



## **Response Hestia Internet consultation: amendment to the law on non-indexation of maximum hourly rate for childcare allowance in 2026**

Hestia Childcare's priority is to invest in quality, pedagogy, the living environment, the continuous development of employees and contributing to social projects within the society (locally and on a national level). This short-sighted proposal has a negative effect on three important groups in our society: the children, the pedagogical professionals who guide children in their development and upbringing in their early years, and the parents. It is impudent that the government is considering harming three such crucial groups.

Due to the strict standardized legislation and the continuous staff shortage, there is no room for structural cost savings. The majority of the prize consists of personnel costs. In this market of staff shortage, but also because of the important work that our pedagogical professionals perform, it is essential that they are well rewarded. This requires that the hourly rate grows in line with collective bargaining developments (CAO) and inflation.

This means that organizations don't have room to look for cost savings to avoid an increase in rates. There is a high risk that this will lead to a reduction in investments in the above-mentioned quality.

This also concerns low-income households that are already entitled to the maximum reimbursement percentage of 96% in the childcare allowance, and will soon have to pay proportionately more in 2026. For the lowest incomes, a few extra tens of euros per month can be a reason to take a child out of daycare.

While we know how essential it is for the development of children to be able to go to childcare. Regardless of where your cradle is. Parents, and certainly parents who are not yet familiar with our childcare system, will try to avoid making use of childcare in the event of an unreliable financing policy and excessive costs. With all the consequences for the children and the labour market. It does not look at the broader perspective, in which children benefit from being guided in their development by professionals from an early age. Early detection of problems in the family or child is crucial in relieving the burden on education and youth care.

This measure will increase the inequality of opportunity among children in the Netherlands. This also increases the inequality of opportunity among women. Research still shows that in the Netherlands, women tend to work less if childcare is too expensive for the family. Additional indexation took place in 2023. Over a long period of time, indexation has been insufficient. As a result, the difference between rates and the maximum hourly rate has increased in the past. The extra indexation has partly restored that. As a result of this proposal, the maximum hourly rate will once again become even less realistic than it already was.

The government has expressed its desire to focus even more on the quality of childcare, more supervision, more safety and the further professionalization of employees. This is partly in response to a number of (life-threatening) incidents, but also because the need for high-quality childcare for every child is becoming increasingly loud. To make childcare safer, space is needed for training and coaching of employees. What we see in the sector is that there is an increasing demand within childcare (in addition to regular care) for specialist knowledge for children with extra care needs. The

subsidised institutions that offer this specialist care are also struggling with staff shortages and have long waiting lists. The childcare centre is often told that these children must be supervised on location; Inclusive childcare for children with additional guidance needs is the trend. This means that the staff must be properly trained (which costs money) and that they are burdened with a higher workload (risk of higher absenteeism and changes in the group which does not do the development and safety of the children any good). Here, too, families with lower incomes are the victims, because private specialist care is available for higher incomes, if a childcare facility could not provide it. Again, this increases inequality of opportunity.

The cuts are completely at odds with the struggle to live up to this position. This does not support (time) investments made by the own Ministry in recent years. And the enormous efforts of the entire sector to make all these continuous legislative changes and adjustments and wishes from the government continuously possible in practice. Enormous flexibility and resilience are required from a sector that has been overburdened for decades.