

became known as the Affiliated Orders, the largest of which was the Independent Order of Oddfellows (Manchester Unity). In Chapter 4, Ismay provides a broad overview of the origins and development of the Manchester Unity during the first half of the nineteenth century. In Chapter 5, she continues the story, with a particular focus on the years between 1850 and 1875. This period played a central role in the development of the organisation because it saw the introduction of more scientifically-grounded actuarial methods. However, despite this, Ismay argues that the organisation continued to place great emphasis on the importance of sociability.

As Ismay suggests, the role played by sociability in friendly society life has often seemed controversial. Many contemporaries argued that the societies devoted too much attention to the development of elaborate membership rituals and that these limited their ability to provide practical assistance. In contrast, Ismay argues that sociability and conviviality were central to the creation of the bonds of trust and reciprocity on which the societies depended. However, this argument may be less original than the author suggests. During the 1990s, David Green argued that the rituals of friendly society life played a central part in their efforts to control malingering, and the same issues were also discussed in a less polemical way by Gorsky (1998) and Weinbren (2010).

Ismay also considers the relationship between friendly societies and the growth of the modern welfare state. This has become an increasingly controversial topic in recent years, with commentators on both left and right arguing not only that friendly societies (and other forms of mutual aid) were ‘crowded out’ by the rise of the welfare state, but also that they offered a viable alternative to it (see Harris, 2018). However, as Ismay points out, many contemporaries believed that the ethos of welfare mutualism was also reflected in the creation of institutions such as the NHS. She therefore challenges us to reconsider the role of that ethos in the development of welfare services today.

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Sonja Blum, Johanna Kuhlmann and Klaus Schubert (eds) (2020), *Routledge Handbook of European Welfare Systems*, Second Edition, London: Routledge, £140.00, pp. 618, hbk.
doi:[10.1017/S0047279420000586](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279420000586)

This book sets itself the ambitious task of providing “topical, and comprehensive information on the welfare systems of all 28 EU member states [now sadly 27 of course!] and their recent reforms” in one volume. It comes close to fulfilling this ambition, which is a creditable achievement in a book dealing with such a broad range of topics and contexts at this level of detail. There are also an introductory chapter, two chapters at EU level and a conclusion.

The individual country chapters mostly follow a common structure, giving a brisk overview of the background and developments of the past 20 years and the main policy issues and priorities, then examining developments in policies for older people (especially pensions and social care), families, health care and social assistance, and in most cases labour market policy. The chapters conclude with a brief discussion of current challenges and likely future developments. Students of European social policy will undoubtedly find this a very valuable source for information on the state of play across the EU. The volume is certain to sell to libraries and the like. It is not cheap, but is a substantial and well-researched updating of the first edition (2009), and can claim to be value for money.

Any review of 20 years of policy-making, cross-cut by the rise of liberalism, the refugee crisis, the accession of new EU member states, the new policy discourse of social investment, the recession of 2008 and the austerity programmes that followed in many countries must make choices. These choices will influence the overall picture of European welfare systems that the book provides. The overall approach starts out from a review of the main trends in comparative welfare state literature and develops what is described as a three dimensional framework, designed to capture recent changes. The first edition identified three directions in research: typologies ("the development of welfare state categories and clusters"), changes at the level of ideas, and types of change distinguishing processes from outputs. The current edition adopts a modified version of this approach, covering regulation (the actual policies with regard to who gets how much of what, and who doesn't), the underlying ideas (Keynesianism, neo-liberalism, social investment and so on), and again the type of change.

This perspective is sufficiently broad to enable the chapter authors to discuss most (but not all) of the issues that are of importance in their various countries. One point is that it is based on a descriptive review of what social policy theorists say rather than an interest in why they say it. The logic of discussions of welfare states is that at root they are somewhere based on ideas about welfare and about how states might achieve it for their citizens, but not necessarily for anyone else. This might lead to two limitations: first, while the "common denominator" areas of policy in relation to the main need groups (the old, the sick, the poor and vulnerable) are well covered, there are a number of areas that are important to welfare in some countries that do not get the attention they might be expected to receive.

First issues that are currently defined as not welfare policy or not applicable to citizens do not get included, although they have major implications for welfare in the countries. An example of a non-welfare area with massive welfare implications is climate change. Mitigation policies will have distributional outcomes and this needs to be considered. An example of a policy area where issues of citizenship are central concerns immigration. This impacts on immigrants themselves and also on the politics of policy-making in a number of countries. Immigrants are not necessarily citizens and may not be highlighted in a discussion that takes the state's current approach for granted.

Secondly the political background of policy-making (central to a discussion of directions in a democratic welfare-state – who gets power and why) does not always enter. Thus ideas such as equality of opportunity, neo-liberalism and neo-Keynesianism are mentioned and policies such as activation, privatisation and social investment touched on as general policy directions. However, there is little consideration of what drives these approaches and thus of where policy is likely to go, or of which trends are nourished by current circumstances and which undermined.

Again, there is little consideration of the major trend in policy theory towards consideration of the role, opportunities and contribution of women in policy, driven by the feminist turn in theory (arguably the most significant development at the level of ideas in the period covered) and also by feminist politics. Discussion of gender issues tends to be limited to those

aspects covered in family policy. Correspondingly the interest in green ideas in social policy, a development that is entirely certain to be of increasing importance as time goes on, is hardly included in discussion. Similarly issues of race and ethnicity, bound up with ideas about what constitutes nation in the nation state and underlying the politics of immigration, are not considered.

Despite these points, the framework provides a serviceable approach to enable the authors of the descriptive chapters to present the main developments in each country.

The overview chapter on the EU setting out how economic considerations have always trumped social concerns, if anything more powerfully as time goes on, presents a clear and compelling account. It is doubly striking that the economics should always win out, as closer economic integration among a range of increasingly unequal countries in itself strengthens the case for corresponding social integration. That case is reinforced by the impact of the recession and of austerity programmes (and one might add, now by the Covid-19 recession).

A chapter on social spending demonstrates that there is no indication of retrenchment or convergence across the EU as a whole, when spending per 100,000 inhabitants is the measure. It is not clear whether an analysis that took into account changes in the level of need – perhaps in terms of population ageing or even degree of inequality within countries, or one which examined trends within different groups of countries (for example, western, eastern and southern Europe; established versus accession members; larger versus smaller countries and so on) – would arrive at the same conclusion.

The final chapter concludes that there is much action across the policy landscape, but that what is happening is best understood as piecemeal adaptive change, conditioned by the circumstances of each country. There is no indication of general directions in policy. This is striking in view of the theory-driven literature that points to the rise of neo-liberalism and the shift towards more market-driven economic systems across the world and the strong suggestion that collective challenges – most importantly, climate change – are certain to pose to government and certain to have strong implications for the welfare of citizens. Nonetheless it is an achievement to provide an up to date overview of developments in welfare across 28 rather different countries in the space of a book which can be lifted from the table in one hand and doing so is a service to the discipline.

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Helmut Gaisbauer, Gottfried Schweiger and Clemens Sedmak (eds) (2020), *Absolute Poverty in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Hidden Phenomenon*, Bristol: Policy Press, £29.99, pp. 440, pbk.
doi:[10.1017/S0047279420000598](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279420000598)

In a region that boasts some of the world's wealthiest countries, does absolute poverty exist? The editors' introductory comment that their students have doubted the existence of 'real' poverty in Europe, only in insert-stereotypical-poor-country-here, is one to which I can relate. While perhaps only part of the impetus for such a book, it nonetheless highlights that the definition of 'poverty' continues to be highly debated and personally defined, a perspective that plays out in these pages.