

Book Review

Robila, M. (Ed.). (2014). *Handbook of family policies across the globe*. New York, NY: Springer.

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Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics, Volume 11, Number 1 (2014)
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In this edited volume comprising 29 chapters and divided into seven parts corresponding to six inhabited continents plus an introduction, Editor Mihaela Robila largely lives up to the promise of the volume's title, bringing a global perspective to the history, politics, process, and outcomes of family policies in 28 countries. Each chapter is written from the perspective of scholars presumably chosen for their expertise in the family policies in the subject country.

In the introductory chapter, Robila lays out the expectations of each chapter for the reader, defining family policy as "government activities that are designed intentionally to support families, enhance family members' well-being, and strengthen family relationships" (Robila, 2014, p. 3). She offers that each chapter will provide "historical, cultural, and socioeconomic context on families and family policy development," (p. 3) as well as a review of the particular family policies of each country. Marriage, child-rearing, work-family balance, support for families at risk for poverty, families with disabilities, those with elder family members, parental leave policies, and policies surrounding domestic violence are among the types of family policies addressed in the various chapters. The book promises to address the policy processes including policymaking, implementation, and evaluation. The extent to which this is successful, however, seems to vary from chapter to chapter as one might expect in an edited volume of such ambitious scope.

What strikes this reviewer as particularly helpful about this resource is the balance that Robila has struck in the selection of countries for inclusion. Many, but not all, of the usual industrialized nations are included (e.g., United States, Russia, Japan, Germany, Italy, and Canada), but while some of the British Commonwealth and former Commonwealth nations (e.g., Australia, Canada, Ireland, and India) are included, the United Kingdom itself is not included. The notable social welfare states of Norway, Sweden, and Iceland are all covered, as one would expect, but so are the surprising entries for Moldova, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Turkey, and Taiwan. This provides, it seems to me, a more balanced view of the political and sociocultural factors that so strongly influence policymaking and policy implementation.

The chapters are interesting and readable. The language, for the most part, is accessible for students while still being useful for the advanced scholar. These are important attributes in a reference resource and are often difficult to achieve in the same volume. Robila has skillfully and artfully managed the balance with her cadre of authors.

The volume could be improved by either strengthening the index topically or providing a set of comparative tables by policy topic. As it is now, a scholar wishing to look, for example, at policies concerning financial support for paternal leave would have to examine each chapter. There is a topical entry for "paternal leave" in the index,

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but it shows only “Moldova and South Korea” as entries. Other countries would include fathers under “parental leave.” A table or set of tables comparing policy structures or otherwise assisting the researcher to access the material would enhance the value of this volume exponentially. Perhaps the reader of this review will find this criticism so minor as to discount it as more reflective of the reviewer’s own laziness, and that characterization may have its merit.

In the final analysis, this handbook is exactly what it promises: a handbook – that is, a reference

source or resource – of family policies across the globe – that is, taking a balanced sample of large and small, industrialized and developing nations on every inhabited landmass. It places these policies in their proper historical, political, and cultural contexts, follows the policy processes from idea to implementation to evaluation, and recommends improvements. Its usefulness for scholars and students of international family policies is unquestionable.