

How far can policy change family life?

Evaluate policy effects across families and distinguish design, access, take-up and outcomes using a UK and Sweden comparison.

Core learning

- A policy creates options; it does not automatically change family relationships.
- Design, access, take-up and outcomes are four separate stages in the policy effect chain.
- A comparison between countries can reveal possibilities, but it cannot prove that policy alone caused a social outcome.

Concepts, studies and perspectives

- UK Shared Parental Leave: Shows how a policy can formally share leave while take-up may still be shaped by pay, eligibility, workplace culture and gender norms.
- Swedish parental benefit: Shows how policy design can reserve and support care time, but outcomes still depend on wider culture, employment and household resources.
- Comparative policy method: Comparison helps evaluation, but learners must avoid simple cause-and-effect claims.
- Functionalism: Policy can support family functions such as care, protection and socialisation.
- New Right: Policy may weaken self-reliance or reshape incentives around family responsibilities.
- Feminism: Policy may redistribute care, but only if pay, take-up and workplace norms allow gender roles to change.
- Marxism: Policy may support the reproduction of labour power while leaving class inequality intact.

Before the lesson

Read the core terms and write a one-sentence definition for each. Bring one question about evidence quality.

C → B → A → A* development

- C: accurate definition and simple example.
- B: clear mechanism and some application.
- A: evidence and alternative explanation.
- A*: qualified judgement linked to group differences and evidence limits.

Source / accuracy note

Source notes: GOV.UK states eligible parents can share up to 50 weeks of Shared Parental Leave and up to 37 weeks of pay; Försäkringskassan states Swedish parental benefit is paid for 480 days for one child, including 390 income-based days and 90 minimum-level days.