot help themselves through the market, usually by working or getting help from family, friends, or other social ties, the government should step in with the aid necessary to fit their needs (Melendez, 2018).
- 3.) Means-tested social benefits refer to benefits where entitlement is explicitly or implicitly conditional on the beneficiary's income/wealth (The more income will receive fewer benefits) (Eurostat, 2020).

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