



# Children, border(land)s and mixed economies of welfare

Childhood

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## Abstract

This special issue is a comprehensive exploration of the pivotal role of state borders in shaping child welfare in various European borderlands from the First World War to the present. The richly detailed articles present a diverse range of historical and social-scientific perspectives, offering a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. Each case study sheds light on a unique aspect of the mixed economies of welfare in borderland areas, collectively proposing a framework for analysing the intricate influence of welfare providers on children's well-being in the intermediary spaces.

## Introduction

This special issue explores the significant role of state borders in shaping the welfare of children. It presents six original case studies, offering empirical insights from various European borderlands, from the aftermath of the First World War to the present day. Each case study sheds light on a different aspect of the mixed economies of welfare in borderland areas, together suggesting a framework with which to analyse the complex influence of welfare providers on children's well-being in these intermediary spaces. The articles collected here offer diverse historical and social-scientific perspectives on the production, legitimisation, and delivery of welfare within the spaces defined by state borders (Konrad and Nicol, 2008). The researchers analyse the relationships between bordering practices and their influence on child welfare, both in its development and its deployment. The special issue provides a valuable starting point for understanding the problem of borderland children as welfare recipients amid the power dynamics of state border formation, maintenance, and evolution.

The articles were initially conceived from within two large-scale international projects: SOCIOBORD and EUR&QUA. Hosted at the European University Institute in Florence, the five-year-long (2020–2025) ERC Advanced Grant project *Social politics in European borderlands* (SOCIOBORD) provides a research structure for scholars interested in joint studies of the history of social assistance in Europe's border regions. In the spring of 2023, SOCIOBORD members began collaborating with researchers affiliated with the EUR&QUA research project (2016–2020), part of the Interreg Programme V A Greater Region. This EU-funded cross-border program promotes cooperation and networking between professional actors within the Greater Region, consisting of French Lorraine, Belgian Wallonia and the German-speaking Community, Luxembourg, Saarland, and Rhineland-Palatinate. The EUR&QUA investigated cross-border assistance in child and

youth welfare, disability care, and the establishment of a cross-border area for international child protection.

The articles in this special issue draw on insights from historical research into childhood and welfare on the one hand, and conceptual insights from child (hood) studies, border studies, and welfare studies on the other. In the following section, we offer an overview of the state of research on child welfare in the borderlands across these disciplinary domains and outline how this special issue advances the existing literature. Subsequently, we analyse the empirical findings of the articles through three lenses. First, we introduce the historical trajectories that led to the emergence of the borderlands under discussion. We establish a connection between the different ways these borderlands were and are understood, and the resulting forms of child provision that emerged in them. Focusing on specific cases, we then discuss how certain groups of children in the borderlands are constructed as 'other' against minors in less peripheral areas, and how this affects their inclusion or exclusion from welfare services. Lastly, we discuss the character of the relationships, as presented in the articles, between actors in the diverse configurations of borderland mixed economies of welfare.

## **Children, border(land)s and welfare**

The provision of social support for children has long been a central focus of welfare studies and modern welfare history. Of particular significance to this special issue are studies connecting the increased targeting of children by welfare initiatives with the emergence of nationalistic discourses that recast minors as future citizens of the nations. In the lead-up to the First World War, portraying children as valuable resources, but also future citizens capable of participating meaningfully in nation-building, became an important ideological strategy. This led to the heightened prioritisation of minors on the agendas of most, if not all, European welfare states and national welfare systems from the interwar period onward (Millei and Imre, 2016: 2-6; Stephens, 1997; Millei and Imre, 2021).

The research on past and present child welfare discourses, policies, and practices, as well as their political applications, encompasses diverse historical and geographical contexts, and its breadth is beyond the scope of this editorial (e.g. Bloch et al., 2003; Bloch et al., 2006; Downs Lee, 2002; Gilliam et al., 2017b; Hultqvist and Dahlberg, 2001; Nadesan, 2010; Venken, 2021). Most of this research has focused on the welfare provided to children within a specific political entity or has compared state welfare systems. The national(ist) historiographies have partially discussed the use of statutory protective systems addressed to children in borderlands in an attempt to integrate the latter to the mainland (e.g. Kulczycki, 1981). However, as an approach, methodological nationalism is insufficiently refined to account for the social, cultural, and political in-betweenness of borderlands. As such, it produces analyses that are blind to important aspects of borderland people's experiences. These include the hybrid identifications, aspirations or practices of borderland inhabitants, which may misalign with hegemonic national projects.

Several studies have discussed a mutually reinforcing relationship between the state border and state welfare systems. The latter are bordered phenomena insofar as they are mostly executed within the state borders of a polity, while taking on these borders' 'protective' function by limiting or excluding outsider's access to domestic resources (Synnies, 2021). Furthermore, cross-disciplinary research has recognised both state borders and welfare states as processes of classification and categorisation, whose successful deployment involves the negation of differences and imposition of essentialist notions of collective aspirations and needs (e.g., for a particular type of security or specific forms of assistance). As such, they play a crucial role in shaping ideas of nation, state, identity, community, and citizenship (Persdotter et al., 2021).

The encounters of child(hood) studies with border studies have, in turn, revealed the multitudinous effects that state borders can have on the children living in their vicinity and during border crossings. Notable areas of investigation include minors' cross-border practices (e.g., Assmuth et al., 2018; Bejarano, 2010), their navigation of identities and their sense of belonging in recipient countries (e.g., Aitken, 2010; Clacherty, 2019), their involvement in transnational family units (e.g., Cienfuegos et al., 2023; Kutsar et al., 2014; Pratt 2010), and their understanding and experience of the state, nationhood and citizenship at contested borders and within borderland spaces (e.g., Jukarainen, 2003; Mendoza Inzunza and Fernández Huerta, 2010; Ongay 2010; Spyrou and Christou 2014; TrầnThị and Huijsmans, 2014; Grinberg 2014; Venken, 2017; Wung-Sung, 2017; Nielsen 2019; Chiu and Choi, 2019; Venken et al., 2021; Josiowicz and Coronado, 2023).

Most of the advances in research on child welfare in relation to state borders have been made concerning policies and practices that affect children and youngsters crossing state borders. In the shadow of the massive and ongoing migrations of children, these studies have been crucial in showcasing the typological diversity of these minors. This diversity, in turn, generates a range of new and specific issues in the welfare sectors of recipient countries (e.g., Bhabha et al., 2018; Bunar et al., 2023; Josiowicz and Coronado, 2023; Scutaru and Paoli, 2020; Skivenes et al., 2014). By comparison, welfare for children inhabiting borderlands remains relatively under-researched. This gap has only begun to be addressed in studies on social and political mobilisation for borderland child welfare by a handful of historians (Maurer and Ripplinger, 2017; Venken, 2021; Zahra, 2008) and social scientists (Meichsner, 2014). Similar to research on child migration, there is a group of studies that, while not explicitly engaging with concepts from border(land)s studies, nonetheless address problems of borderland child welfare, but within the paradigm of minority rights (e.g., Lendák-Kabók, 2024).

This special issue advances the research on borderland child welfare by examining the characteristics and patterns of mobilisation of welfare providers in intermediary spaces. We acknowledge borders and borderlands as historically contingent phenomena whose meanings and functions change over time and in different historical and cultural contexts. Without losing the contextual characteristics of the state borders in the individual case studies, the articles in this collection grapple with the (continuing) effects of a specific understanding of state border and its functions that emerged during the nineteenth century. In this period, Laura di Fiore claims, state borders gradually became "a stark expression of a new conception of sovereign space", consisting "of an 'inside' clearly separated from

the ‘outside’” (Di Fiore, 2017: 48). This involved a specific vision of the ‘inside’ as a space populated by members of an imagined national community. The ‘outside’ referred to an idealised picture of the international order, consisting of sovereign states, neatly separated into ‘nations’ by state borders. It is on the basis of these understandings of state, nation, and state border that the first layers of the statutory welfare systems in Europe were introduced and, irrespective of any actual demographic of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, began to be referred to as ‘national’ welfare states, or, when the public and private sectors collaborated on welfare, ‘national’ mixed welfare economies. The recurring theme across the articles in this issue are the long-lasting legacies of the original institutional and ideological designs laid out in the aftermath of the First World War.

Contributors to this special issue understand a border as both a physical line and a dynamic socio-political process. The explanatory power of the border-process concept, referred to as re/de/bordering, lies in its capacity to bring forward the ongoing labour of countless actors on local, national, and transnational levels; labour set in motion just as often to legitimise arbitrarily placed state borders as to expose the fragility of state sovereignty (Donnan and Wilson 2010: 75; Van Houtum and et al., 2005; Scott 2015). By departing from the perception of a border as fixed, the border-process suggests this labour can occur anywhere and, further, can be embedded in across various public and private domains (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019). Consequently, we consider child welfare not only as informed by the effects of state borders, but also as a domain interpellated by practices of re- and debordering.

We agree that ‘national’ welfare systems are technologies that govern children through which they can be categorised, divided, excluded from, and included in welfare services and, in a broader sense, the hegemonic majority (Gilliam et al., 2017a). At the same time, we build on the insights of those studies that conceptualise borderlands as sites of struggle between competing claims, and as spaces conducive to the emergence of alternative social, cultural and political projects. We argue that due to the conviction that children play a crucial role in the future of (nation-)states, child welfare often serves as a metonym for larger competing interests and rival political subjectivities, both in borderlands and states (Brambilla et al., 2015; Hess and Kasperek, 2017).

Each article in this collection comments on these dynamics by delving into a specific form of child provision as it emerges within local mixed welfare economies. The concept of mixed economies recognises the multiplicity of formal and informal state and non-state welfare actors at the local, regional, state, national, and international levels (Giomi et al., 2022; Harris and Bridgen, 2007; Powell, 2019). This notion is applied to borderland contexts to demonstrate how the state’s disciplinary and social engineering agenda is enacted on borderland populations through welfare provision, and how that agenda can be undermined or transformed from below, through the practices of borderland welfare providers who, while dependent on the design of state administrative borders, can produce welfare spaces outside the supervision of the state. Furthermore, the articles point to scenarios where ‘national’ welfare systems spill across state borders or are replaced by alternative assistance schemes, whose territorial outreach does not reflect a historically or currently accepted international political order. These dynamics are often overlooked or marginalised in studies of welfare that are conducted within a single polity.

The articles in this special issue adopt bottom-up approaches to their research material. Hence, each takes as its point of departure the position of local (historical) actors in providing child welfare. The archival sources, documents or testimonies they produced form the basis for reconstructing and analysing welfare provision for children in various European borderlands from the 20th century to the present. Some authors maximise the analytical potential of locally archived sources about individual welfare institutions, such as Federica Moretti and Machteld Venken in their article about the Children's Castle in Luxembourg, or Laura Lee Downs in her text about the *Assistenza all'Italia Redenta* (Assistance to Redeemed Italy, hereafter *Italia Redenta*) in Northeastern Italy. Other authors opt to add sources and documents from other levels of decision-making, such as reports issued by various nation-states, to reconstruct the welfare provision for children in borderlands. Christian Schröder, Ulrike Zöllner, and Mark Unbehend, for example, offer a comparative analysis of the interpretation of international guidelines on children's rights within neighbouring nation-states in Western Europe.

## European border(land)s in past and present

Establishing state borders is not predetermined but rather evolves through historical processes that can bring about considerable differentiation, leading to unequal access to opportunities and resources. The borderlands demonstrate how delineating populations into separate, culturally homogenised communities by means of state borders is a socially constructed activity (Summa, 2021). The borderlands are often defined through ongoing contestations over the limits of national territories, or considerable mobility across state borders. These characteristics of borderlands constitute favourable conditions for power struggles and cross-border exchange, all of which may occur outside state oversight (Venken, 2021).

The six articles present a diverse range of European borderlands throughout history, showcasing changing perspectives on state borders, the role of states, and child welfare. The borderlands under consideration vary in the social and political circumstances surrounding their creation, by the nature of the state border that delineates them (e.g., porosity, security level), and by the patterns and purposes of border crossings. At different moments in time, depending on context and political motive, the state, residents, or both, can engage in producing these borderlands' 'otherness'. This alterity can be built around issues of ethnic or religious difference, competing territorial claims, or a high intensity of commercial, cultural, or social interaction across borders.

The opening articles by Laura Lee Downs and Machteld Venken offer case studies from contested borderland regions created by the redrawing of state borders in the aftermath of the First World War. The interwar period saw a consolidation of consensus around the notion of the nation-state as the prime mode of domestic and international governance. At the same time, implementing statutory welfare systems became a yardstick for mature statehood. Child welfare, and education in particular, became a crucial tool in fashioning minors into a national citizenry. These larger developments constitute the backdrop for Laura Lee Downs's research in the province of the Julian March, located where present-day Italy, Slovenia and Croatia meet. The region had

recently been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire but was claimed by Italy following the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy in November 1918. The author discusses the establishment of emergency child welfare services during the interbellum in a multiethnic and multilingual borderland as it transitioned from imperial to national sovereignty, and as the state shifted politically from liberalism to fascism following Mussolini's rise to power.

Machteld Venken examines a specific type of welfare service – summer camps – offered to children living on the Belgian side of the Belgian–German borderlands in the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith, and Malmédy (hereafter ESM). Previously German, these subsequently transitioned to Belgian sovereignty following a public consultation mandated by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. The German state considered ESM its lost national territory and found it necessary to nurture contacts with the borderland population. With the growing influence of Nazi propaganda among the German-speaking inhabitants of ESM, the Belgian state refocused its attention on its newly acquired territories. The author explores how the Belgian and German national welfare schemes competed for the loyalty of the borderland population in an ongoing controversy over the rightful ownership of the region.

The articles written by Dominika Gruziel, and Federica Moretti and Machteld Venken, offer insights into selected aspects of child welfare provision at the dawn of Europe's reconstruction, after the Second World War. With varying degrees of success and in different forms, European welfare systems pursued the defamilisation of children's care, assuming increasing responsibilities for their well-being. The overtly nationalistic discourses of the interwar period were replaced by the idea of cultivating children and youngsters loyal to the hierarchical and centralised communist nation-state on one side of the Iron Curtain, and the liberal notion of the child's right to welfare on the other.

Dominika Gruziel's article is set in the hyperactive Polish-Ukrainian borderland after the Second World War. Established in post-war international conferences, the newly delineated territorial border between communist Poland and Soviet Ukraine stirred a prolonged and violent contestation across both states. The subsequent stabilisation of the disputed state border would eventually be achieved through population exchanges between Poland and Ukraine, as well as cultural cleansing in both countries. The author analyses the discriminatory practices of welfare provision to the multinational cohort of children on the Polish side of the contested border, which was delivered amid military confrontations, massive movements of populations and a radicalisation of the Polish state's understanding of security.

Federica Moretti and Machteld Venken discuss the origins of a pedagogical establishment: the Children's Castle (Kannerschlass). Located in the Luxembourgian canton of Esch-sur-Alzette, close to the Luxembourgian-French border, it was set up to house orphaned and disadvantaged children. The authors analyse the establishment and functioning of the institution against the backdrop of Luxembourg's self-identification as a space where diverse cultural and linguistic elements circulated. Moretti and Venken argue that this specific understanding of the Luxembourgian state as an intermediary space compelled local educators and political elites to search for pedagogical inspiration for child welfare across state borders.

Since the 1990s, European child protection and provision systems have gradually embraced the directives outlined in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These adaptations have developed under the pressure of several higher-level, intertwined processes. The European continent underwent the deconstruction of the Iron Curtain, followed by economic and political transformations in numerous Central and Eastern European states; the formal establishment of the European Union and its expansion; the enlargement of the Schengen area; and the adoption of an idea of European citizenship as complementary to national citizenship (Cockburn, 2013: 166-178).

However, the last two articles in this special issue demonstrate that, despite European integration, child welfare in Europe is primarily delivered at the nation-state level through 'national' welfare systems, even as the meanings of the nation-state and welfare state constantly evolve. The authors of the closing articles reflect on this specific issue in the context of child welfare provision in two contemporary border regions. The first is the Greater Region, encompassing the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg and five regions across three countries: the French region of Lorraine, the German regions of Saarland and Rhineland-Palatinate, and the Belgian regions of the Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles (a French-speaking Community) and East Belgium (a German-speaking Community). The second is the Euregio Region, encompassing the Dutch province of Limburg; part of the German region of Nordrhein-Westfalen, including the city of Aachen (Aix-en-Chapelle); and two Belgian provinces – Liège and Limburg, along with their German-speaking communities. The self-understanding of these spaces as distinctive administrative, social, cultural, and economic units is based on the long-established and intensive cross-border movements of people, goods, and ideas. Their emergence was significantly enabled by the liberalisation of the regime of state borders in Europe, and the EU's endorsement of regional integration, which attempted to better accommodate emerging regional self-identifications on the ground as they were actually lived.

Bettina Diwersy and Stefan Köngeter examine how contemporary practices of social workers – employed by 'national' welfare systems but active in the cross-border spaces of the Euregio and the Greater Region – adapt and respond to the welfare needs of transnational children and families. The former are accustomed to crossing state borders multiple times a week or even daily, whether as pupils or while visiting a divorced parent or grandparents living in different jurisdictions from their family members. The authors investigate the approaches developed by welfare professionals on either side of state borders to facilitate the provision of welfare services for border-crossing children.

Christian Schröder, Ulrike Zöllner, and Mark Unbehend ask the important question why supposedly 'universal' international regulations on children's rights, such as the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, are interpreted and implemented differently across the Greater Region. By examining the legal framework and implementation of child protection measures in each region, the authors illustrate how 'national' welfare systems influence regional practices.

## Borderland children as welfare recipients

With different degrees of explicitness, the articles in this special issue engage with the discursive conditions and socio-political circumstances under which children living in the vicinity of a state border are constructed. Young inhabitants of these intermediary spaces are often cast as displaying different characteristics or needs than those in other areas of a state. Overall, the articles demonstrate how the alterities produced are subsequently (mis) managed through welfare practices or serve to undermine the (welfare) hegemony.

From the point of view of welfare provision, alterity is often invoked to draw attention to ignored or insufficiently addressed problems. Consequently, those who highlight a social issue advocate for its wider recognition, leading to commitments on the part of welfare providers (preferably the state) to deliver services (e.g. Piper, 2005). The articles in this special issue provide a revealing sample of welfare producers' approaches to the constructed alterities of children in the borderlands. These can include overlooking the specific needs of a child living in an intermediary space, using child provision to assert national legitimacy, developing arrangements for borderland minors' protection, or explicitly denying provision to specific categories of children and youngsters. We contend that the management of borderland children's perceived alterity can range from the eradication to the inclusion of their constructed difference.

Dominika Gruziel's article discusses two contending understandings of children's alterity on the Polish side of the Polish-Ukrainian border in the aftermath of the Second World War. The author reconstructs how local educators and municipal welfare providers initially outlined a system of provision that would accommodate ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences between pupils, reflecting (though not in equal distribution) the heterogeneity and lived experience of the borderland's population. Borderland children with diverse cultural characteristics called for tailored welfare measures unnecessary in other parts of the Polish state. Further, the cultural difference of a borderland minor did not lead to questioning its rightful belonging to the Polish state. This understanding soon collided with the Polish state's emerging view of cultural and national homogeneity as a precondition for successful post-war reconstruction. The otherness of borderland populations was subsequently managed by oppressive means: physical removal of the Ukrainian population from the region, cultural cleansing, and forced Polonization. By the end of the 1940s, the Polish statutory welfare system would be accessible to ethnically Ukrainian minors, though it would ignore their cultural background.

In her case study, Laura Lee Downs discusses how children in the newly Italian but multiethnic and multilingual territory of the Julian March were perceived as a challenge to Italy's nation-state-building project. With the Italian occupation and annexation of the region and subsequent transition to fascism, ways that children might be grouped hardened into their categorisation based solely on their ethnic background and mother tongue. Italia Redenta's welfare services targeted Croatian and Slovenian children in war-devastated rural areas with no available alternatives. Kindergartens were built throughout the region with Italian as the sole language of instruction. By providing educational and welfare services, Italia Redenta sought to alter the behaviours of minority children and ensure their loyalties to the Italian state, thereby integrating Italy's new borderlands into



the mainland and minimising or eradicating cultural and linguistic differences. Mitigating the alterity of Croatian and Slovenian children through their Italianization was a strategy based on a belief in the plasticity of their minds and behaviours, which, it was thought, could be moulded along ideological lines. In this case, the belief was deep enough not to necessitate the physical removal of ‘problem’ populations.

Machteld Venken presents a case in which two national welfare systems competed for the same group of borderland children, offering the same thing – summer camps. The shared aim was to foster national loyalty either to the German or Belgian state. However, the two assistance programs had differing perceptions of the needs of borderland minors and their eligibility for inclusion in the German or Belgian welfare systems. The German state allocated resources, formulated policies, and established infrastructure to invite borderland children from what had become Belgian territories. This involved the establishment of fully subsidised short-term summer camps across the state border, to encourage an emotional connection with what was perceived to be their homeland. The integration of these borderland youngsters into the German welfare scheme and the national community was contingent on their presumed similarity to the German population at large, allegedly implicit in a shared German ethnicity, cultural heritage, and language. In contrast, the Belgian state initially avoided implementing distinct welfare policies in East Belgium so as to prevent conflicts with German-speakers in the already bilingual Belgian Kingdom. However, when the interest of German National Socialists in the ESM’s minors posed a political threat, the Belgian state increased the enrolment of these children in Belgian summer camps with the aim to protect them from exposure to Nazi propaganda and potential radicalisation. The rivalry between the two ‘national’ welfare systems for the loyalty of borderland minors led to a disproportionate representation of these children in summer camps organised on both sides of the Belgian-German border.

Taking the Euregio region as an example, Diwersy and Köngeter discuss the commencement of regional provision to children who frequently cross state borders. These minors may be excluded from welfare services on both sides of a state border, as the ‘national’ welfare systems are designed to serve recipients residing in one place. In the statutory systems of protection, these children and their families deviate from the arguably ‘national’ welfare norm (e.g., a child brought up in a single national family permanently residing in one country). The authors analyse how social workers from cross-border regions respond to the needs of these children by developing cross-border collaboration to ensure that social services and benefits follow a child across the state border. Drawing attention to these children’s specific needs prompts inclusionary forms of assistance, which in turn modify the ‘national’ welfare systems by (slowly) incorporating mechanisms of transnational cooperation, for instance between professionals, non-state welfare actors, and clients (children and families). The cross-border systems of protection invite reflection on alternative ways of governing European populations and on reimagining the European continent, not simply as a collection of nation-states, but as a variety of regional, transnational, and cross-border constellations of support, cooperation, and exchange.

## Borderland mixed economies of welfare for children

Each contribution to this special issue discusses a selected aspect of borderland mixed economies of welfare. The concept of mixed economies acknowledges the diversity of formal and informal welfare providers operating on local, regional, state, national, transnational, and international levels of decision-making. The pool of welfare brokers includes (but is not limited to) international organizations, transnational networks, state services, voluntary and community assistance in its various forms (individuals, charities, churches, mutual-aid groups etc.), occupational welfare, commercialised services, and, finally, families and kinship networks (Powell, 2019). Studies of mixed welfare economies, often approached ethnographically, from the bottom-up, have been proposed as an alternative to earlier research that assumed the state, particularly the central state, to be the chief (and most appropriate) provider of comprehensive and universal welfare services (Giomi et al., 2022).

The notion of mixed economies of welfare facilitates a more nuanced understanding of the division of labour between different welfare producers. It also pays close attention to interactions between welfare actors. The characteristics of specific constellations of welfare provision – for instance dominant and non-dominant producers, the relations between them, the ideological underpinnings informing their action, etc. – are context contingent and exhibit high variability. These different actors engage in various ways, either formally cooperating, remaining indifferent to one another, offering parallel services, or competing over beneficiaries.

The functioning of mixed economies of welfare in borderlands is chiefly informed by the relationship of the states that share the relevant state border. Relations between neighbouring states can range from explicitly hostile to cordial to indifferent or marked by minimal interaction between state authorities. In her case study, Machteld Venken uncovers the influence of a ‘national’ mixed economy of welfare system spilling across to a neighbouring state. The intensity with which German state agencies targeted children in the regions of Eupen, Sankt Vith and Malmédy caused Belgian child welfare providers to increase their welfare measures. Venken relates how child welfare schemes on both sides of the Belgian-German border relied on the cooperation of state agencies with an array of religious entities, humanitarian organisations, and social security services. The parallel development of these national schemes facilitated the emergence of a cross-border mixed economy of child welfare.

In contrast to Venken’s article, Diwersy and Köngeter discuss how borderland welfare actors attempt to compensate for the indifference of their respective state welfare systems. Since these systems overlook children who often cross state borders, state-employed professionals in the Euregio Region address these minors’ welfare through bottom-up collaboration with their professional counterparts abroad. This leads to a network of horizontal, transnational exchanges among social workers in an equal partnership. Welfare professionals create a transnational space that allows different understandings and practices of child protection to mingle, thereby overcoming the nation-state-oriented logic of welfare provision. Operating in a transnational space of heterogeneous norms and practices, local caregivers expand the palette of welfare

concepts and practices in their respective ‘national’ welfare states and mixed economies of welfare. Parallel cross-border collaborations further implement the directives outlined by international institutions, setting the norm on children’s rights, and triggering reforms in ‘national’ welfare systems. In contrast, although children with a transregional lifestyle are common also within the Greater Region, welfare structures on different sides of state borders do not consider these minors as potential clients, and consequently, do not develop methods to identify or assist them. Deprived of the institutional support of their states, the quality of the professional arrangement in the Greater Region depends on the very subjective approach of social workers to cultural or linguistic differences, as well as their willingness to embrace the different understandings of children’s wellbeing in foreign welfare systems.

International organisations and foreign donors can become prominent co-producers of welfare within borderlands, e.g., as an agency distributing goods, financial aid or ideas. In their analysis of the establishment of the Children’s Castle in Luxembourg, Federica Moretti and Machteld Venken reconstruct a network of mutually supportive welfare providers, from the micro level (local reformist educators and the municipality of Esch-sur-Alzette) to the meso level (politicians operating within the institutions of the Luxembourgian nation-state) to the macro level (e.g., UNESCO). The authors argue that the local pedagogues who initiated the Children’s Castle, and those within the national political establishment that supported it, were able to develop their project by the purposeful weaving of multiscale interactions with international organisations and child welfare pioneers abroad. Ultimately, it was the latter’s inspiration that brought about the establishment of the Children’s Castle as a new, secular example of child welfare in Luxembourg.

Christian Schröder, Ulrike Zöller, and Mark Unbehend examine a contemporary case of a miscoordination of welfare practices for borderland minors between different levels of decision-making. The authors’ analysis reveals the effects of the uneven national implementation of the UN’s directives on children’s rights on cross-border social practices in the Greater Region. Because the Convention serves mainly as a guideline for the ratifying states, welfare state representatives and social workers in Luxembourg, Belgium, France and Germany all implement the directives at their discretion and by the means they find most appropriate for their specific contexts. This results in the diversification of welfare practices across the EU member states. This diversification hampers coordinated welfare action among social workers assisting children, who often cross state borders. The study reiterates the status of ‘national’ welfare systems as hegemonic actors in most welfare constellations, whose specific discursive, institutional, and legal traditions set the parameters of welfare operation.

The articles in this special issue underscore the importance of voluntary welfare sector in co-providing (child) welfare, but also comment on its politicised relations with the state. The nation-state’s legislative systems outline the parameters of voluntary contributions and the institutionalisation of voluntary sector into state welfare politics. In borderlands, the non-state welfare sector can become a major player in offering social assistance to specific groups of children whose needs may be incidentally or purposefully overlooked by statutory providers. Non-state welfare entities in the borderlands can find

their work overlapping with the agenda of one or more states, or on a collision course with one state while being supported by another.

Laura Lee Downs's article offers an example of a tight collaboration between the state and an (at least initially) voluntary organisation, Assistance to Redeemed Italy, that was designed to operate exclusively in the borderlands acquired by Italy in 1921. The invocation of 'redeemed' in the organisation's name testifies to an ideological congruence with the state's view on the contested borderland territory as both rightfully restored to its 'true' nation, and in need of services tailored specifically to its 'transitional' condition. Despite containing 'association' in its name, Italia Redenta had a hybrid public-private identity, bringing in substantial state funding for its impressive territorial expansion. However, the association's ideological and institutional proximity to the political establishment came at a price. To better align them to its radicalised statutory politics in the borderland, the fascist government redirected Italia Redenta's agenda and welfare practices. Consequently, although it began as a humanitarian welfare organisation – aiding the local poor in the distress of the postwar – it would subsequently evolve into a project of Italianisation, normalising ethnic minority children to the national paradigm in its capacity as the leading provider of preschool care.

Non-state welfare actors in the borderlands are particularly vulnerable to the border politics of a state. In her article, Dominika Gruziel shows how a borderland mixed welfare economy can be curbed by the state's persecution of specific segments of non-state providers. Given the ongoing military struggle over the newly drawn border, the Polish authorities viewed Ukrainian organized voluntarism and kinship networks as spaces that might well nurture alternative political agency. Securing its eastern borderlands, the state outlawed Ukrainian associative life, illegalised the Greek Catholic Church (a historically significant provider of charity to Ukrainian communities), and disintegrated Ukrainian familial and kinship networks through forced displacement. These measures resulted in the destruction of Ukrainian voluntary formal and informal welfare production, making Ukrainian children entirely dependent on the Polish state.

Last but not least, research on mixed economies of welfare underscores the importance of the contribution of families and kinship networks to the well-being of children, notwithstanding the 'golden age' of the welfare state or what was arguably the defamilisation of childcare in communist countries (Cebrián et al., 2019; Langan, 1997). Studies also demonstrate that the emergence of the welfare state brought about a radical reconfiguration of the relationship between states and families (Frohman, 2008: 166-178; Thomas, 2005; Bekaert et al., 2021). In exchange for its commitment to the provision of wide-ranging services, the state reserved the right to interfere in familial life, with the underlying expectation that values instilled in the family would align with those promoted by the state. In the borderlands, kinship was and is still often perceived as consequential in the nurture of children's loyalty or disloyalty to the nation-state (Zahra, 2008). For this reason, borderland families are particularly vulnerable to state control within hegemonic welfare schemes. In this special issue, Laura Lee Downs demonstrates how, in pursuit of the nationalisation of Italy's northeastern borderlands in the interwar period, local welfare providers attempted to influence the behaviour not only of minors but also of their families. In contrast, in their research on contemporary transnational families and children

in the Greater and Euregio Regions, Bettina Diwersy and Stefan Köngeter demonstrate how primary caregivers can employ cross-border movement as a strategy for making their families invisible to the surveillance of national welfare systems.

## Conclusion

By focusing on child welfare in European borderlands, this collection of articles recognises that the way borderland children and youth experience state borders and ‘national’ welfare systems differs from how adults act and perceive these same borderland contexts, but also from how children living elsewhere in the country relate to state borders and welfare. The situated accounts of borderland systems of protection and provision offered in this issue reveal both the institutional power of state borders over the well-being and lived experience of children and the fragility of the state border that may be undermined or reconfigured through local welfare practices.

The findings presented attest to the enduring influence of state borders in structuring European child welfare provision, even in cases where state borders have remained unchanged for decades, unchallenged, or even made imperceptible in the act of crossing. We also highlight the long-standing legacy of the nation-state and the hegemonic role of state welfare systems, despite the advancements of Europeanisation and cross-European cooperation. The nationalistic particularism that promoted social protection for ‘our’ children during the initial phase of welfarism in Europe has had a lasting impact, obstructing the implementation of universalistic child welfare agendas on the part of international organisations. The internationally agreed rights of children are primarily put into practice at the nation-state level. Their implementation occurs at the discretion of states, which can decide which means are most suitable for them. Overall, this special issue’s investigation of modes of collective action around borderland child welfare uncovers past and ongoing tensions between international organisations, nation-states, local state representatives, and non-state welfare actors regarding the needs of borderland children.

Applying the concept of mixed welfare economies to various case studies within borderlands in Europe through the 20th and early 21st centuries reveals the co-existence of multiple institutional and non-institutional welfare geographies that cannot be fully understood through the lens of ‘national welfare states’. Indeed ‘national (mixed economies of) welfare’ can stretch across states’ territories to communities whose allegiances reach outside of the polities they live in. By uncovering and examining these alternative welfare geographies, the articles in this special issue contribute significantly to our understanding of child welfare production, both historically and in the present day.

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