

Paper presented at the Wellchi Network Conference 1
**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY EUROPEAN WELFARE
STATES: THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR CHILD WELFARE**

St. Anne's College, University of Oxford
January 7-8 2005

**Trends in sharing costs for children. Nordic-North European
comparisons.**

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to bring together national reports on trends in economic support to parents in North European countries. In the paper a special focus will be on how economic support is institutionalised. I will discuss implications of these institutional arrangements in terms of 1. Principles of governing of parental behaviour from a gender perspective. 2) Discuss what the arrangements brings for child welfare. In the paper I draw on results from a comparative study covering eight countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, The Netherlands and United Kingdom. The full study is titled Welfare policy and employment in the context of family change. It is made up of national and comparative studies covering demographic trends, changes in labor supply of women and men (with and without children) and changes in family policy. Within the project national teams have also made special comparative studies of demographic trends, men's attitudes to having children, issues regarding balancing family and work, time use studies, political discourse on family and on parental rights and obligations as addressed in family law and policies, comparative analysis of child benefit packages, comparative study on the relationships between education, fertility and employment. More information can be found at <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/summs/welempfc.htm>.

In the paper economic support covers child benefits, economic support to lone mothers and poor families, maintenance by non resident parents, economic support for parental care, economic support for out of home child care. The main results show that there has been a shift in focus from supporting nuclear families to a focus on children. The needs of children are brought to the fore front both regarding economic needs and care. Child benefits are paid as universal support for all resident children primarily at flat rates. Children in lone mother households are granted income support and lone mothers are given incentives for taking up paid work in most studied countries. Several measures are developed in order to strengthen the parental economic responsibilities of non resident parents. Different measures are being institutionalized to pay parents for doing child care. Income replacements for mothers is more common than income replacement for fathers in cases where they replace work for doing child care. At the level of policy and public care, care is being conceptualized more in terms of education

of children rather than taking care of children when parents are working. In all countries costs of child care is problematic for parents not only as fees to be paid for out of home child care but also as forgone income when unpaid care is undertaken. Also quality of child care is regarded as posing many unsolved problems in the studied countries. Care of children is dragged into the logics of commodification – a process that brings many kinds of contradictions in the ways in which care is managed and shared between the private family and the public. Altogether the transition of family institutions from the concept of bread winner families into adult worker models brings contradictions in policy responses to gender equality and child welfare.