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# Multiple meanings of care across time and space: policy resources for working parents and carers

Prof. Mara A. Yerkes  
Utrecht University

# ERC-CoG CAPABLE: Enhancing Capabilities? Rethinking work-life policies and their impact from a new perspective

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# Background and motivation

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- 2019 WLB directive: intention to ease work-care combinations for working parents and working carers
- Member state response: introduce/extend policies to meet the guidelines of the directive
- Problem: introduce/extend policy  $\neq$  improving the capabilities of working parents and working carers in equal ways
- Policies based on assumptions of meaning of care for parents and carers





# Background and motivation (2)

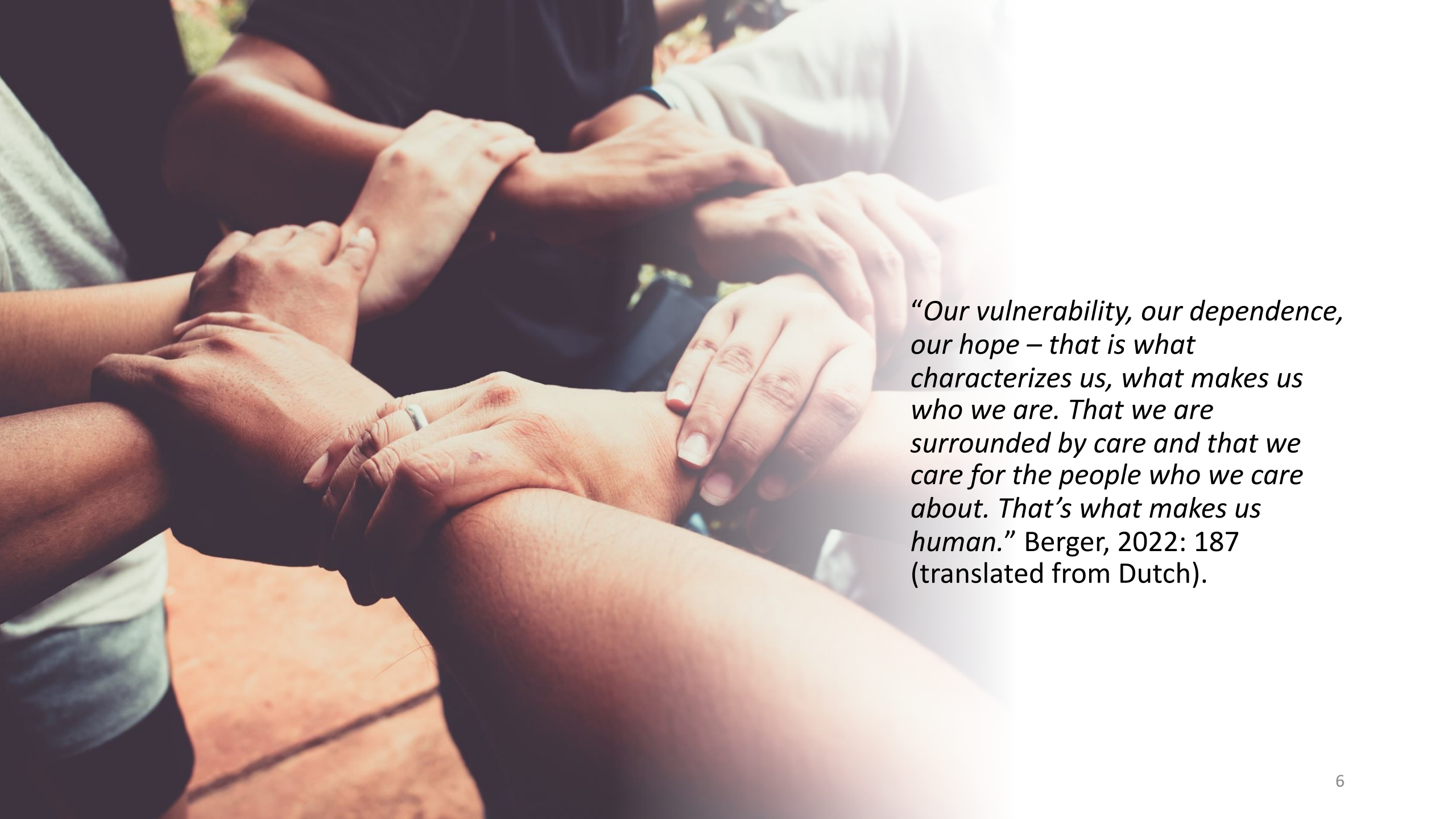
- Spatial variation: WLB directive=(supra)national level
  - Little attention for meanings of care contextualized in local contexts
- Temporal variation: WLB directive/national policies focused on singular periods of working and caring
  - Fails to capture dynamic and changing meanings of care and caring (see, e.g., Doucet, 2022).



# Research questions



- How do working parents and working carers experience providing care?
- How does gender shape these experiences?
- How do these gendered meanings of care differ across time and space?



*“Our vulnerability, our dependence, our hope – that is what characterizes us, what makes us who we are. That we are surrounded by care and that we care for the people who we care about. That’s what makes us human.” Berger, 2022: 187 (translated from Dutch).*



# Rich literature on care

- Care: a(n) (undervalued) social good (Daly and Lewis, 1998; Daly, 2002; Tronto, 2013)
  - In a societal context in which care is assumed to be of importance but the meaning working parents and carers attach to providing care is taken for granted, greater exploration of the meaning of care is needed.
- Care is contextualized (Doucet, 2023; Knijn and Kremer, 1997; Kremer, 2007; Thomas, 1993; Tronto, 2013; many others)

# What meaning for care?

- Capability:
  - Freedom (to live the life one has reason to value);
  - Real opportunity; Effectively able to do or be (Robeyns, 2017; Sen, 1992)
- Achieved functionings (outcomes) vs. *valued* functionings (Sen, 1992; Kurowska, 2018; Robeyns, 2017; Yerkes et al., 2019)



# Data and methods

- Longitudinal interviews:
  - Amsterdam / Nijmegen, the Netherlands
  - Ljubljana / Maribor, Slovenia
  - Barcelona / Pamplona, Spain
  - London / Leeds, United Kingdom
- Working carers and working parents
- Purposive sampling by caregiver status, gender and education / socio-economic position
- Wave 1 (112 semi-structured): Nov 2021 – March 2022; Wave 2 (89 in-depth) Nov 2022 – March 2023
- Deductive and inductive coding (grounded theory; e.g., Timonen et al., 2018)

# Interviews

NL	W1	W2	Attrition	Which groups?
AMS	14	12		People from Nijmegen more than Amsterdam; lots of parents; 2 with ethnically diverse backgrounds; mostly tertiary educated
NIJ	14	9		
Total	28	21	25%	
<b>SLO</b>				
LJB	15	11		3 cases from MAR and 4 from LJB, mostly vocational educated, 4 parents and 3 carers
MAR	6	3		
Total	21	14	33%	
<b>ES</b>				
BAR	16	13		All parents; vocational (BAR) to tertiary (PAM) educated
PAM	17	15		
Total	33	28	15%	
<b>UK</b>				
LON	17	13		
LEE	13	13		
Total	30	26	13%	

# Preliminary results



# Care temporalities

*“I’ve been doing all these things forever. All my life, since I was 12, I have been cooking for her. [...] She lives quite comfortably and I work all day.”* Female less formally educated working carer (and parent), Ljubljana

*“So I’m doing quite well, I’m not the typical sandwich generation that has both at the same time, so it’s just kind of, it’s been a transition.”* Female formally educated working carer (and parent), Ljubljana

*“To me, I think it’s come on gradually, the increased burden of it. I had to find time. That’s why I reduced my hours. I had to find time. That’s what prompted me to retire and return. And then one of the big changes is that obligation to go so frequently to check that she’s okay and trying to find cover for holidays and weekends away. So I find that difficult, getting away without knowing that she won’t have anybody for a couple of days.”* Female formally educated working carer (and parent), Leeds

# Care temporalities (II)

*“We know that it’s a ritual every day. And we struggle our way through it and know that once again we’ll have quiet moments together, because if the kids are at school from 08:30 to 14:00, then she (his wife) only has the 11-month old. So yeah, that’s not too bad and she can just do the things, household cleaning sitting on the couch for a minute or just drinking a coffee. And she says that. And that it’s momentarily hectic in the mornings and getting the kids from school in the afternoon and after that, it’s actually good. Until we go to bed, and then its good, actually.”* Vocationally educated working father, Nijmegen

*“To me, I think it’s come on gradually, the increased burden of it. I had to find time. That’s why I reduced my hours. I had to find time. That’s what prompted me to retire and return. And then one of the big changes is that obligation to go so frequently to check that she’s okay and trying to find cover for holidays and weekends away. So I find that difficult, getting away without knowing that she won’t have anybody for a couple of days.”* Female formally educated working carer (and parent), Leeds

# Care spatialities

- *“I think the first time she had a stroke, I was up at the hospital every day, but this time she was at, like a further hospital and I was working at the same time and I wasn’t going up a day.”* Female formally educated working carer, London
- *“But the house (next to my mother’s) had to be bought. And it was crazy to start up the tourist apartments (...) with these apartments, I was also able to pay a person to take care of my mother. (...) what alternative would I have had if I had not been able to live next to my mother? Well, I don't know, I don't know. (...) Her home was very important to her. Nursing homes are a horror.”* Female formally educated working carer (and parent), Barcelona





# Temporalities and spatialities

- *“I think I’d run out of hours. [...] so that then it would be easier to coordinate all that, so that maybe then I would have more time, so that I don’t know if I’m working out in the morning before work, but I’m not going to go and pick up my daughter, say, earlier, like that. I’ll see how I can manage that, or at least just work for 8 hours, right, so that it would be easier to combine all of that, or let’s say we don’t have a day care near us now, we have a day care in [town], and that would be easier if I could work to the day care, let’s say.”* Female formally educated working mother, Ljubljana



# Next steps

- Ongoing coding and discussions
- Exploring multiple themes:
  - Meanings of care
    - Change within individuals across time
    - Similarities / differences across localities
    - Gender shaping / being shaped by care
  - Role of agency
    - PhD candidate (Samuel Briones) considering agency manifestations in work-care arrangements

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Thanks for  
listening!

: [M.A.Yerkes@uu.nl](mailto:M.A.Yerkes@uu.nl)

: [www.worklifecapabilities.com](http://www.worklifecapabilities.com)

: [www.cogisnl.eu](http://www.cogisnl.eu)



# Appendix

# Care processes (Doucet, 2023)

- Caring about / attentiveness, also meting unmet needs
- Caring for: considering how to best meet these needs
- Care-giving (actually providing care)
- Care-receiving (making judgments about the care received, adequacy, quality)
- Caring with (collective responsibilities, social policies attempting to facilitate care)



# SPI: Work-life balance policies at multiple levels

- National:
  - Flexible work arrangements and childcare services - resources for whom?
  - Digitalization and perceived access to childcare allowances
- Organizational
  - Perceptions of childfree employees accessing work-life balance policies in organisations
- Local
  - **Discourse and regulation of early childhood education and care across 8 European cities**
  - **The role of long-term care services in the work-life balance of informal carers in Europe**



Photo credit: [www.bluediamondgallery.com](http://www.bluediamondgallery.com)

# SPs 2-5: The role of individual, community, and social contexts

- Living valued lives during the Covid-19 pandemic: inequalities of gender and class
- Functional literacy and childcare accessibility in the Dutch childcare market
- Challenging notions of part-time work: Cross-country and occupational differences in part-time/full-time employment status reporting
- **How do working carers value different ways of combining care and paid work? Insights from eight European local settings**
- **Multiple meanings of care across time and space: policy resources for working parents and carers**



# Opportunities for collaboration

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