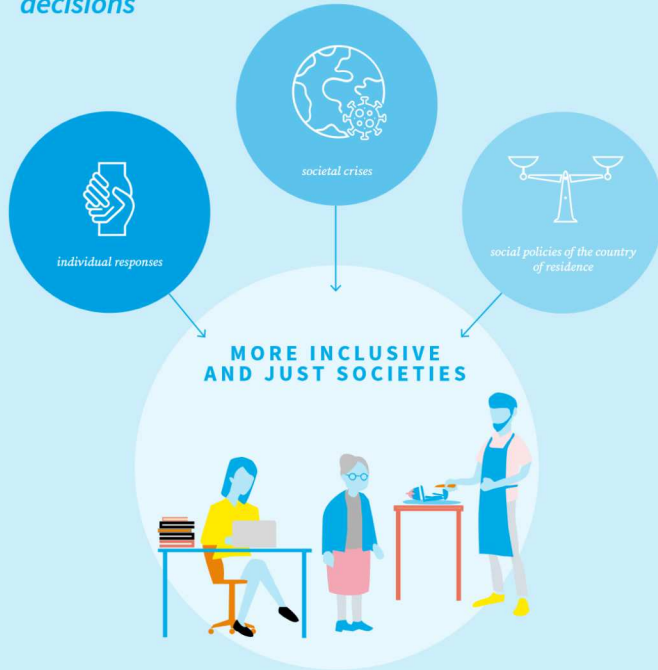


Three contextual dimensions for work-family decisions



Demographic ageing means that we are living longer and longer, and the birth of a person's first child is happening later and later. These developments put our pension systems under pressure, and various reforms have been implemented in European countries which prolong the working lives of men and women. At the same time, people have always cared for their elderly relatives, and the contribution of family caregivers is still very important.

This poses new challenges for these men and women, namely, how to reconcile working, being an active grandparent and taking care of elderly family members. These new reconciliation issues are at the core of my research. I aim to find out under what circumstances such reconciliation is successful: What does successful reconciliation have to do with our previous working biography, family structure and the country in which we live?



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Crises as challenges and opportunities for more inclusive societies

In many aspects of social and academic life, the past year was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a sociologist, I am interested in how such a crisis affects peoples' behaviour and whether it reinforces social inequalities. Much of my research in the past year has therefore been dedicated to these questions. To that end, I worked together with researchers from the cluster of excellence "The Politics of Inequality" on the design and data analysis of two online surveys. Together with Susanne Strauß and Luna Bellani, I found that women have been harder hit by the pandemic than men in two ways: Their workload in terms of housework and childcare has increased and their life satisfaction has decreased to a greater degree. Together with Sebastian Koos, I also analyzed social inequalities in the emergence of new local help as a result of the pandemic: Those more educated and with larger networks helped more. In the wake of this collaboration, I have obtained a grant as Co-PI at the cluster of excellence. The interdisciplinary and international CoPE project (COVID-19 Policies for Gender Equality) will investigate the effects of COVID-19 policies on gender inequalities in Germany, Italy, Finland and the Netherlands.

My own project at the Zukunftskolleg has progressed as well. I published an article which found

that national care policies relying on family care are more likely to drive informal caregivers out of the labour market, and that labour market exits are more likely when the care receiver is a partner or a grandchild rather than a parent. Not least, I submitted a grant proposal to the German Research Foundation which will build on and extend the current Zukunftskolleg project.

SUSTAINABILITY STATEMENT

In my private life, I have tried to live in a climate-friendly way for a while now: avoiding flights, not owning a car, keeping to a vegan diet. This stance naturally translates into research interests and practices. As one positive side effect of the pandemic, I avoided traveling to conferences. Another is that I explored new modes of working and parenting, which have enhanced my family's wellbeing without making me less productive. In my professional life, I have thought a lot about how I – as a social scientist – can contribute to building more sustainable societies. Economic, ecological and social sustainability are not contradictory but go hand in hand. I believe that my expertise can make a difference in two ways. First, my research on participation, inclusion and wellbeing in old age produces relevant insights for re-structuring and governing ageing societies. Second, the social, economic and health vulnerabilities during the pandemic have revealed how inequalities come about. By studying these mechanisms, we can identify the learning potentials from the pandemic and highlight possible opportunities and routes for creating more inclusive and just societies. My ambition is to put my capabilities as a researcher at the service of sustainable societal development.