

WELLCHI NETWORK

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

Sixth Framework Programme



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POLICIES AND POLITICAL REFORMS

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DENMARK

Danish family and childhood policies

Tine Rostgaard, Senior researcher, PhD
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In Denmark, family policy is aimed at supporting families in their care work and enabling them to make their own life choices. Helping parents to reconcile work and family life is an important part of this approach, and also indirectly helps reduce the risk of child poverty. The focus on childhood includes measures in the work place, encouraging firms to develop reconciliation policies. But one can also refer to the concern about ensuring sufficient day care services, thus enabling parents to take up work.

There has been an increase in institutional day care, whereas family based day care (public care for the child in a home setting) has not increased to the same degree, despite the general assumption that this is the best form of day care for a young child. As the expansion of provision took place against a backdrop of tighter economic means, the targeting of resources and increases in the number of children in day care groups have, however, led to increased concern about the quality of services. Since 1995, all children aged 1-5 years have been entitled to a place in day care, regardless of parental income, education or working status, which should ensure equal access and take-up of day care. Some municipalities have now offered a guarantee from the day that parents express a need for day care, e.g. Copenhagen municipality.

Day care services not only have to provide day care but must prevent the negative effects of coming from a less advantaged background. Day care institutions are now required to establish an early intervention, targeting children who come from disadvantaged households in terms of social, intellectual and emotional competences.

Since 2006, families have benefited from a reduction in fees for the use of day care services by children under 3 years of age. The fees have been reduced from a maximum of 33 % of total costs to a maximum of 25 %. From 2007, the day care fees for children aged 3-6 years have also been reduced. In terms of leave policies, a major controversy has arisen over the last 10 years concerning the fathers' quota, which means an individual right for fathers to parental leave. In 1997, a 2 week period of father's leave was introduced, despite criticism that few fathers used the existing possibilities for leave. Following the election of a Liberal/Conservative government in November 2001, the previous parental leave system was changed and the 2 week father's quota dropped. The new system was introduced in March 2002: in effect the new leave system provides better payment (under the old system, half the leave period was paid at 60% of the initial maternity leave benefit) but for a shorter period of leave. Parental leave now covers 52 weeks, 20 weeks for the mother only and 32 weeks to be shared between the mother and father. In contrast to other Nordic countries, Denmark no longer has a father's quota. The father has a personal entitlement to only 2 weeks paternity leave, apart from the parental leave weeks that he can share with the mother.

Another issue has recently been raised by the Minister of Family Affairs who has noted that Danish women and families have fewer children (on average 1.8) than surveys suggest they would like (2.4 children (Eurobarometer data)). The Minister notes that family policy must be evaluated by whether families have the number of children they would like. Rather than introducing new measures or policies, she suggests a public debate about the norms and rules regulating parental practices and life choices, particularly concerning the high ambitions of modern parenthood which aim to find a balance between work and family life.

New policy measures include financial support for the mediation and counselling of parents seeking to separate, thus preventing the most severe impacts of separation on children. This initiative has to be seen against the background of an increase in the divorce rate in recent years.

For more information on family policy, see the Ministry of Family and Consumer Affairs website at <http://www.minff.dk/english/>

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NORWAY

Norwegian family and childhood policies

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Family policies were very high on the Norwegian political agenda during the 1990s. During this decade parental leave was increased considerably, child-care coverage was strongly expanded, and the benefit arrangement for single parents was reshaped. All these reforms were seen as evidence that Norway was finally joining the other Nordic welfare states in developing a dual earner/ dual carer regime. Counteracting this to a certain extent was the introduction of the controversial cash-for-childcare benefit in 1998, which is a cash benefit payable to parents of children aged 1-3 who do not use publicly-sponsored childcare (Leira 1998, 2002, Skrede 1999, Brandth and Kvande 2001, Ellingsæter 2003, 2006, Skevik and Hatland 2007).

The pace of family policy reforms has slowed down in the 2000s. The current government, a centre/ left coalition headed by Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg (Labour), is strongly committed to policies for equality. As symbolic gestures, the Ministry of Children and Family Affairs has been renamed the Ministry of Children and Equality, and the former family section within the ministry has been renamed the "living together" section (the Ministry's English website is here: <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/ministries/bld.html?id=298>).

For updated information on governmental activities in the area of children and the family, see <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/Families-and-upbringing.html?id=213>

The government's most important priority in the family policy area is its commitment to full nursery coverage. This commitment is so strong that during the election campaign the Minister of Finance, who is also the leader of one of the coalition parties, threatened (or promised, depending on one's view) to leave politics for good if this aim was not achieved by 2009. By the end of 2006, the coverage rate for children aged 3-5 years old was 92.8 per cent. For 1-2 year olds, it was 61.9 per cent. In 2004, the rates were 87.7 and 47.8 respectively. So, the largest increase has occurred in the youngest age group.

Updated figures from Statistics Norway can be found here: http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/04/02/10/barnehager_en/

The government's other main promise in this area was to introduce maximum fares for parental payment in nurseries. A maximum of NOK 2250 per child per month (app. 280 EURO) was introduced from January 2006, the promise being to lower this further as soon as full coverage is achieved.

In the area of parental leave, the centre/ left coalition has extended the leave period by two weeks, both of which are reserved for the father. This has extended the total leave period to 54 weeks with 80% wage replacement, or 44 weeks with full replacement. The government's aim is to extend "daddy leave" by another three weeks, but no time scale has been presented for this.

Two of the government's coalition parties wish to abolish the cash-for-care scheme, while the third party wishes to maintain it. For the time being, the scheme is safe, though rates were decreased slightly in the annual budget.

An overview of social rights under the National Insurance Act can be downloaded from this page: http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/aid/dok/veiledninger_brosjurer/2006/A-0008-E-The-Norwegian-Social-Insurance-Scheme-2007.html?id=419518

In the area of family law, there are ongoing debates about the rights of homosexuals to adopt children, about the sharing of physical custody after parental break-up, and about enforced marriages (as practiced in some ethnic minority groups). Work is in progress in each of these areas, as announced in press releases

<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/bld/pressemeldinger/2007/Gjennomgang-av-barneloven.html?id=444828>

<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/bld/Ryddemappe/SLA-Avdeling/p30009336/Regjeringen-utredet-felles-ekteskapslov-for-heterofile-og-homofile-par.html?id=417752>

<http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/aid/pressemeldinger/2006/Tvangsekteskap-skal-ikke-aksepteres.html?id=271976>

(press releases are only available in Norwegian).

Two of the three parties in the coalition government are committed to equal rights for homosexual and heterosexual couples, and this includes the right of same-sex couples to adopt children. Also, there is a strong commitment to children's rights to equal contact with both parents even when the parents do not live together.

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GREECE

Greek family and childhood policies

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The rising participation of married women in the labour market, and the increase in the numbers of divorces and births out of wedlock have led to the redefinition of gender roles in and out of the household and to the economic independence of Greek women. While, to a certain extent, two working-parent families are starting to become the norm, and despite the changes in social roles, the idea of gender equality in the domestic sphere has only recently been recognized. It is evident that the re-organisation of economic responsibilities was not accompanied by a redistribution of domestic responsibilities in the context of two-working parent families.

In relation to social policy it seems that there is a gradual transition from "provisional family status quo" to more "individualistic structures and provisions". Nonetheless, since mentalities and practices in the context of everyday life are not currently changing, reforms in the welfare state will not be accompanied by new services e.g. paid leave for parents, nurseries etc. Nevertheless, some laws and some regulations regarding the reconciliation of family life and work only indirectly contain elements that can be considered to reinforce family life and children's wellbeing.

Furthermore, the internal rationale of family benefits is related to family size. Emphasis is placed on large families (3+ children), thus leaving out thousands of families and households. This direction subordinates social policy for the family to the commands of demographic policy focusing all public support on families with many children ("polyteknes" in Greek). The provisions neither take into account the new developments and changes in the institution of the family nor the new functions of its members in the framework of reciprocal obligations and responsibilities in the private sphere.

The provisions to families with many children are not limited to economic support but also include many measures of privileged treatment, such as the employment of parents in the public sector, a priority in mortgage approval, exemption from car purchase taxes, cut-price tickets etc. These provisions are not connected to one's income and cannot be considered to be related to the reduction of poverty.

An important law was adopted by the Greek Parliament in 2006

A. The new «Family support and other regulations» law that was passed on 28/3/2006 provides a 2,000 Euro benefit to families with a third child, as well as for every child after the third, irrespective of other benefits. Also, the status of "polyteknos" is bestowed on families parentally caring for three children (rather than four, as was defined previously) from the same or other marriages (the children must be unmarried, under 23 years of age or studying in state recognized higher education institutions) and the parents must live in Greece permanently and must be Greek or EU citizens.

However, the benefits allocated to single parents (mothers) are very low and in no case do they cover the cost of children's upbringing.

B. The statute (Act 3500/24-10-2006) aims to prevent and combat violence in domestic life. On 10 October 2006 the statute against violence in the family was adopted. This Act punishes certain criminal offences, which constitute violence mainly against women and children with heavier sentences than the Penal Code while it introduces a wide concept of the family. It also makes coercion of a spouse to sexual intercourse by the other spouse (intermarital rape) a punishable offence. Moreover, it makes domestic violence a rebuttable presumption of marriage breakdown. The act also introduces judicial

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violence a rebuttable presumption of marriage breakdown. The act also introduces judicial mediation to be conducted by the public prosecutor.

Successful Good Practices:

- the introduction of “**day-long municipal kindergarten and day-long primary public schools**” to help working parents with family obligations and deal with the ‘relief of the working mother’ and the prevention of interruptions to women’s work as well as providing the opportunity for non-working mothers to work

Flexible and part-time work. Breastfeeding

- **In the public sector**, mothers are entitled to a reduction of two hours a day for children up to the age of two and a one-hour reduction for children aged two to four. The working mother (if she does not make use of reduced working hours) **is also eligible for nine (9) months paid leave to look after the child (law 2683/1999)**. This allows for mothers to be with their babies for almost a year after childbirth.

However, the characteristics of family benefits + measures in Greece are: complexity, lack of homogeneity and coordination, fragmentariness and inequality of provisions among various social groups. Problems mainly concern:

- the gap between those with practical knowledge and those who are in decision making.
- the lack of permanent funding
- bad coordination and lack of cooperation between various governmental agencies for the reduction of overlapping practices.

Moreover, the danger of divorce and births out of wedlock are continuously rising, which results in a decrease in traditional families and the greater presence of single parent families, which therefore leads to deteriorations in the position of women since they have to face even more responsibilities.

SWEDEN

Academic Mobilization in favour of Swedish parents

Translation of an article published in *Dagens Nyheter*, August 21st, 2006

Let the state pay for a reduction in the working hours for parents

The Swedish right wing alliance’s proposal for a care allowance system has negative consequences for families. Parents must be given the opportunity to reduce their working hours, as this increases gender equality and improves family life. Employers, unions and employees should act together.

Almost all parents that work for 40 hours or more report stress and a lack of time for their family relations. This difficulty to combine work and family life has inspired proposals for political measures that enable parents to make their family their priority for a few years. “Care allowance” is the common name for such systems. The Christian Democratic Party in Sweden has been working on this issue for a long time and now all of the right wing alliance parties have offered similar proposals. In a recent poll by SIFO, 64 percent of the population agree that the state should make it financially possible for parents to be at home with their children until they are 4 years old.

We are a group of Swedish and foreign researchers that wish to highlight the very negative consequences of systems based on care allowance and to present a proposal that reduces the pressure on family time and increases gender equality.

In Finland and Norway, where the care allowance system exists, 95% of the parents concerned are women. This means a return to the traditional repartition of tasks, with women taking care of children while men earn money. The consequences for women are financially and professionally negative, as well as the impact on society. Indeed, women affected by long parental leaves are often young women with a low education and no permanent professional activity. There is a high risk of them not being able to find a good job at the end of their leave and therefore remaining dependent on social welfare for a long time.

The system also has a negative impact on the relations between the father and his children. Indeed, as the father is given full responsibility for earning money, he will have to work more and will have less time with the children. Moreover, the full time presence of the mother at home does not facilitate close relations between the father and children. The care allowance system is therefore worsening the “men trap” problem: fathers can not have close relations with their children.

Finally, as children’s well being is highly dependent on their parents’ life satisfaction, the care allowance system could have a negative affect on the child. In addition, many of the children who would need to spend time in a day care centre, the children of parents who do not speak Swedish for example, will not go there.

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Considering these different elements, it appears that “time pressure” within families can not be solved very well by care allowance. On the contrary, we are convinced that the solution is to find how working life can be made more family friendly.

Today, the principle is that when an employee works, someone else is paid to care for their child and do housework. Even if this no longer corresponds to reality, the demands for performance in working life have not lowered. Flexibility is presented as the new solution, but in practice, flexitime as a possibility for working from home, which was supposed to facilitate conciliation between work and family life is unsatisfactory. In fact it has negative consequences. For example flexitime creates blurrier boundaries between work and private life and research shows that flexible working hours cannot compensate for the negative effects of long working hours.

We believe that a “parent track” is needed in working life, i.e. a way to participate in working life that is compatible with family life. It is absurd to expect the same behaviour from parents of small children as from individuals without children. In order to establish a “parent track”, the norms and actions of employers, unions and employees have to be altered.

To support the creation of a “parent track” we suggest a political reform offering mothers and fathers the possibility of reducing their working week by 5 hours, with sufficient compensation for the lost salary from the state.

Mothers of small children have worked more hours in recent last decades. This has been an important step towards improving gender equality, but at the same time has created problematic situations. Research shows that one out of four of all full time working parents have a total workload of over 80 hours per week (incl. housework and caring for children).

Discontent with long working hours is so strong that a third of all mothers and fathers working 40 hour weeks report that they would prefer fewer hours even if that meant a lower salary. The fact that parents with children under the age of eight do not work for fewer hours, even if they are legally entitled to do so, shows that the 40-hour norm is extremely rigid. A voluntary reduction in working time for parents, with some salary compensation, could be a real solution to facilitate family life.

(...)

Our suggestion based on a small reduction in working hours offers several advantages. First, a parent with a regular 40-hour job can normally hold onto it. The employee and the manager simply need to find ways of reorganising the work (this is also an opportunity for rationalisations). Second, if the burden on the family is reduced substantially, both parents can make use of this opportunity. We believe that many modern couples would both take this decision in order to facilitate their everyday life.

To make the system attractive, we suggest the creation of an “equality bonus”: if one parent reduces their working hours the compensation from the state is 30 % of the salary reduction, it could be 90% of the highest salary if both parents choose this option. This system would reduce the risk of a choice of only the mother’s working time being reduced.

In fact, just as “daddy months” have made male parental leave more acceptable, we believe that our proposal would make the idea of fathers adjusting their work to the needs of the family more acceptable.

With the aforementioned compensation levels the voluntary reduction in working hours would mean a total reduction in income of about five percent (depending on whether one or two parents use this possibility). Five percent is a level that most families with two 40-hour salaries could manage, with some adjustments required for single parent families (the compensation could then be 100 %). We believe that our proposal, as opposed to care allowance, would be attractive to many parents.

According to our calculations, if the reform only concerns the mothers and fathers of children under the age of four, the cost would “only” be equivalent to a fifth of what the parental leave scheme costs today. Since the proposal offers parents a good solution to participate in the labour market it can be seen as a defence of the Swedish “working line” with potential societal gains. The proposal would also contribute to loosening today’s rigid gender roles and 40 hour norms – it would be a major improvement in freedom of choice. But of course, it is ultimately a matter of political priorities and of which society we wish to create.

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LEWIS, Jane (ed), *Children, changing families and Welfare States*. Edward Elgar. 2006, 308 pages

The papers of this book edited by Jane Lewis were first presented at one of the WELLCHI network conferences. It proposes an analysis of the main consequences for children of the profound restructuring of the EU welfare states over the last two decades, but also of the complex transformations of families. The starting point for this reflection is related to the new attention being paid to children by policymakers and in particular by EU experts. As Jane Lewis stated: "the reorientation of the modern welfare state towards expenditure that can be represented in terms of investment, whether in the form of active labour market policies (rather than 'passive' welfare benefits for the unemployed), or family policies to support children as future investments is new" (p. 3). This attention is usually qualified as the "social investment strategy", which means that children are at stake as future "citizen workers". Contrarily to a "repairing" welfare state, which tries to regulate the negative impacts on adults of the new globalized economy, this perspective consists of preventing the social problems of the new generations by investing in childhood in different ways. The first section of the book proposes an analysis of this new strategy in order to understand its different backgrounds (Jane Jenson and Ruth Lister). As a matter of fact, the explicit and implicit objectives of such a strategy are complex: they are related to the promotion of children as real citizens, but also with the threat of the rapid aging of the EU population, due to an insufficient birth rate. This strategy is also related to the promotion of gender equality, but also to the obsession with promoting an adult worker model. The second section is centred on specific investments in children ('paying for children'), looking at child benefits packages from a comparative perspective (Jonathan Bradshaw, Ulla Björnberg and Fran Bennett). The third section looks at childcare policies ('caring for children'), whether that be looking at the cultural dimension of care and employment policies (Birgit Pfau-Effinger), or at the pedagogical discourse that sometimes takes the place of discourse on care (Peter Moss) and at the role of such ideas as those promoted by the OCDE in the field of care policies (Rianne Mahon). The final section is dedicated to the work – life balance issue and its contradictions, looking in more detail at different national contexts (Marie-Thérèse Letablier for France; Ute Klammer for Germany, Dianne Perrons for UK and Barbara Hobson, Ann-Zofie Duvander and Karin Halldén for Sweden). This book is certainly a crucial reference for debates on childhood policies on an EU level. Claude Martin (CNRS, France)

WALFOGEL, Jane : *What Children need*. Cambridge, Harvard University press. 2006, 269 pages

Editor's presentation:

What do children need, and how can their needs be met in today's world, with both parents working and the number of single-parent families increasing? This book offers bold answers, based on analysis and argument that avoid the extremes of predictable left- and right-wing ideology. Emphasizing core cultural values of parental choice, quality of care, and work, the economist Jane Waldfogel guides readers through the maze of social science research on families, work arrangements, and child development to offer big-picture conclusions and recommendations for change. Waldfogel proposes a seven-point plan to meet the needs of children in working families while reconciling choice, quality and employment. She argues for policies that: allow parents more flexibility to take time off work for family responsibilities; break the link between employment and essential family benefits, such as health insurance; give mothers and fathers the opportunity to spend more time at home in a child's first year of life; improve the quality of care for infants and toddlers, by tightening standards and providing more support for promising programs such as Early Head Start; improve the quality of care and education for pre-school-aged children, by expanding successful programs such as Head Start and prekindergarten; increase access to high-quality out-of-school programs for school-aged children and teenagers; increase the role of schools by extending the school day and year. This timely book tells us how we can invest wisely in programs that will benefit our children and ultimately all of us.

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INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

WELLCHI NETWORK

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/>

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>

OTHER EVENTS

National Child Care Conference

Halifax (Canada), June 15-17 2007
<http://www.ccnsc.org/ocean.html>

ISCI (International Society on Child Indicators)

Inaugural Conference in Chicago in June 2007:

<http://www.childindicators.org>,

For registration, please visit:

<http://www.acteva.com/go/chapin>

Migrations and Citizenships

II International Conference on Ethnography and Education

Barcelona, 5-8 September 2007
<http://seneca.uab.es/antropologia/emigra/congres/eng/presentacio.html>

INTERESTING LINKS

- **Foundation for Child Development** (United States)
<http://www.fcd-us.org/>
[FCD's 2007 Child Well-Being Index page](http://www.fcd-us.org/) includes the full report, and links to charts that provide details of the individual indicators comprising each domain as well as disparities by race and ethnicity.

- **OECD's Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers** (www.oecd.org/els/workingpapers) Working Papers No. 51 (by Peter Whiteford and Willem Adema) and No. 52 (by Anna Cristina d'Addio) were previously presented, respectively, at Conference 2 – Hamburg and Conference 3 – Barcelona of the Wellchi Network.

- **OECD Family Database** (www.oecd.org/els/social/family/database)

Follow up of the *OECD Babies and Bosses* reviews on the reconciliation of work and family life in selected Member States, and in view of the strong demand for cross-national indicators on the situation of families and children, the OECD has developed an on-line database on family outcomes and family policies with indicators for all OECD countries.

- **Innocenti Report Card 7, Child Poverty in Perspective: An Overview of Child Well-being in Rich Countries**; issued on February 2007. Available in English, French and Spanish in pdf. version.
(<http://www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/>)

WELLCHI Links:

- Access the Final Conclusions and discuss them (http://www.ciimu.org/webs/wellchi/discussion_forum.htm)

- Contributions presented at the Final Conference (Barcelona Feb 2007) downloadable at: http://www.ciimu.org/webs/wellchi/conference_3.htm

- **Wellchi Working Paper Series.** New titles:

Bradshaw, J. “Beyond Child Poverty”
Pfau-Effinger, B. “The Relationship between Family and Employment and the Well-being of Children”
Bühler-Niederberger, D. “The Power of Innocence. Social Politics for Children between Separation and Participation”
Kurczewski, J & Oklej, A. “Polish Grandparents and Grandchildren - Mutual Normative Expectations”
Roca Trias, E. “Homosexual Families: Adoption and Foster Care”
Comas d'Argemir, D. “Family Today: Individuality and Public Policies”

To access the Working Papers, please visit <http://www.ciimu.org/webs/wellchi/publications.htm>