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Abstract

'REGIMES' OF RECONCILIATION: EUROPEAN WELFARE STATES SUPPORTING WORKING PARENTS AND PARENTING WORKERS

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This paper analyses childcare policies of the EU Member States looking at whether and how they support parents of under-school-age children to combine working and parenting. Previous research has often used conceptual dualisms like mothers vs. workers or carers vs. earners. The paper however suggests that these dichotomies can not capture the full variety of social policies that are practised in different European countries and brings up a two-dimensional notion of working parent/parenting worker that could be included in conceptual frameworks of comparative social policy analyses. In addition to policies that are promoting either working or caring, a considerable and increasing number of social policies aim to promote the combination of work and care. However, even when promoting the combination of these two roles, reflecting national priorities, welfare states may focus their support more on the parental caring role (supporting 'working parents') or on the work role (supporting 'parenting workers').

The paper will use this new conceptualisation to analyse childcare policies of different European welfare states. The main question is: which roles or role combinations do childcare policies, including care service provisions as well as parental leave and payment schemes, of different European welfare states promote? The data come primarily from European and OECD statistics that are used to cluster EU Member States into different groups. Country examples from each cluster are then taken into more detailed examination. The analysis is done taking into account the deeply gendered character of European labour market structures, looking at reconciliation policies focusing on both mothers and fathers of under-school age children.