

## **Maternity Legislation in Estonia and Ireland: a critical juncture?**

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This paper draws on path dependency theory to explore continuities and change in maternity protection legislation in relation to time (leave) and money (benefits) in Ireland and Estonia. The choice of countries allows for the consideration of the relationship between religious ideas and political ideologies and the development of social policies. Both societies have changed unrecognisably in the last eighty years since they achieved independence, Estonia in 1918 and Ireland in 1921. Ireland has changed from an economically depressed, inward-looking protectionist state to a thriving outward-looking Celtic Tiger economy and member of the European Union, now facing the challenges of the global economic recession. Estonia experienced a brief period of independence, followed by 50 years of Soviet occupation and re-independence which then enabled the country to become a member of the European Union. Both are small countries on the periphery of powerful colonising eastern neighbours. Both countries inherited the germs of social policy from their former overlords. Drawing on path dependency theory this article explores critical junctures which have shaped maternity policies for the future. It shows that in both countries, despite major changes and ‘explosions’ continuities persist. It suggests that path dependency may be a useful theory as we go forward in highlighting the current economic crisis as an ‘explosive moment’ which will undoubtedly shape policies for women in Ireland and raises issues in relation to future continuities and change.