

WELLCHI NETWORK

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[Sixth Framework Programme](#)



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POLICIES AND POLITICAL REFORMS

NETHERLANDS

The Dutch Welfare State in Crisis and the situation of the family

Manuela du Bois-Reymond
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For many years, the Dutch welfare state was a model in Western Europe. It stood for a prosperous economy and a close-knit safety net in case of unemployment, health problems or other problematic situations. Nobody needed to fear being pushed into the hopelessness of poverty or other forms of marginal existence. The Netherlands were known as the "gids land" because they produced solutions for social problems by negotiating sensible agreements between the social partners involved (state/government, enterprises, unions). Children, young people and their families profited from this situation.

This has all changed considerably in recent years. Although the lives of most Dutch people have improved in comparison with previous years, there are alarming developments occurring that affect certain categories of the population. Those are:

Young people between 18 and 24 years

Young families

Unemployed people

People with a low level of education, especially ethnic minority groups (Turks, Moroccans, Surinamese and Antilleans).

According to the last overview made by the Dutch Social Cultural Bureau (De sociale staat van Nederland, SCP 2005), the latter two groups are worse off than 10 years ago, not so much in terms of purchasing power but rather concerning their social and cultural integration in mainstream society. For example: families with children spent less on sport and leisure activities and occupied lower quality housing. Young people are more often unemployed and earn less than older people. The number of overweight children has almost doubled over the last ten years. Less people visit libraries or take part in cultural events.

But the most alarming development is the growing divide between the wealthy and the growing number of disadvantaged groups. The political optimism for successfully steering social and economic developments ("maakbaarheid") has worn off and has been replaced by a general mood of pessimism and an inclination towards seclusion (No to the European Constitution; confusion among political parties; rise in populist movements), hesitation to enforce reforms, especially in education (wagging between the old paradigm of educational equality and the new ideology of excellence), and increasing xenophobia (a strict asylum and migration policy; exaggerated demands for naturalization and gaining citizenship status).

As for youth policy, there is a wide range of facilities that are aimed at helping children and young people to integrate and enjoy life. But no remedy has been found for the longstanding evil of over-bureaucratization and fragmented infrastructures. A family in need may be cared for by twenty or more social institutions and social workers, each of which are unaware of what the others do. Coordination is needed but not achieved.

All in all, Dutch society is in a state of transformation, but neither the people nor the politicians know where it is heading.

AUSTRIA

Childcare and Parental Leave in Austria

Margareta Kreimer
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Access to child care facilities

In Austria, the supply of public child care facilities is limited, especially for children under 3 years old and for children of school age. Only about 9% of children aged 0 to 3 years are cared for in child care institutions. In the age group from 3 to 4, public child care is significantly more common (66.6%) and 94% of all children from 5 to 6 attend public child care institutions (see Statistik Austria 2003, 2003a). Full-day care is limited for all age groups. There are large differences between regions (*Bundesländer*), especially in terms of opening hours: More than 90% of child care facilities in Western-Austria only provide half-day-services. Many child care facilities are closed during the school summer holidays (9 weeks).

In the second half of the 90s a special programme to increase the supply of child care facilities was established through government subsidies. It helped to reduce the deficit of places for children in the 3 to 6 year age range. The second stage of the programme (subsidies to increase the supply for children under 3 years and for those of school age) was not continued after the change of government in 2000. A 2002 survey shows a deficit of 90,000 child care places (BMSGK 2003), 344,000 children under 15 years old are cared for by child care facilities. In the 2003 National Action Plan for Employment the Austrian government promises that "efforts are undertaken to ensure that Laender and local communities provide sufficient, needs-compliant quality childcare facilities with due regard to the EU objective of providing childcare to children under 3 years of age and to older children during non-school hours." Up to now no such efforts have been made.

Parental leave regulation in Austria

Since 1990, Austria has had a two-year parental leave entitlement that is linked to previous participation in the

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labour market and provides protection against dismissal and a right to return to the position. As well as maternity leave (8 weeks before and 8 weeks after birth), fathers can also take parental leave. There is no "father's quota" in the parental leave scheme. Before 2002, parental leave was combined with parental leave payment (*Karenzgeld*): only those with entitlement to parental leave could get parental leave benefit (flat rate, 407 Euro per month). It was paid for a maximum of 2 years. After 1996, six months of the leave were paid only if fathers (the other parent) took them. Since 2002, all parents caring for a child receive child care allowance (*Kinderbetreuungsgeld*) until the child is 3 years old (if parents share, otherwise 2.5 years). At 436 Euros a month, this allowance is slightly higher than the "old" parental leave benefit. Carers receiving child care allowance are allowed to participate in the labour market for up to yearly earnings of about 14,500 Euros (*Dazuverdienstgrenze*). This limit is much higher than the maximum earnings level that was allowed while getting parental leave benefit (about 290 Euros/month). But the system is now more complicated for employees, because time-off regulation (which is still linked to participation in the labour market) and child care allowance follow a different logic. The main problem lies in the different durations: Employed parents can take parental leave for up to 2 years; afterwards they lose their protection against dismissal and the right to return to the position. But they can receive child care allowance for up to 2.5 years (if they don't share). The period of parental leave from work is gradually extending so as to become consistent with the maximum duration of the child care allowance – with rather negative consequences for female employment: First, child care supported by the allowance does not guarantee financial independence; therefore poverty is a significant problem for women in Austria. Secondly, the incentives to take longer breaks from paid employment will increase the problems experienced by carers in the future in relation to their social security entitlements and income status (Kreimer 2006).

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SWITZERLAND

Development of family policies in the welfare state of Switzerland

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Family policies in Switzerland were traditionally a somewhat marginal field of welfare state policies. The main focus of family policies was traditionally a certain degree of financial support for low-income families, whereas childcare was seen as a private matter for the housewife within the family. Relatively little change has been made to family policies over the last two decades. Prevention of poverty in families with children is still at the centre, though the issue of whether policies should react in some way or other to changes in the population's family values has recently become a contested issue (Gerlach *et al.* 2004, p. 85; Pfau-Effinger 2006, 2007; Stutz 2006; Wecker 2006).

The share of public provision of childcare is still relatively small, and social rights to care are not established. Only 4 per cent of all public financial transfers in the field of family policies was spent on the provision of public childcare (Stutz 2006). External childcare is now more common than before, and the share of parents using it for children under 15 years has doubled since 1991 (Eidgenössisches Department des Inneren 2004, p. 87). However, external childcare, is in most cases, informal childcare given by relatives and market-based solutions such as 'daycare mothers' are only partly used. Only 16 per cent of those who use external childcare also send their children to some kind of public childcare, and 60 per cent of these children are there a maximum total of only one day per week (Eidgenössisches Department des Inneren 2004, pp. 11-12; 87-88). There are some regional differences at the cantonal level, with a higher degree of provision of public childcare in the French-speaking parts of Switzerland (*ibid.*, pp. 48-49).

Social rights connected to in-family care did not exist until recently. Before 2005, there was not even a maternity-leave scheme for employed women. Therefore, parental leave and part-time employment were only possible in the framework of financial redistribution within a male-breadwinning family. In 2005, paid maternity-leave of 14 weeks with 80 per cent of the former income was introduced, which is a first small step towards catching up with the other welfare states of Western Europe, of which the majority had already introduced maternity-leave schemes by the 1960s or 1970s (Wecker 2006; Gerlach *et al.* 2004).

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GERMANY

The reform of parental leave allowance in Germany

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In 2007, a new parental leave allowance called '*Elterngeld*' is going to be introduced in Germany. It is going to replace the former parental leave allowance (Erziehungsgeld) and has been initiated by the German Government, which is a coalition between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD). The *Elterngeld* is fully financed by taxation and is, unlike the former parental leave allowance, not means-tested. It is based on an income substitute of 67 percent of the former net-income of the care-giving parent with a fixed minimum (300 Euros/month) and maximum benefit (1,800 Euros/month). The minimum allowance of 300 Euros per month is granted for every care-giving parent regardless of employment. Unlike the former parental leave allowance, which was based on 300 Euros and was paid over 24 months (or alternately 450 Euros over 12 months), the new parental leave allowance is only granted for 12 months for the main caregiver, which in about 95 per cent of all cases in the former scheme was the mother. The scheme includes two additional 'daddy months' if the father, as well as the mother, takes over two months of care. Moreover, single parents can also receive *Elterngeld* for 14 months. It is also possible for caring parents to combine *Elterngeld* with part-time work of up to 30 working hours per week.

On the one hand, this new income-related scheme provides better conditions from a gender equality perspective than the former parental leave allowance. Unlike the former scheme, it provides caring parents with the possibility to act as financially autonomous caregivers. However, compared with the former scheme it is less favourable to caring parents in two respects:

The new possibility to act as a financially autonomous caregiver is limited to the middle classes. Women in low-income groups, which include women in occupations with low income or in part-time work, unemployed, and students, lose out through this scheme. Whereas it was possible in the framework of the former scheme to receive 300 Euros parental leave allowance for two years, this is now restricted to one year, or otherwise 150 Euros for two years.

The 12-month limit for the payment of parental leave allowance, or 14 months if both partners take it up, contradicts the organisation of public provision of care. This is particularly so in West Germany mainly based on a provision for children from three to six years. Currently, the Family Minister does not plan to extend the public provision of childcare to children younger than three.

Link to the law (draft): <http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Internetredaktion/Pdf-Anlagen/gesetzentwurf-elterngeld.property=pdf.bereich=,rwb=true.pdf> (draft law)

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The EC's parental leave directive

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The first proposal for a directive was generated by the European Commission in 1983. However, due to British opposition and the unanimity rule, the directive was not adopted. Almost 10 years later, during the Belgian Council Presidency, the debate on a European parental leave directive was resumed and led to the adoption of a general agreement in 1996. In 1997, the directive was extended to the UK and Northern Ireland (see: Falkner et al.:2002; Council Directive 96/34/EC, Council Directive 97/75/EC).

The aim of this agreement is to "set out a minimum requirement for parental leave and time off from work on the grounds of force majeure, as an important means of reconciling work and family life and promoting equal opportunities and treatment between men and women." (Council Directive 96/34/EC). The parental leave directive consists of the following agreements:

The agreement states that male as well as female workers shall have an individual right to parental leave in the case of birth or adoption of a child.

Referring to this, each member state is requested to set up a national law that allows parents to provide parental leave for at least three months.

After parental leave men and women shall have the right to return to their former position or, if not possible, to "an equivalent or similar job".

The member states are asked to establish agreements for workers to avoid dismissal related to exercising their right to parental leave.

Working parents must be granted the right for time off from work, when urgent family emergencies require their immediate presence.

Rights which workers acquire when parental leave starts must be maintained until the end of the parental leave period and shall apply afterwards. (see: Council Directive 96/34/EC)

The member states have been requested to implement these minimum requirements into national law until 1998 and are encouraged to establish more favourable regulations (see: Council Directive 96/34/EC).

References:

Council Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE; CEEP and the ETUC.

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31996L0034:EN:HTML>

Council Directive 97/75/EC of 15 December 1997 amending and extending, to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Directive 96/34/EC on the framework agreement on parental leave concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC.

http://europa.eu.int/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexapi!prod!CELEXnumdoc&lg=EN&numdoc=31997L0075&model=guichett

Falkner, Gerda; Hartlapp, Miriam; Leiber, Simone, Treib, Oliver (2002): Transforming Social Policy in Europe? The EC's Parental Leave Directive and Misfit in the 15 Member States. In: MPIfG Working Paper 02/11, October 2002.

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Herziening van het echtscheidingsrecht: Administratieve echtscheiding, mediation, voortgezet ouderschap.

(Divorce Law Reform: Administrative divorce, mediation continuation of joint parental responsibility after divorce),
Masha.V. Antokolskaia (ed.)2006
SWP, Amsterdam

This book is an academic response to two bills aimed at reforming Dutch divorce law. The first Bill was passed by the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament, but, partly due to the criticisms expressed in this book, the First Chamber scrapped the Bill in June 2006. The second Governmental Bill is presently in the Second Chamber. Both bills have important implications for post-divorce arrangements involving children. One of the main issues is an attempt to force parents to make a so-called 'parental plan' before filing a petition for divorce. A parental plan is an agreement for the post-divorce division of care and educational tasks, child maintenance, and exchange of information about the child. If the parents fail to make such an agreement, the judge could send them to a mediator or declare the petition for divorce inadmissible. The judge can also accept the petition for divorce without a parental plan, but only when he or she concludes that the parties cannot be reasonably expected to make such a plan, for instance, in case of domestic violence, or should one of the parents have psychological problems. The contributions to this show that the Dutch academic community is divided in its appreciation of the compulsory parental plan. One of the main points of criticism is that parental agreements should be encouraged with the help of positive stimuli, rather than being forced upon the parents. It is also stressed that making parental agreement an, albeit qualified, precondition for filing a unilateral petition for divorce creates conflict with article 6 ECHR. It has also been suggested that parents that are on good terms with each other have no need for binding legal arrangements. Moreover, such arrangements are not in keeping with the core idea behind the continuation of joint parental responsibility after divorce: namely that the parents should continue to decide child issues on an informal consensual basis, as they used to do when they were married. In contrast, the supporters of the compulsory parental plan maintain that it is in the interests of the parent that does not reside with the child after divorce, and therefore also in the interest of the children.

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Tyrer, P., Chase, E., Warwick, I., and Aggleton, P. (2005): 'Dealing with it': experiences of young fathers in and leaving care. British Journal of Social Work.
Yoshikawa, H. (2006): Making it work: Low-wage employment, family life, and child development, New York

International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research

A new report, *International Review of Leave Policies and Related Research*, edited by Peter Moss (Institute of Education) and Margaret O'Brien (University of East Anglia) has just been published by the UK Government's Department of Trade and Industry.

The report is the latest product from the International Network on Leave Policy and Research and contains national audits on leave arrangements in 22 countries (including maternity leave, paternity leave, parental leave provision and take-up). The impact of leave policies on children and their well-being is given special attention.

Contents include:

Parental leave policies: The impact on child well-being

Parental leave policies for mothers and fathers: children's perspectives and well-being

Leave policies and early childhood services in Hungary

Country notes on leave policies and research – Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, United States.

This publication, titled *International Review of Leave Policies and Related*

Research 2006, Employment Relations Research Series No 57 can be accessed online at: <http://www.dti.gov.uk/files/file31948.pdf>

Hard copies can be ordered from: www.dti.gov.uk/publications. Click the 'Browse' button, then select 'Employment Relations Research'. Alternatively call the DTI

Publications Orderline on 0870 1502 500 (+44 870 1502 500) or email them at: publications@dti.gsi.gov.uk

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WELLCHI NETWORK

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

3rd LOCAL AGENTS MEETING

“Children in multicultural societies”

Organized by EKKE –National Centre for Social Research– Athens, Greece.

27th March 2007

<http://www.ekke.gr/english/index.html>

PAST EVENTS

5TH WORKSHOP:**“Transmission of inequalities from generation to generation and their impact on social cohesion”.**

Organised by University of Gothenburg (Gothenburg- Sweden). 13- 14 September 2006

See: <http://www.sociology.gu.se/english>

3rd LOCAL AGENTS MEETING

“Migration, families and relationships: critical issues - future agendas”

Organised by CRFF –Centre for Research on Families and Relationships– Edinburgh, Scotland. 23rd November 2006

See: www.cfr.ac.uk

6TH WORKSHOP:**“The relationship between children and non-resident fathers and its impact on their quality of life”**

Organised by NOVA -Norwegian Social Research- (Oslo-Norway). 1- 2 December 2006

See:

3RD CONFERENCE (FINAL):**“How can the well-being of children in a knowledge-based society be ameliorated? Convergence and divergence patterns in a European perspective”**

Organised by CIIMU (Barcelona-Spain). 8- 10 February 2007.

See: <http://www.ciimu.org/webs/wellchi/>

OTHER EVENTS

1. Global Perspectives- Conference Board: 7th European Work-Life and Diversity Conference

Theme: “Solving Europe’s Productivity Puzzle: What Role for Work-Life and Diversity?”

Where: Radisson SAS Hotel, Berlin, Germany – When: October 17-19, 2006

For more information, click here:

<http://www.conference-board.org/conferences/conference.cfm?id=1193>

2. The development of public childcare and preschools in Europe - Path dependencies and change - Institutional perspectives

Thursday, 19th October - Saturday, 21st October 2006 | Germany, Hildesheim University

For more information: <http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/de/18977.htm>

http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/media/sozpaed/Hildesheim_flyer.pdf

3. Council on Contemporary Families: 2006 Symposium

Theme: "Who Cares?: Dilemmas of Work and Family in the 21st Century"

Where: University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, IL – When: October 20, 2006

For more information, click here: http://www.worldatwork.org/em/itac/conference_email.html.

4. 2006 National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) Annual Conference

Theme: “Unanswered Questions in Marriage and Family Science”

Where: Hyatt Regency, Minneapolis, MN –

When: November 8-11, 2006

For more information, click here: http://www.ncfr.org/conference_info/index.asp.

5. Global Perspectives-Community, Work and Family: Second International Conference

Where: Lisbon, Portugal – When: April 12-14, 2007

For more information, contact Maria Das Dores Guerreiro at maria.guerreiro@iscte.pe.

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1. EU

Website of the European Commission: Youth
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.html

Council of Europe & European Commission Research Partnership
http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/Youth/2_Priorities/research_partnership.asp

European Youth Centre Budapest
<http://www.eycb.coe.int/>

Informationsnetz zum Bildungswesen in Europa [The information network on education in Europe]
<http://www.eurydice.org/index.shtml>

Website of the European Council: Education, Youth and Culture
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/cms3_applications/applications/newsRoom/loadBook.asp?BID=92&LANG=1&cmsid=357

2. Austria:

Österreichisches Institut für Familienforschung [Austrian Institute for Family Studies]
<http://www.oif.ac.at/>

Statistik Österreich [Statistics Austria]
<http://www.statistik.at/>

Österreichisches Institut für Jugendforschung [Austrian Institute for Youth Research]
<http://www.oeij.at/root/start.asp>

3. Belgium

Statistics Belgium
<http://statbel.fgov.be/>

Centrum voor de Rechten van het Kind or Centre des Droits de l'Enfant [Children's Rights Centre, University of Ghent]
<http://www.centrumkinderrechten.org/>

Interuniversity Attraction Poles - Research Network on Human Rights of Children (IAP)
<http://www.law.ugent.be/pub/iuap/>

4. Luxembourg

Centre d'Études sur la Situation des Jeunes en Europe, Luxembourg
<http://www.cesije.lu/>

National Youth Service Luxembourg
<http://www.youthnet.lu/>

Le Gouvernement du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg
<http://www.etat.lu/>

5. The Netherlands

Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare – NIZW
<http://www.nizw.nl/smartsite.htm?id=4>

Verwey- Jonker Instituut, Utrecht
<http://www.verwey-jonker.nl/index.asp>

Youth Studies and Youth Policy, Department of Education University of Leiden
<http://www.leiden.edu/index.php3?m=&c=369>