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**CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY EUROPEAN WELFARE  
STATES: THE CHANGING CONTEXT FOR CHILD WELFARE**

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## **Saving for children: life courses and markets**

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### ***Abstract***

Childcare is, for good reasons, a central theme in the gender and welfare state literature. The reconciliation of work and care can't be solved by nuclear families (if any) only. Given the precarious labour market position of many women, many families can't afford to reduce the breadwinner's working hours. If they can, not so many men are willing to take their share of caring for the child. Therefore childcare will remain the Achilles heel of gender equality. So, gender inequality on the labour market as well as in the parental relationship produces the need for childcare when a) societies need women's employment for economic or demographic reasons, b) women themselves prefer to be employed for financial, social or psychical reasons, and/ or c) families need both parents' earnings.

Western industrialized countries try to solve the childcare issue in different ways, which has challenged scholars in the field of gender and the welfare state to identify typologies of childcare. For instance Arlie Hochschild (1995) distinguishes four types of childcare referring to the pedagogical climate of the childcare centres; traditional, post-modern, warm modern and cold modern. Monique Kremer (2002) and also Thérèse Letablier and Ingrid Jönsson (2003) have developed typologies on basis of the welfare mix of childcare. In these typologies they construct several packages of childcare containing bits and pieces of parental care, intergenerational care, informal (un) paid care, and professional care in either public or private childcare centres.

The main differences between Hochschild's typology and the ones developed by Kremer, Letablier and Jönsson are a) Hochschild focuses on the quality of childcare, while the other authors focus on the institutionalisation, costs and accessibility of childcare, b) Hochschild analysis childcare centres and the other authors refer to the welfare mix of childcare from a supply side perspective.

In my presentation I will take these typologies as a starting point for exploring current changes in the context of childcare in the Netherlands. On the one hand the Act Basicprovision Childcare will be introduced on January 1, 2005. This act reconstructs

the field of childcare dramatically; the financial structure will be reconstructed, all childcare centres will be private companies and the structure of quality control will change. Costs, accessibility, institutionalisation as well as quality are the core items of the new act. On the other hand parental leave is again under discussion, this time the context is a reconstruction of social security by way life-course arrangement. The current government suggest to include parental leave in this life-course arrangement in which people can save time and money for taking leave when they have newborn children (or for a sabbatical or early retirement).

The perspective of my presentation will be: what is the relation between changes in the supply and the demand side of childcare. Is it possible to unravel if and in what way does (the welfare mix of) childcare meets the demands of mothers (and fathers)? Or does (the welfare mix of) childcare constructs the demands of mothers (and fathers), and if so what are the particular characteristics of the Dutch construction of welfare that are embedded in both new ways of organizing childcare?