

What works, what doesn't:

International perspectives
on balancing work and care



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social fund
in the czech
republic



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editorial:

Dear readers,

This publication will present you with examples of work-life balance provisions in several European countries: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany and Poland. International perspectives from countries which are geographically, culturally and historically related to the Czech Republic can lend direction and inspiration to the policy makers who shape the family, social and employment policies in the Czech Republic now and in the future. Although we culturally share many notions on gender roles and the position of women and men with our neighbours, the texts in this publication show there are great differences among the specific policies in each country and their impact on the real lives of women and men.

Julia Kubisa from Poland, for example, describes the development of family policy in Poland in the last decade and its effects, including the legal aspects regarding professional babysitting, the abolishment of the parental allowance, and the policy of paternity leave. Good practices in these areas are discussed by Ol'ga Pietruřova and Maria Jackova, who describe work-life balance provisions and flexible parental allowance mechanisms in Slovakia. In addition, examples from Germany illustrate a well-conceived and stable approach to family policy. A series of interviews with Czech women living abroad gives a comparative perspective on work-life balance policies in different countries and the ways these policies affect families' choices and living conditions.

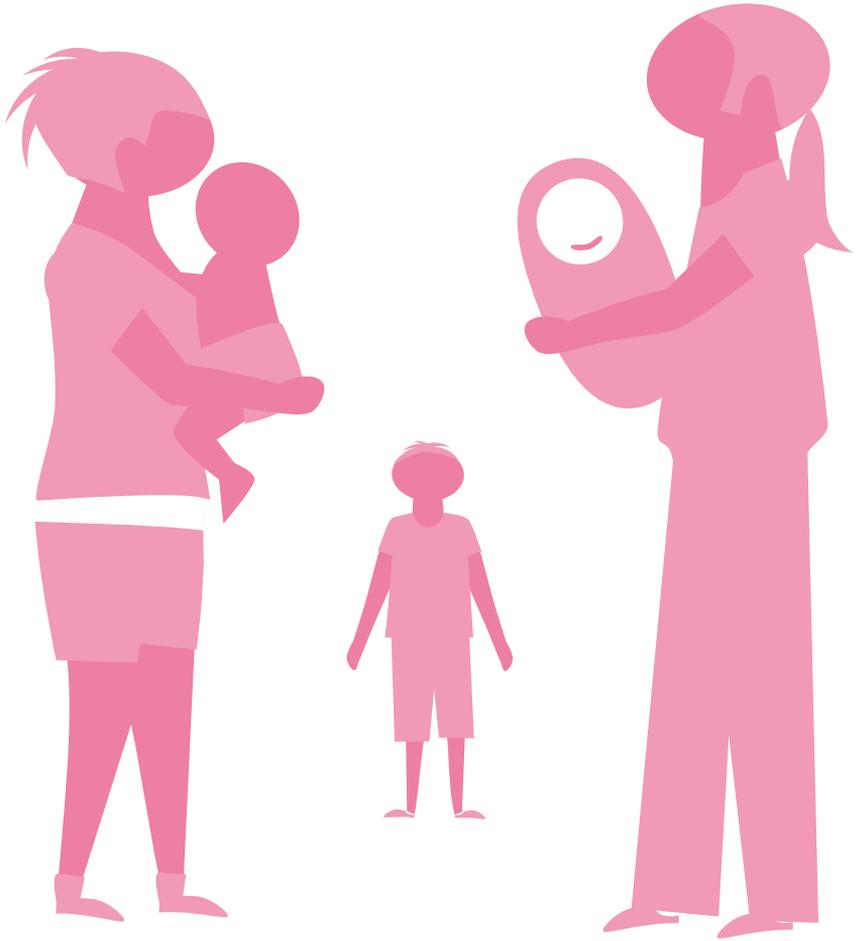
Big changes in work-life balance policies and the relevant legislation were taking place when this publication was in production. In her article, Linda Sokařova comments on these changes. She points out the conflicts between various intentions and actual provisions and concludes that the current transformation has not been entirely positive. For example, the process of making parental leave benefits more flexible and more supportive for employment among parents has been accompanied by the closing down of pu-

blic kindergartens and nurseries. However, the text about nurseries in Prague 4 shows that the nursery situation in the country is not completely dire and that there are very well functioning systems in place as well.

We hope this publication will not only be an inspiring collection of good practices but also serve as a resource for policy makers, professionals, NGOs, and organizations that support parents and caregivers.

Enjoy,

Jitka Kolářová a Nina Bosničová, editors.





(Non-)Making of Family Policy in the Czech Republic

Linda Sokačová

In the Czech Republic, family policies are coordinated and implemented primarily by the government, by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. The other essential actors in shaping family policy are the counties and municipalities as the funders of various supporting activities and measures. One of the most distinct features of the current family policy is the fact that the system of maternal and parental leave has been changing every year. This has been very problematic, also because these changes affect other welfare benefits and make the entire system of social care all the more confusing. Good family policy is comprehensive – besides parents on maternity and parental leave, it provides for citizens at all the stages of the life course, including seniors, youth with disabilities, orphans and others. Unfortunately in the Czech context, these types of care have not been getting the attention they deserve. Municipal and county-level decision-makers are concerned with little more than parental and maternal leave and pre-school care.

The last two administrations have pushed care services (childcare, elderly care, etc.) away from institutions to families. The positive aspects of this trend are several. First, it facilitates the emergence of new types of services. Second, it helps break the rigidity of care institutions and finally, it leads to improved client rights. On the other hand, it puts the responsibility for care upon individuals and families who must ensure that dependents, such as children, elderly or persons with disabilities, are provided for without the assistance of the government, which is not building a support infrastructure or special support measures. In the context of economic changes and the transformation of the social care system, families and individuals are under growing pressure.

In addition, effects of some the proposed provisions are contradictory. On one hand, the governmental funding for social care providers such as senior homes is being cut and on the other, the deregulation of the housing market is leading to a rise in rental fees. As a result, elderly citizens face severe economic and social consequences including social isolation. We can see corresponding trends in the area of parental leave policies. The administration is interested in supporting commercial and company childcare at the expense of public kindergartens and nurseries. This puts parents, particularly mothers carrying the burden of childcare, in a double bind. They cannot find a job unless their child is guaranteed a place in the kindergarten but kindergartens do not accept children of unemployed parents. Frequently, public kindergartens give preference to children of working parents.

The motto of the current administration is the reduction of the budget deficit and responsible financial planning. Under this premise, the government has not only cut welfare benefits and reduced investments in social services. It has decreased its support and funding of the public sector, which plays a crucial role in developing family policies and promoting equal opportunities.

Maternity and Parental Leave, Childcare Services and Facilities, Flexibility and Job Market

The governmental strategy of maternal and parental leave has a number of positive points but some of its critical elements may aggravate the social status of families. First of all, the policy of maternal/parental leave lacks support measures that would enable caregivers, especially mothers, better participation in the job market. The supply of childcare services is not meeting the demand on the part of working parents at the moment. Second, there are no provisions that would extend social security and government support to caregivers who stay at home in the long term. As a result, homemakers, for example, receive dramatically low retirement pension.

The good news is the removal of the ban on making an income in addition to parental leave allowance. Parents on leave can now work as much as they like, for as much money as they like and on the basis of any kind of contract. The only remaining barrier to employment in the case of parents on leave is that most of them cannot continue in the same job with the same employer as prior to leave. For some parents, this is a great problem, particularly for employees working in institutions using fixed salary schemes because these organizations are usually not flexible enough to re-define job positions.

The new system of parental allowance, which has been in force since January 1st, 2012, has also changed the previous limits on the days a child of a parent claiming leave benefits could use institutional childcare per month. This change applies to both parents starting leave this year and those whose benefits were set by the former regulations (if they are interested). Children under two years old can now attend nursery or kindergarten for up to 46 hours per month and there are no limits for older children anymore. For working parents, this amendment means a fundamental improvement of the system as long as they manage to place their child in a public kindergarten or nursery. With children younger than three, this is still very difficult.

In contrast to other gender experts, I believe that the unusually long period of parental leave is beneficial to families. The standard duration is 3 years. If

the parent's employer agrees to grant the employee unpaid leave, this period can be prolonged to 4 years. In this case, the legal guarantee of the previous job position no longer applies. Parental leave is not mandatory: parents are free to end it any time. Moreover, parental allowance and parental leave are two distinct legal institutes which are provided independently from each other. Parental leave therefore represents a protective measure and an option for parents who wish, need or have to stay at home (due to lack of access to institutional care or because of discrimination) with their children for the long term. Upon agreement with their employer, parents taking leave are also allowed to work part-time or on a temporary basis and thus remain active in the job market. Many women returning from parental leave struggle with finding a job. These challenges, however, are not simply a consequence of being out of work for three or four years. They are related to discrimination, prejudice, lack of childcare services and a lack of flexible contracts, which promote work-life balance. Parents living in small towns and in the country who commute to work find work-life balance most difficult to reach.

Anti-discrimination provisions, accessible childcare services and positive flexibility are some of the fundamental elements of a friendly family policy because they support parents, do not penalize the childless and give parents space to make free decisions regarding their parenting strategies and participation in the economy and public life.

Nevertheless, the impact of government policies on the position of families with children is not always as obvious and direct as cuts in parental benefits or the rise of the VAT. Issues omitted or suppressed in different policies have as much effect. For example, neither the current nor the proposed policy measures seek to expand the infrastructure of public childcare as a whole (proposed regulations only support alternative forms of childcare services and company kindergartens). Also, negative job flexibility is growing and the position of employees is getting progressively worse.

Childcare Services and Flexible Employment Options

Although municipalities formally establish and run public kindergartens, the government sets the rules and conditions. Unfortunately, rigid regulations and unnecessarily high standards of hygiene make public pre-schools expensive to operate and thus hinder their flexible development. The instruction and curriculum guidelines, on the other hand, are neglected despite their key importance.

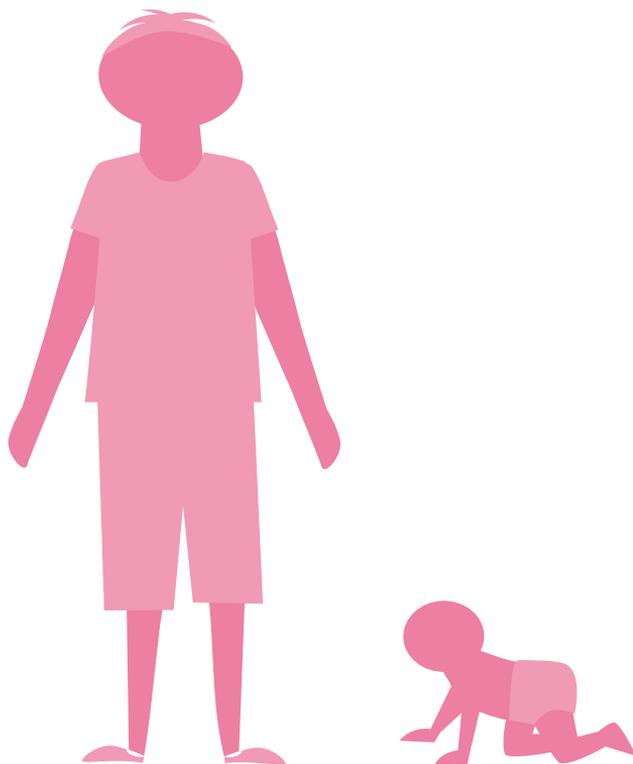
Qualified teachers in public kindergartens are paid very low salaries. This is a major issue, along with the general lack of staff and external professionals, such as teaching assistants, psychologists or inclusive education experts. In many kindergartens, there are 25 children per 2 teachers. This ratio does not really allow for the full development of each child neither for quality care. Under these conditions, it is difficult to imagine any future improvement. The critics of public kindergartens use these limitations as an argument against the entire system and call for alternative forms of pre-school education. Its problems, however, do not consist in the nature of the institution; they are results of the conditions and operating rules political representatives have created.

On the other hand, the conceptual framework for nurseries and kindergartens is ready for an update. A reform of the curriculum, the standards of hygiene or other elements is necessary. Here, the public kindergarten and nursery system can learn from alternative and commercial providers that offer a range of inspiring good practices, such as forest kindergartens, which operate outdoors, mixed-age groups, flexible attendance rules, etc. To enable progressive change, however, the national and municipal governments would need to propose and implement legislative changes and supply kindergartens with funding. Withholding investments into further development of the pre-school education system is shortly going to intensify the problems of parents (especially women) in the job market and to worsen the situation of middle and low-income families.

In addition, positive flexibility policies in the job market have won no support from the current administration so far. The debate on tax relief for employers offering part-time contracts has been put on the back burner. Although we admit the measure was controversial because of its potential abuse by employers who might force their employees into part-time work arrangements, the implementation of other family-friendly measures has been stalled as well. The proposed changes included amendments of the Labour Code and of the Employment Act regarding unemployment benefits and overtime compensations. Other issues that were going to change concerned curbing of the active employment policy and cuts in funding and staffing at the offices of Labour Inspection, which play an important role in ensuring employers follow non-discrimination regulations and other protective measures. All these provisions and the lack of their implementation reinforce negative flexibility in the labour market, which in turn hinder work-life balance of families in the Czech Republic.

The author is a sociologist.





New Family Policies in Poland - Paternity Leave and the Act on Early Child Education and Childcare Services for Children under Three

Julia Kubisa

In the last 20 years, family policy in Poland has been neglected and marked by incomprehensible political decisions. First, investments in the area of social care were labeled as “expenses”¹. Then, they were cut one by one as a part of ongoing economic reforms. This approach resulted in a severe reduction in the number of kindergartens and nurseries and decreased compensation for those on parental leave. Eventually, the concept of paid parental leave was abandoned altogether and only families with extremely low income per household member were entitled to parenting benefits.² The effect was practically immediate: the fertility rate in Poland sank sharply, from 2 in 1989 to 1.4 children per woman in reproductive age in 2004.³ Interestingly, the population continued to shrink despite the new anti-abortion law and related measures such as the curbing of sex education in schools and the end of reimbursement of contraception. The economic transformation caused unemployment, which was unfamiliar for all the people accustomed to the living conditions of socialist Poland. Due to the traditional views on gender roles which expect women to stay at home with the children, women were hit by unemployment than men. However, not enough children were coming.

In Poland, traditional notions which clearly assign domestic and family roles based on gender are widespread while alternative models are criticized for destroying family values. According to these conventions, male breadwinners come home to relax and to help with small repairs. Women, on the other hand, should always be more than just homemakers. Historically, women left the kitchen in order to help with the post-WW2 reconstruction and from this era until 1989, they were actively employed. In addition to being employed outside the home, they also maintained their roles as full-time homemakers. In the socialist era, their domestic work also entailed waiting in queues, which lasted for hours.⁴ The People’s Republic of Poland’s official policy to support women’s employment was to develop a dense network of nurseries and kindergartens. The most intensive period of expanding the infrastructure of childcare institutions was the 1950^s. Later, this trend slowed down although the number of children in Polish families was growing. Inevitably, this meant that the capacity of kindergartens and nurseries was stretched, and in 1970^s, kindergartens and nurseries were teeming with children. The number of children per class was also unreasonably high. The

1 Stiglitz, Joseph E.: *Globalizacja*, PWN, Warsaw 2005.

2 Heinen, Jacqueline – Wator, Monika: Child Care in Poland before, during and after the Transition: Still a Women’s Business. In: *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* XIII, 2006, No. 2, pgs. 189–216.

3 *Mały rocznik statystyczny*. Główny Urząd Statystyczny (GUS), Warsaw 2010.

4 Titkow, Anna: Kobiety pod presją? Proces kształtowania się podstaw nowoczesnej tożsamości. In: Titkow, Anna: *Tożsamość polskich kobiet. Ciągłość, zmiana, konteksty*, IFIS PAN, Warsaw 2007.

state responded by sending women back to the household with the help of an early retirement policy for women close to retirement age. The assumption was that they would replace institutional care by stepping in as grandmothers. The following decade, the state followed up by introducing paid parenting leave for working mothers rather than making any more investments into nurseries and kindergartens. In these ways, the responsibility for childcare was effectively transferred from public institutions to the households. Children were now placed in their own homes in the care of their mothers and grandmothers. Fathers stayed out of the equation. The state continued to adopt and implement this policy throughout the 1990^s and although fathers became entitled to parental leave in this decade, this change took place at a time when parents on parental leave were no longer entitled to monetary compensation. In average Polish families women make less money than men. This means means that women are forced to become the ones to take a leave of absence from employment to become primary caretakers. With the help of the right-wing rhetoric of family values, local politicians gradually shut down the majority of nurseries in the country. They would present nurseries and kindergartens as cold-hearted places void of emotion, using the overcrowded nurseries of the 1970^s to illustrate their point. The home environment, symbolized by the warmth of the family hearth, represented the other side of the spectrum. These developments also had an economic dimension. In 1990, the state established municipalities as new self-governing administrative units. Municipalities then took over the operation of educational institutions, including nurseries, kindergartens and schools. Their budgets were limited and they constantly looked for ways to save money. In the light of the right-wing political rhetoric, nurseries appeared superfluous and represented extra expenses for the city, especially after parental leave and retirement policies had transferred childcare provision on to families. The legislation also played an important role in the shutdown of nurseries because their regulations were far stricter than kindergarten regulations. According to the law, nurseries were health care institutions, and as such, they had to observe high standards of hygiene, sanitation and special construction codes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. It was also required that a qualified nurse be present on the premises at all times. In the face of these demands, both public and company nurseries were closed down even though maintaining them would have been easier than building new ones.

Over time, this policy effectively stripped Poland of almost all nurseries. In 2009, only 2 % of children under 2 attended public nurseries in 2009.⁵ Help for

⁵ *Reconciliation between work, private and family life in the European Union*. Eurostat 2009.

working parents came from the private sector and the grey market. In cities, commercial “early childhood centers” started offering childcare services for children 1 to 3 years old and above. The quality and compliance of these centers, however, became a challenge. Public authorities such as the School Inspectorate would no longer be able to monitor the standards. In addition, the quality of services varied from place to place, and the fees were relatively high. Therefore, families started to hire under-the-table babysitters. Naturally, grandmothers also played a major role in looking after children. The demand for childcare and the difficulties older people faced in the job market were the two main reasons behind the trend of women retiring early despite the very low pension.

Women’s groups have spent years trying to call attention to the way the government has been transferring the burden of care onto women in Polish families. Politicians used gender stereotypes and economic arguments to justify shutting down nurseries and pushing women out of their jobs. Mothers were losing their financial independence by taking unpaid parental leave, and grandmothers were taking over the demanding job of looking after children for their pensions’ nominal fee. Women who work illegally as family babysitters are neither entitled to health care nor welfare benefits. Given that early childcare is widely considered to be exclusively women’s work, these arrangements seemed perfectly ‘natural’.

In summary, by reinforcing traditional gender roles and labeling institutional childcare as a superfluous expense (in line with the 1965 Washington Convention) the Polish government shut down the majority of nurseries and initiatives seeking to involve fathers in childcare, which led to a sharp drop in Poland’s fertility rate.

However, the social changes in the 1990^s and in the new millenium introduced new notions of gender roles. Society began to pay closer attention to women who said that paid work represented not only an essential contribution to their family budgets but also an opportunity for economic independence and self-development. This is supported by gender statistics on education, which now place the average level of education in Polish women above that of men. Nowadays, more and more people seek equality in their families and partnerships and try to share housework equally. This is particularly true among younger generations.⁶ Women no longer accept the double shift; they demand their partners share childcare as well as housework. The 1990^s also

⁶ Titkow, Anna – Duch-Krzysztozek, Danuta – Budrowska, Bogustawa: *Nieodpłatna praca kobiet. Mity, realia, perspektywy*, IFIS PAN, Warsaw 2004.

brought home births to Poland, which turned around the way fathers related to their children. At home births, fathers were suddenly able to take part in the birth, to ritually cut their children's umbilical cord and to get involved in looking after them right from the beginning. This includes the mundane tasks of changing diapers, bathing infants, and getting children dressed. The potential of home births to foster close relationships between fathers and children is enormous.

Finally, the pressure of the European Union also played a part in the progressive changes which have been taking place in Poland. The European Commission reports on work-life balance and the growing popularity of the concept led the government to amend social and employment policies. Pessimistic demographic forecasts about the aging population and low fertility rates were also a factor in these decisions. In 2010, the Polish government introduced paternity leave and adopted a new Act on Early Child Education and Childcare Services for Children under Three. Although the legislation was anxiously anticipated by young parents in Poland, some of its aspects have been criticized. Let us take a closer look.

Paternity Leave

Since the law passed in 2010, fathers in Poland have been allowed to take one calendar week off (7 calendar days, not 7 working days) in order to spend time with their family. Since 2012, that has been prolonged to two weeks. The law was preceded by several years of public debate. Since 2006 at least, women's groups have been raising the issue of paternity leave while the popular media such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* have been providing the space to discuss it.⁷ In the beginning, the public saw paternity leave as something like a Scandinavian souvenir. At this time, journalists and professionals tended to wonder whether Polish fathers would prefer to use the week of leave to go fishing rather than stay at home. Fortunately, over time, arguments promoting paternity leave became more pragmatic: relationships between fathers and children needed strengthening and women going back to work after parental leave needed support. Finally, the politicians and the public agreed that a paternity leave policy would serve as a statement about the fact that children actually have two parents, both of whom have the right to work-life balance.

⁷ Pawtowska-Salińska, Katarzyna: Niania działa, żłobek nie. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Oct 20, 2011.

The government coalition (PO, Platforma Obywatelska and PSL, Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe) then introduced a policy of paternity leave which is compensated on the same terms as mother leave and which employers cannot deny to grant their employees. The leave period cannot be split into separate parts and used at different times. Fathers can take paternity leave at any point in the course of the first year after their child is born, irrespective of the employment status of the mother.

According to a survey by the Labour Inspection Authority, only 16.6 thousand men took paternity leave in 2010, while 92.3 thousand women took maternity leave the same year. Lack of awareness among men about paternity leave might be the main reason why they have not taken advantage of this benefit more often. Many fathers do not realize that paternity leave is not a privilege but a right available to all. It seems that neither companies nor their HR departments are well-informed about this option. Fathers have indicated that their employers tend to deny paternity leave to them even though it is illegal to do so. The failure of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs to accompany the introduction of paternity leave with any awareness-raising initiatives has been disappointing, especially since the Ministry runs public relations campaigns in other policy. Hopefully, the unpleasant findings of the Labour Inspectorate and the extension of the paternity leave period in 2012 will lead to more publicity in the future.

Act on Early Child Education and Care Services for Children under Three

In February 2011, the President signed into law the Act on Early Child Education and Childcare Services for Children under Three, adopted by the PO-PSL government in response to the rapidly growing presence of women in the job market. The 2010 governmental strategy Poland 2030 acknowledged women's active participation in the economy and stated that this trend must be reflected by investments in human capital. The strategy aims to create mechanisms which would support women, particularly young working mothers, throughout different stages of life. The only controversial element of the strategy is its narrow focus. The policy details standards of pre-school education in nurseries and kindergartens but it completely omits care for the elderly or chronically ill. This is surprising because many women look after their aging or ill parents as well.

The Act on Early Child Education seeks to create instruments to help young mothers to be actively employed. According to this new law, nurseries are no longer under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health and no longer need

to fulfill the same strict sanitation and hygiene standards they once used to. Furthermore, the new regulation should clamp down on the grey economy of childcare. As described earlier, many families employ babysitters without official contracts. The Act presumes that early childcare will now be provided by nurseries, early childhood centers, daycare providers or babysitters. It is also liberal in respect to the administration of childcare institutions. Nurseries and childcare centers can now be established and operated by municipalities, legal and natural persons, or by structural units not defined as legal entities. This includes businesses, which may use funds allocated for social benefits for this purpose.

Funding for building new nurseries in general is another important issue associated with the new law. The Act is supposed to make the development of new childcare institutions easier. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has announced a funding scheme for the development of institutional childcare called Toddler. Municipalities are free to apply for grants for their new nursery projects in open calls for proposals. In 2010, the government allocated 40 million PLN to this programme, in 2012 60 million PLN and in 2013, it is planning to allocate 90 million PLN. These totals are intended to support the development of 277 nurseries and childcare centers; the renovation of 1, 670 nurseries, childcare centers and day care centers; and equipment for 2, 540 childcare providers. The estimated outcomes of the 2011 funding round of Toddler were 40 new nurseries and child centers, the renovation of 400 facilities, and it covered the completion of interior renovation and equipment for 650 childcare centers. It should be noted that the state contributes no more than 50 % of the estimated reconstruction or construction budget. This means that municipalities are forced to find the resources to pay for half of the expenses associated with building or rebuilding a new nursery. Parents also share the costs. They pay fees for placing their child in care. These fees may be set by the institution operating the center.

Children can start attending nurseries when they are 5 months old and they can stay for as long as 10 hours per day. Child care centers can admit children at least one year old or older for as long as 5 hours per day. Qualified caregivers include pediatric nursers, midwives, babysitters, pre-school and primary school teachers and other educators. Childcare centers may also employ staff who have completed their secondary school education, who have two years' experience caring for children younger than three, and who have attended 280 hours of specialized training.

Additionally, the law brought innovations in the area of under-the-table babysitting by legalizing the profession. The new profession of the daycare providers is welcomed by young mothers who are interested in looking after their own as well as other children in their homes. The benefits of the measure are meant to be two-fold: to assist mothers with returning to work and to assist them with childcare. Daycare providers and municipalities now enter into a contract concerning service provision, agreement to perform legally defined work (which is regulated by the Civil Code rather than the Labour Code). The provider then looks after children, following expectations set by the parent/s of the child. The municipality covers the provider's insurance for personal liability for damages which may occur while a child is in her care.

Babysitters who have been providing daycare illegally have not been entitled to health and social care insurance. Now the law stipulates that the Department of Welfare and the health insurance company share the responsibility for paying the contributions for providers who make less than the minimum wage. Parents pay the contributions for babysitters whose wages exceed the minimum wage and the contributions and they also pay for optional health insurance. The working hours and the job description of the caregiver are detailed in the contract between the provider and the parents. There are no minimum qualifications set by the law. However, daycare providers must be able to guarantee all due childcare: they must not have a criminal record, and they must have never been denied parenting rights or failed to pay child support. The provider must also be able to meet the space and safety requirements necessary to look after a maximum of 5 children. Finally, the municipality must arrange training for each caregiver.

Because it has been a few months since the regulation was introduced, we can try to make our first conclusions. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has told the media that 4.5 thousand new places have been created in childcare. This figure represents a 14 % increase in child placements in comparison with the year prior (2010). For example: in Warsaw alone there are 6 thousand children waiting for nursery placement. However, a more realistic assessment of the effects of the measure cannot be made until February 2013 because childcare facilities funded from the Toddler programme are scheduled to open throughout the year 2012.

Financing is a key issue in reviving public childcare. Although municipalities receive 50 % of the costs from the Toddler scheme, they must supply the other half of the resources with their own means. Many have found the answer in the budgets of local families with small children by raising the

fees for childcare services dramatically. In Warsaw, the monthly fees went through a sharp, sudden increase of 160 % (from 189 PLN to 500 PLN). Unlike kindergartens, where parents pay only for the days their child is present, nurseries charge monthly fees regardless of the days the child attends. Although this system has raised protests among parents, the city officials in Warsaw and other cities have refused to change it thus far. Unfortunately, keeping nursery fees unreasonably high are turning these services into a luxury good for privileged families only. The paradox is that even though nurseries are funded by municipalities, by becoming out of reach they no longer provide a public service. Currently, proposals include charging on the basis of attendance only as it is common in kindergartens. According to this regulation, parents who work 8 -hour shifts and whose children spend 9 -10 hours in daycare due to their parents' commute will have to pay as much as 500 PLN a month. This amount represents a large portion of the average salary which is currently about 2, 597 PLN.

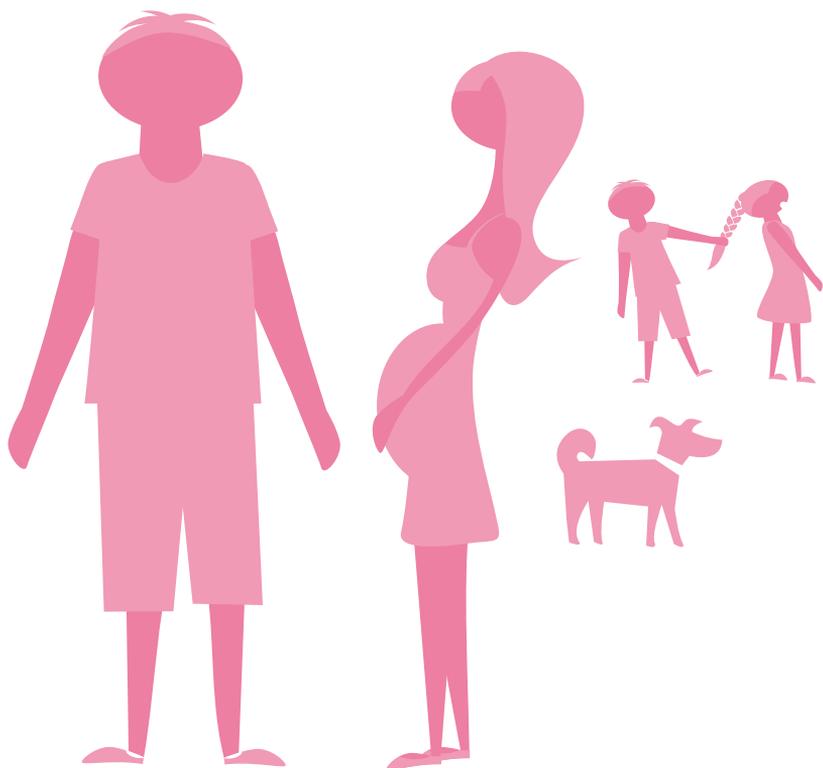
In the first few months of 2011, only 25 people applied for the job of the daycare provider. It is likely that municipalities have not informed citizens about this new kind of employment. Again, let us hope that there will be interest in mending the situation and that local governments are going to promote this employment opportunity. Another reason for reluctance might be the contractual nature of the job, which allows for easy termination, no paid holidays, sick leave, or parental leave. Nor does it afford the protection of the Labour Unions. Contract-based work in Poland has earned the reputation of a "junk contract", hinting at the fact that the contract does not guarantee a stable income. The lawmakers had apparently assumed that the character of this work was temporary and that mothers looking after small groups of children were going to return to standard paid employment once their own children grow older. The problem is that the regulation allows people over 50 to provide care to young children as well, if they meet all the requirements. Unlike young women, older people might view this work as long-term employment and need the stability such employment affords.

The measure seems to be the most effective in regard to "uncovering" the grey economy of babysitting. At the time of this writing, 2, 000 official contracts with babysitters and babysitters have been signed. Although the real market is much larger, the trend of legalizing the profession is positive. Parents have been complaining about the complicated administration of the contracts, but if the legal and contractual procedures are closely monitored, the processing could eventually be streamlined - provided there is good will on the part of The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, of course. It is also reasonable to expect that a portion of parents and caregivers are not going

to legalize their working relationship in order to avoid the financial burden of associated taxes and fees.

In conclusion, the recent changes in family policies have other positive aspects as well. One of these is the involvement of fathers in childcare and a real expansion of the network of child care providers. On the other hand, paternity leave is too short. Although paternity leave in its current form might strengthen the bonds between father and child, the measure is not likely to change the position of women in the job market. The new act on paternity leave will not encourage employers to treat women and men equally. It is even more difficult to be optimistic about the Act on Early Child Education and Childcare Services for Children under Three and the Toddler programme. In regard to nurseries, municipalities are not cooperating with the private sector. Instead, they seem to prefer direct partnerships with parents. In other words, local governments are funding new nurseries from the pockets of the parents of children already enrolled in nursery care. This situation is unreasonable and pathological and it demonstrates that the politicians continue to believe that family policy is not worth investment. To them, it is still an expense and a burden which can easily be shifted onto the citizens.

The author works for Sociological Institute, University of Warsaw, Poland.



Family and Work – Good Practices from Slovakia

Mária Jacková, Oľga Pietruchová

In the areas of employment and equality, work-life balance is one of the top political issues in Slovakia today. Work-life balance is considered to be the key to gender equality and an essential element of the national policies of active employment and job creation. Although the political safeguards of greater job creation have been put in place as the goals of the European Employment Strategy, reviewed at the European Council meeting in Barcelona in 2002, which include measures to support flexible employment and improve access to pre-school childcare, employers are slow in implementing these measures in practice. Women, particularly mothers with young children, struggle to find their place in the job market and their struggle has a range of negative consequences not only for the job market itself, the position of women and their economic independence, but also for the demographic development of the country. The unemployment rate among young people in the Slovak Republic is one of the highest in the EU and this lack of job security plays an important role in their decision to start a family. Similarly, when employment opportunities are lacking, women who have jobs might feel discouraged from taking a break from work in order to have children. They may choose to postpone maternity to a later age and to have fewer children. Statistics suggest that the most demographically stable countries in Europe are France, Great Britain, the countries of Scandinavia and Benelux. All of these countries have family-friendly work-life balance provisions which relieve the pressure on women to make difficult choices between a career or a family.

Work-life balance is thus not only important for women and their economic independence, but it plays an essential role in the long-term sustainability of the country. Ensuring that work and family responsibilities are shared by both women and men promotes gender equality and both women and men need to enjoy work-life balance before women can be economically independent. The principle does not only apply to work – the balance needs to start at home.

Gender Roles and Care

In Slovakia, mothers usually devote themselves to full-time care for their newborn by taking maternity and parenting leave consecutively, although

the law¹ suggests that both parents/partners share childcare equally. The widespread argument about women being 'naturally' better emotionally, physically and psychologically equipped to look after children than men encourages this arrangement in practice. The assumption is that women's ability to give birth implies they can raise children.

Administration data on parental leave benefits depict the situation most accurately. They indicate that the number of fathers taking parental leave has never exceeded 2 %² out of the total number of parents taking leave. The absolute rate rises with the rising fertility rates but in relative terms it shows a slight drop. This means that even though more fathers take parental leave when more children are born, the proportion of fathers among all parents on leave tends to drop rather than rise. Unequal division of labour at home reflects on the job market. While having children does not have any effect on the fathers' careers or the effect is positive, having children is a major obstacle to employment among mothers. The employment rates of men rise with having children (from 79 % to 88. 6 %) but the employment rates among women drop from 79. 3 % to 66 .7 % for mothers.³ Men tend not to adjust their employment patterns according to the needs of the age of their children. Employment patterns among mothers, on the other hand, are practically defined by the number of their offspring and their age. Only 40 % of mothers with children under five years of age work. Only 52 % of all mothers of three children work. In conclusion, having children reinforces men's employment while for women, having children usually means losing their job. Neither in the family nor in the workplace are women equal to men.

Without pro-active policies on the part of the state, we cannot offset the dramatically unequal division of labour in the family. However, family policy is not a priority for the current Slovak government. In part, there is no interest in the society in any form of state intervention in individual or family privacy because people are afraid of 'social engineering'. Nevertheless, no job market policy will be effective unless the stereotypical division of labour in the family changes. If the gender roles in families stay the same, employment policies will merely address the symptoms, not the cause.

1 Sec.18, Family Act No. 36/2005 and prior regulations.

2 *Summary Report on Gender Equality in Slovakia 2010*. Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family 2010.

3 Ibid.

Good Practices in Slovakia

The new Act on Parental Leave Benefits, which has been in force since January 1st, 2010, grants every parent looking after a child younger than three a cash benefit of EUR 190. 10 per month. If the child has long-term health problems, this benefit is available until the age of six. For the first time in the history of this benefit, higher amounts are provided to parents of twins, triplets or more children born at the same time. The basic sum of EUR 190. 10 per month rises by 25 % per every additional child. This means that parents of twins are entitled to EUR 237. 60 per month and to EUR 285. 10 if they have triplets.

Another welcome change introduced by the Act was the possibility of earning a legitimate income (via employment, enterprise, investing, for example) without losing the allowance in the original amount. When at work, parents can secure childcare with the help of the other parent, grandparent or another adult, or by placing the child in institutional childcare provided by a commercial, religious or state entity, including kindergartens. An income-generating activity of either parent does not affect their right to parental benefits.

Working parents can also decide whether they wish to continue to receive parental allowance or switch to the childcare allowance.⁴ The purpose of the childcare allowance is to help cover the childcare expenses for every child younger than three (or six) years of age. The amount is set according to childcare expense receipts but must not exceed EUR 230 per month.⁵ The childcare allowance was introduced on January 1st, 2009 as a new welfare benefit for parents who go back to work (make an income) before their child reaches three years of age (or six if the child suffers from long-term health problems). Under all circumstances, however, childcare must be secured by another person or by an institutional provider (nursery, kindergarten) at all times.

The new benefit for working parents is that they can choose between two types of allowance: the childcare allowance or the parental allowance.

⁴ Act No. 561/2008 on Childcare Allowance and corresponding changes and additions to prior laws and regulations.

⁵ The estimated funding for the Childcare Allowance Act provisions was outlined in the budget of the Slovak Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, EU funding schemes and the national project Employment and Social Inclusion Operation Programme (OP ZaSI) co-funded by the government and the EU.

The first one is better for parents using institutional care which costs over EUR 190 per month or for parents of more than one child under three. The allowance is granted for every child separately. Welfare benefits are coupled (parental allowance first and childcare allowance next) but offer alternatives to parents of children younger than three. Parents have the opportunity to choose the form of childcare which best meets their needs or the needs of their children and can work or study at secondary schools or universities (incl. PhD. programs). In the first three years of the child's life, parents may also alternate between the two allowances as they need but they can never claim both at the same time. The goal of the policy is to eliminate the barriers and discrimination parents of young children face in the labour market.

Another dimension of the childcare benefit is that it helps create new jobs in the area of care, which are provided to women due to the prevailing stereotypes about the traditional gender division of labour. In this case, although we usually consider these stereotypes to have a negative effect on women's position, in this case they may be beneficial. The new legislative situation has allowed many families to establish a childcare business in the name of the grandmother in the family. Even though a number of grandmothers would look after their grandchildren for free, now they can receive remuneration for work that had traditionally been unpaid.

In 2010, 3, 428 parents claimed the childcare allowance. This represented 2, 323 more parents than in 2009, the year prior. Even though it is only a small increase in relation to the total number of parental allowance claimants (77, 000 in 2009), it is still a rise. The slow reaction of parents to this option might have been caused by the administrative burden of applying for the childcare allowance which requires that parents regularly show receipts for childcare services. The other disadvantage of using the childcare allowance to pay for the services of a grandmother using a business licence to look after a grandchild is that she must pay taxes and fees as other business persons. The net sum after all the deductions is usually about the same as the amount of the parental allowance. This means that only a small number of families can really benefit from the new system of childcare allowances and the good intention of the legislation has practically no effect.

Flexible Forms of Employment

The new Labour Code, in effect since September 1st, 2011, responds to the diverse needs of parents and their work-life balance better than the legislation discussed above. It supports untraditional forms of work such as part-time work, split shifts, job sharing and other flexible employment options such as flexible work hours, shift work and so on.

For example, even though contracts for short working hours are a legal form of employment in Slovakia, they are rarely used in practice. In 2010, only 4.4 % of all employees worked short hours (4 % in 2009 and 2.8 % in 2008). The proportion of part-time work rose among women (from 4.2 % in 2008 and 4.9 % in 2009 to 5.7 % in 2010) as well as among men (from 1.6 % in 2008 and 3.2 % in 2009 to 3.3 % in 2010). One of the reasons why employees underutilize part-time work options is that families usually need two incomes to meet their financial needs.

According to a Workforce Study, women work part-time more often than men because, as they said, it better fits their needs. A fixed work schedule dominates among both men and women employees but among men, working hours tend to be set according to the needs and requirements of their employers while women prefer flexible working hours.

The process of liberalization and deregulation of the labour legislation started in 2001 with the amendment of the Labour Code, which sought to improve access to employment. One of the work-life balance measures implemented as a part of the process was the option of part-time work contracts for employees looking after children. If an employee requests a reduced weekly schedule, the employer is required to make all the necessary provisions to meet the request. An important disadvantage of part-time work is lower wages, which reflect the reduced number of working hours. The current law also stipulates that employers treat all employees equally, regardless of whether they work full-time or part-time. For example, if employees work more than four hours per day, they are entitled to meal provisions.

Other legal employment options that can be negotiated between employees and employers include working from home or telecommuting. If they agree on working from home, the employer is responsible for covering the information technology and other expenses associated with the

performance of the contracted work. Telecommuting is especially popular among parents returning to work during or after parental leave and among older workers. Another group of workers who prefer telecommuting arrangements are people from isolated regions with high rates of unemployment or from regions where flexible work is hard to find. Telecommuting requires communication and information technologies and is most widely used by programmers, technicians, marketing and purchasing professionals, accountants and human resource specialists. To parents of young children or to people looking after dependent family members who face discrimination in the job market, telecommuting also represents an attractive employment option.

A complete novelty brought by the 2011 amendment of the Labour Code is that employers can create split job positions. The employees sharing the position then negotiate the work schedule and divide all the responsibilities of the job. In case they cannot come to an agreement, the employer determines the schedule on their behalf. If the work carried out by the employees in this position continues to be useful in the company after the end of the split arrangement, the employees have the right to full-time work in the same company. Job sharing is also interesting for students or for people getting ready to retire and training their successors. By allowing two people to cooperate closely in one position, shared jobs promote inter-generational solidarity.

On one hand, this system of splitting one job into two part-time “shared jobs” creates new jobs and helps prevent frequent abuse of part-time workers who are expected to take on all the responsibilities of the full-time position for a part-time pay. It can also stimulate the interest of parents with small children in flexible employment. On the other hand, these arrangements are more costly than standard work options because they require employers to pay for staff training or meals, for instance.

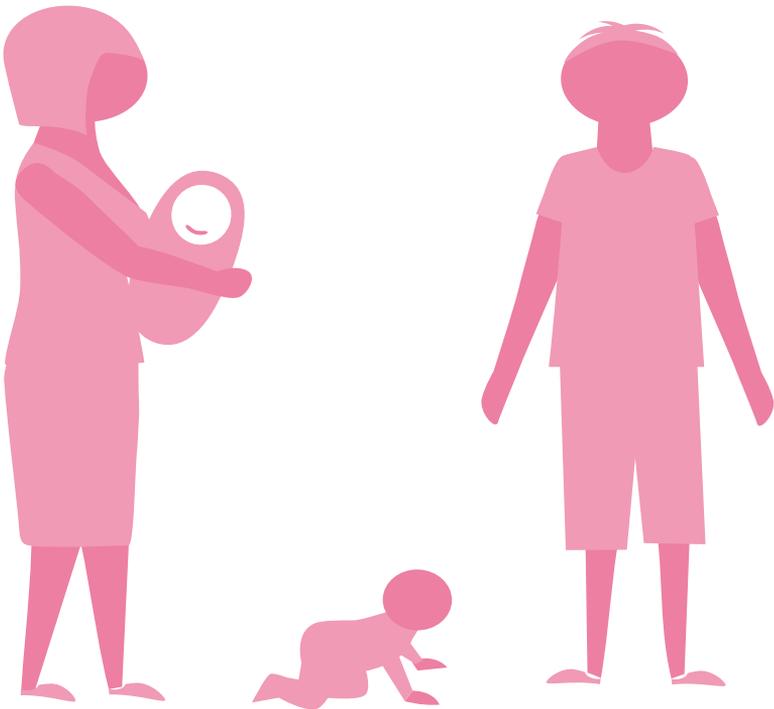
All in all, flexible work organization and employment opportunities help increase employment among parents taking care of small children and thus raise employment rates overall. Untraditional work options also improve a sense of job satisfaction among workers, raise the quality of the position and contribute to the efficiency of the work process, all of which can turn into profit for the employers. Finally, the 2011 amendment of the Labour Code makes it possible to create the working conditions flexibly, according

to each employer's circumstances as well as according to the needs of the employees by allowing individually negotiated overtime contracts or flexible performance records.

The latter provision work-life balance provision represents a flexible approach to recording hours worked with the help of a time bank system. Employees keep records of the hours they put in monthly and redeem their overtime in exchange for time off as needed. For example, if people work overtime when it is necessary to meet deadlines or the employer's requests, they can compensate by taking these hours off in order to take a leave in the summer when their children are on holiday, for example. The description of each job position includes a base amount of required working hours on an annual, monthly or a weekly basis. In other words, the current Labour Code allows parents to accumulate overtime hours and take them off to spend the school holiday with their children. Similarly, it will become possible to split the standard period of parental leave into different segments up to the child's five years of age.

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Family Centres in Germany – A One-Stop Shop for Care, Counselling and Support

Theresa Baumeister

Changes in society call for a re-organization of life and work so that they meet the needs of contemporary families. More and more mothers work nowadays, which requires mobility and flexibility. Traditional family models, gender roles and generational patterns are changing (grandparents are no longer accessible or available to help) and boundaries are disappearing and families are facing new risks and challenges. This socio-economic development calls for new political solutions.

A One-Stop Shop

Family centres in Germany represent an answer to these pressing issues. As institutions of social care, they are based on the premise that public pre-school institutions can be developed to serve the wide range of needs contemporary families might have. Following the model of

'one-stop-shop' of the Early Excellence Centres (EEC) of childcare, which have been founded in working-class neighbourhoods in Great Britain since the 1990s,¹ the current family centres in Germany provide much more than the elementary childcare and education services of kindergartens and nurseries. The programmes of family centres extend to areas of family education and social care counselling and assistance, forming an infrastructure which responds to the ever changing challenges faced by contemporary families.

The services of family centre include:

- supporting families in difficult life situations, such as single mothers and fathers or immigrants (language classes for children, German courses for immigrant parents, special day-care, etc.)
- helping children overcome educational barriers related to the low level of education in their communities (targeted early childcare and health services, parent education and re-qualification programmes, counselling as needed)
- supporting work-life balance by extending childcare hours, offering services early in the morning or late in the afternoon and emergency childcare or care for children younger than three.²

¹ Diller, Angelika: *Eltern-Kind-Zentren. Grundlagen und Rechercheergebnisse*. Deutsches Jugendinstitut, 2006.

² Ibid.

Quality Standards

In North-Rhine Westphalia, family centres can obtain a quality assurance certificate if they pass the standards in four practical and four structural categories of their work. The practical categories include counselling and support for children and families, family education and support in child raising, day-care and work-life balance. The structural assessment criteria include social care, work organization and cooperation, communication and institutional development and evaluation. In order to get the certificate, the centre must reach a set number of points in three out of these four practical and three out of the four structural categories. In the area of work-life balance, the standards focus on the following aspects of the centre's programme:

"Family Centre:

1. Understands the needs of new parents. In the process of registration, parents are interviewed about their needs for childcare services even if these needs might not match the centre's operating hours.
2. The centre understands the needs of parents already registered. Parents are interviewed annually about their childcare needs and their records are updated regularly.
3. The centre provides counselling for parents whose childcare needs extend beyond the centre's operating hours.
4. The centre offers lunch for children upon parents' request.
5. The centre offers childcare for children under three.
6. The centre's childcare services are available to 6. 30 p. m. or longer on a regular basis (at least once a week).
7. The centre is able to refer parents to good quality babysitters and maintains an updated list of childcare providers with good references in the area.
8. The centre offers emergency childcare for siblings of children who use the centre's services regularly."

Services that meet the real everyday needs of families and that focus on the social aspects of support help create integrated service points. By being

accessible and by offering specific services targeted to real-life needs, family centres may be useful for families in difficult life situations, who do not find adequate support in conventional pre-schools. From the family policy perspective, such comprehensive services truly respect the family, which increases the popularity and prosperity of their community and region.³

From Pre-School Care to Integrated Services

The current boom of family centres offering integrated services that meet the real needs of today's families shows that this was the right strategy. Close cooperation with parents in the area childcare is one of the fundamental principles of family centres. In recent years, family centres have enjoyed the support of politicians in many states of the federation and the number of centres is growing steadily. In North-Rhine Westphalia, for example, the Ministry of Health, Equality, Care and Aging (MGPEA, formerly Ministry for Family, Women, Generations and Integration MGFFI) has been committed to expanding their network throughout the state since 2006. By 2010, a third of the existing 9 thousand pre-schools were to offer comprehensive, 'integrated' services including family education and counselling, professional day-care, inter-cultural programmes, language education and support programmes and work-life balance provisions.⁴

The German Federation as well as individual states are developing family centre support programmes and financing schemes at the community level so that the current centres spread and grow into umbrella projects and networks.⁵ In addition, family centres are also being started 'from the ground up' in response to specific local needs. Finally, counties and regions in Germany are also creating family centres independently from the state administration as a part of their family and youth policies.

3 Srov.: *Familienzentren in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Neue Zukunftsperspektiven für Kinder und Eltern Ergebnisse der wissenschaftlichen Begleitung im Überblick*. Ministerium für Generationen, Familie, Frauen und Integration des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 2009.

4 Srov.: Stöbe-Blossey, Sybille (ed.): *Kindertagesbetreuung im Wandel. Perspektiven für die Organisationsentwicklung*. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften 2010.

5 Diller, Angelika – Heitkötter, Martina: *Interview. Alles aus einer Hand: Familie im Zentrum*. Deutsches Jugendinstitut 2008, <http://www.dji.de/cgi-bin/projekte/output.php?projekt=817&Jump1=RECHTS&Jump2=30, stav k 30. 9. 2011>.

Funding

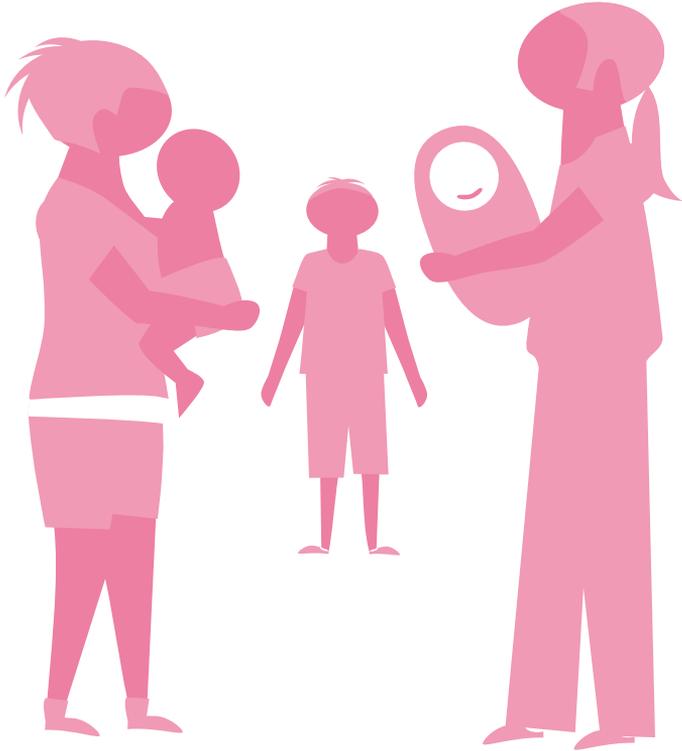
A variety of funding models has been used to develop family centres. State-level funding schemes provide start-up money and partial operational support in the long-term. The North Rhine-Westphalia Family Centre Programme, for example, grants 12 thousand EUR to every certified family centre per year. The official founders of the centres (local administration, for example) typically also provide funding and in search for additional resources, centres may also apply for grants with different foundations or participate in competitions with financial awards, for instance. Besides the state administration, centres may also be able to find funding with community funds for specific needs (i.e. language education), insurance companies (therapy services) or social care institutions (supporting early childcare, for instance). Yet, it is never easy to secure stable funding for the full operation of all the centre's services because there are no established funding schemes and financial help is often missing.

According to a study commissioned by the North-Rhine Westphalia Family Centre Project, however, the concept of family centres is immensely popular among all the beneficiaries as well as among all the cooperating agencies.⁶

The author is a gender expert.



⁶ Srov.: Familienzentren NRW. Im Dienste von Eltern und Kind. Angebote der Familienzentren für die ganze Familie. PädQUIS 2009.



Work-Life Balance – Family as a Success Factor

Theresa Baumeister

The inter-connectedness of career and family life reflects the current trends in the job market and in society. Discussions on 'work – life balance' - the right proportion of work and family in people's lives and how to achieve it are no longer new. The Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in Germany (BMFSFJ), now considers work-life balance to be one of its top policy priorities and in the last few years, it has been cooperating closely with employer unions¹ to implement a number of strategic work-life balance initiatives.

Work-Life Balance – A Business Issue

Social change always accompanies changes in the area of work and economy. Dropping fertility rates producing a lack of qualified workforce are affecting the job market and encourage employers to compete for skilled staff. On the other hand, the traditional gender stratification of jobs into typically men's and women's has been disappearing. Today, many women are interested in continuing their careers in addition to raising their families, so the proportion of women in the job market is much larger than it used to be. In spite of these changes, the percentage of mothers working for pay in Germany is the lowest in the European Union, according to the statistics. A report by the Federal Ministry showed that a whole 40 % of women who were actively employed prior to starting families never go back to work once they have children.² Expanding the opportunities for work-life balance is therefore essential to stimulating women's potential in Germany. Work-life balance also plays an important role in the competition for qualified workforce. Still, two thirds of German parents think that to establish a work-life balance is difficult to do and many fathers complain that their jobs leave them little time for their families. These opinions are widespread although cities and regions understand that their popularity and prosperity is closely tied to the quality of working conditions for families.³

In both politics and business nowadays, decision-makers seek instruments to make the working and living conditions as family-friendly as possible. 90 % of German business leaders firmly believe that the happiness of their

1 Srov.: Oechsle, Mechthild – Mischau, Anina [ed.]: Arbeitszeit Familienzeit Lebenszeit: Verlieren wir die Balance? *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, Sonderheft 5, 2005.

2 Entrepreneurial Programme Report (*Arbeitsbericht zum Unternehmenprogramm „Erfolgsfaktor Familie“*). BMFSFJ 2008.

3 Schreurs, Margarete – Morhard, Anette [ed.]: *Wettbewerbsfähigkeit steigern durch familienfreundliche Arbeitsplätze. Kooperative Personalpolitik als Chance*. Eschborn 2005.

employees depends on how well the company can meet the needs of parents.⁴ A study by the Demoscopic Institute in Allensbach showed that 74 % of the companies surveyed indicated that a family-friendly environment leads to better economic results.⁵ In addition, employers thought that good family-friendly policies attract highly-qualified workers, contribute to a sense of satisfaction among the staff and raise the levels of productivity.

Economic Programme

The Family as a Success Factor programme (Erfolgsfaktor Familie) promotes this approach. The main goal of the programme is to “establish family-friendly HR policies as a leading management strategy and as a hallmark of the German economy.”⁶ Erfolgsfaktor Familie was launched in 2006 as a joint project of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in Germany (BMFSFJ), the labour unions, foundations and other business organizations with the aim to support businesses in implementing a family-friendly approach. The programme has brought work-life balance to the centre of company life. These developments have also expanded the notion of family-friendliness from the narrow focus on simply adding new public kindergartens to creating better working and living conditions for working parents in the broadest possible sense.

The main HR issues include:

- family-friendly workplace and company culture
- returning to work after parental leave
- family-friendly working hours and work organization
- HR marketing focused on the practical aspects of these policies.⁷

⁴ Family-Friendly Working Hours (*Familienbewusste Arbeitszeiten*). BMFSFJ 2011.

⁵ Report on Families 2010 (*Familienreport 2010*). BMFSFJ 2010.

⁶ Entrepreneurial Programme Report (*Arbeitsbericht zum Unternehmenprogramm „Erfolgsfaktor Familie“*) BMFSFJ 2008.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Company Network

The Erfolgsfaktor Familie programme consists of several projects. One of them is a network of businesses co-founded by the Ministry and Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK). At the moment, the network has 3,650 members sharing a wealth of know-how, information and contacts⁸ in order to help each other implement family-friendly human resource policies. The project is operated by dedicated officers at the DIHK headquarters and its website includes examples of good work-life balance practices from companies as well as from research and literature.

Family-Friendly Working Hours

The Family-Friendly Working Hours programme was created in response to the needs of working parents and its goal is to motivate employers to develop flexible and family-friendly working hours schemes. They can choose from a range of options, starting from flexible or shared working hours to telecommuting or long-term schedule planning and others.

The programme also seeks to:

- create a platform that promotes a smart and contemporary understanding of part-time work
- encourage all the involved parties to respect individual family-friendly working hours solutions
- share good practices to help create space for employer-employee negotiation
- alleviate the impact of demographic changes on the job market
- to help mothers to return to work.

⁸ Information from 2011.

Company Child Care Centres

Another project of the Erfolgsfaktor Familie programme is concerned with company-sponsored childcare. Its aim is to expand the network of company childcare centres with the help of funding from the European Social Fund (ESF). This model HR project is time-limited and supports companies interested in contributing to employee childcare as well as German universities promoting the work-life balance of their students. To promote work-life balance, the parents' working hours must be synchronized with the hours of the childcare service. This support programme helps small and mid-size companies who have used their resources to introduce childcare options but are struggling with full implementation.⁹

In 2008, the project started holding annual competitions for companies offering innovative family-friendly solutions. The competition is becoming popular and the number of participants is steadily growing.¹⁰

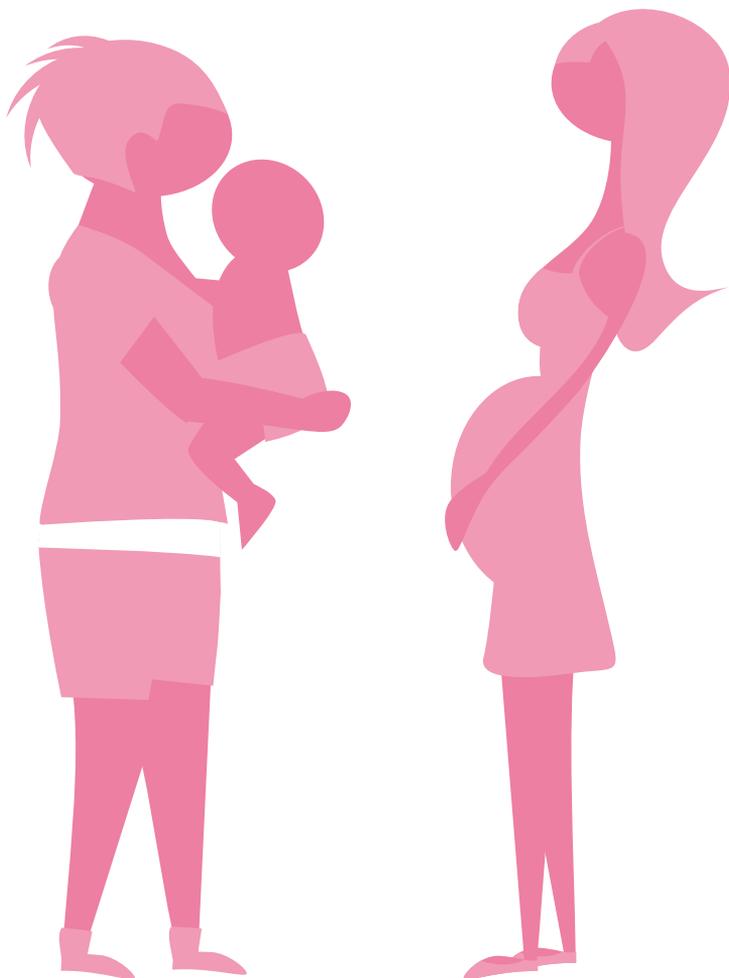
Good Practices Database

Finally, the programme has been successful in enabling the sharing of good practices and their implementation in practice. The project's information portal includes working materials and reports, all available to the members of the network. The Family-Friendly Working Hours project offers practical guidelines and detailed information on the different models of working hours as well their legal and organizational aspects. The database of good practices includes real-life experience of companies who have successfully implemented new working-hours options. However, we must continue to explore comprehensive solutions that will accommodate the various needs of different employees in different areas of use so that our future solutions will respect the multi-layered and contradictory demands set by the work-life balance discourse.

The author is a gender expert.

⁹ *Entrepreneurial Programme Report (Arbeitsbericht zum Unternehmenprogramm „Erfolgsfaktor Familie“)*. BMFSFJ 2008.

¹⁰ Ibid.



Maternity Leave or Parenting Time?

Kateřina Jonášová, Pavla Frýdlová

How to balance work and family? How to have both children and a career? Women in the Czech Republic face this dilemma more often than in other EU countries. The Czech model in which women have the opportunity to take a long parental leave but cannot always access pre-school care or part-time work seems old-fashioned in comparison with other European systems. The insufficient capacity of Czech pre-schools to accommodate all the children whose parents need pre-school care makes it impossible for women to return to work. Fathers in the Czech Republic rarely participate in raising children. The following text includes interviews with three Czech women who live or have lived in Scandinavian countries. In the interviews, they are sharing their experience with different types of pre-schools, gradual return to work and with different models of maternity and parental leave. In contrast to the Czech understanding of maternity and parental leave as women's 'maternity holiday' (the official Czech term for childcare leave), in Scandinavia, maternity and parental leave periods are viewed as a special time dedicated to raising children by both parents.

The Poverty of Czech Mothers

For Czech women, the period of most intensive mothering represents the beginning of a vicious circle. The time women in the Czech Republic spend at home on maternity and parental leave is the longest in Europe and in the world. According to statistics, most Czech women take three years of leave with each child. Such a long break is a big change in their professional and personal lives and the effect multiplies with each additional child. In a family with two children, the mother might take break from employment for as long as eight years. "Although foreign psychologists and economists assert that pre-school education is the best type of investment, Czech child psychologists as well as the general public believe that women should take a long parenting leave. Repetitive and long parenting 'holidays', as they are called in the Czech Republic, play an important role in the position of women in the job market. However, the current conservative government, composed exclusively by male politicians, think that a woman's place is in the kitchen," says Štěpán Jurajda, an expert in the economy of labour and the Director of CERGE (Center for Economic Research and Graduate Education).¹

¹ Data from 2011.

In the Czech Republic, the gap between the employment rates of mothers and that of childless women is the greatest in the EU. Czech women seem to either work full-time or they have children and don't work. Then long career break most women take also contributes to the widening gap between the average income of women and men. According to this indicator - 26 % difference between women's and men's salaries, the Czech Republic places next to last in the EU (where the average difference is 18 %). Lower amounts of old-age pension are another result of this development. 22 % of Czech women older than 65 are currently at risk of poverty.

Norway: Father Leave

Even though the Czech legislation allows men to take parental leave and to participate in childcare, only a marginal 2 % of fathers take advantage of this option. The reasons behind this trend are low motivation and the conservative atmosphere in Czech society. In line with gender stereotypes, men are expected to be the breadwinners in the family rather than the caregivers. Men interested in taking parenting leave are viewed as submissive and peculiar while women uninterested in taking a long leave are labelled as heartless mothers or as overly ambitious and career-oriented go-getters. In Czech, all these labels are very pejorative.

Barbora Šindelářová is a psychologist who has lived in Norway for five years. She has a one-and-a-half-year-old daughter. Barbora says: *"The biggest differences I see between Norway and the Czech Republic consist in equality between women and men and in work-life balance. In Norwegian society, equality has a long history. They were the first in Europe and in the world. Both genders are highly respected, also due to the fact that women are represented in all levels of politics in Norway. Children go to kindergarten from the age of one and their mothers can return work. Fathers usually take a 3-months-long parenting leave and claim parental allowance. This portion of leave is denied to the family if the father decides not to take it. This system has been in place since 1977. In the 1990s, fathers started to take parental leave to look after children on a mass scale. Today, 90 % men utilize this option and I think it is very beneficial for the family and for the relationship between the father and the child. Studies from Norway and Sweden show that the fathers who take parenting leave when their child is little think that spending time with children is an important priority later on in life as well."*

The process of establishing kindergartens started in the 1970^s. Kindergartens are an integral part of the Norwegian education system. They are either funded by the government or run as commercial organizations. Parents pay about 10 - 15 % of one monthly salary for kindergarten care. The child per caregiver ratio is much lower than in the Czech Republic - a caregiver looks after three or four children. One-year old children attend closed groups. Parental leave lasts a year and parents can choose between 46 weeks with benefits at the 100 % previous income level or 56 weeks at 80 %. When the child reaches one year, most women go back to work and choose the type of contract they are interested in (either part-time or full-time). Employers are legally obligated to meet their demands even if they want to reduce their hours down to a half, for instance. I spent a year on parental leave and for another half a year I have been claiming welfare benefits. Soon I am going back to work and plan on negotiating the hours. My employer has contacted me in the course of this year to ask what my plans were about coming back. Discrimination of women raising small children is out of question. Employers appreciate women's experience and make it possible for them to work flexible hours.

In Norway, nobody would think that a mother who places her child in kindergarten at the age of one is heartless. On the contrary: if she doesn't go back to work, someone might remind her that she should think about her career. Thanks to this family-friendly system, the birth rate in Norway rises each year."

In summary:

- Parents in Norway are entitled to up to 46 weeks of parental leave and receive 100 % of their previous income, or they can take 56 weeks of leave at 80 % of their former income.
- 3 weeks prior to birth and 6 weeks after birth are allocated for the mother. 10 weeks from the entire parental leave period are allocated for the father (father leave quota).
- This father leave quota has been established since 1993. In 2009, it was changed from 6 weeks to 10 weeks.
- In 1988, a whole 90 % fathers took advantage of this benefit. In 2008, as many as 16.5 % fathers prolonged their 10-weeks-long parental leave.

Denmark: Europe's Happiest Children

Czech mothers find it increasingly difficult to find a job which fits their experience and qualifications. (In the Czech Republic, women complete their secondary or university education more often than men.) If an employee takes parental leave, the employer has an obligation to save their job for them for as long as 3 years. However, the employer also has the right to give returning mothers notice any time they are back, including the first day of their return. This practice is unfortunately quite common. Unlike in other developed countries in the EU, flexible employment options are missing. In the Netherlands, for instance, 76 % women have flexible work contracts. In the Czech Republic, only 8 % women have access to this type of arrangement. The Czech government has never introduced any measures to support part-time employment like other countries, which have done so to mitigate the effects of the economic recession. Part-time or shared jobs are not seen as profitable by Czech companies, because the company size is determined by the number of employees rather than the number of jobs (all contracts added up). The ill-functioning and incomplete pre-school education system in the Czech Republic aggravates the situation. There are only a few kindergartens in the country and practically no nurseries. In respect to kindergartens, the Czech Republic counters the trends in other European countries. In France, for example, kindergartens are integrated into the school system and in Germany, kindergarten capacity is rapidly growing. (The current government of Chancellor Merkel has pledged that by 2013, German kindergartens are going to accommodate every three-year old child in the country.) In contrast, Czech pre-schools were being closed down on a mass scale in the course of the 1990s when the fertility rate was low. This was true especially of nurseries, which currently amount to only 45 in the entire Czech Republic. At the moment, the demand for pre-schools is so great that over 30,000 children are waiting for a place. The situation is particularly dramatic in the vicinity of Prague, in other large cities it is slightly better.

Mirka Bendix-Beranová, a former kindergarten teacher, is now a businesswoman and a mother of two. Mirka spent each of her parental leave periods in a different country – in the course of the first leave she lived in Denmark and the second one she has been taking in the Czech Republic. She says: *“I met my husband-to-be in the mid-1990s, we lived in Copenhagen at the time. After about a year (in the country) I started working in a kindergarten. Then we had a daughter, who is now 13 years old. I worked until the eighth month of pregnancy. I was entitled to maternity leave just like other male and female citizens of Denmark. Mothers have the right to maternity leave starting 4 weeks before the date of birth until 14 weeks after birth. Fathers can take 2 weeks in the*

course of this period. At the end of the 14 weeks, the parental leave period resumes. This takes 52 weeks and is provided to the family, which means that either the mother or the father can take any number of weeks off within this period and thus take turns in looking after their child. The parental leave allowance usually makes 60 - 80 % of their salary and it is paid by the employer. There are many options and employers are very flexible.

Most women in Denmark take half-a-year or a-year-long leave, knowing that children are guaranteed a place in a pre-school from the age of half-a-year. Children can go to a nursery or to a 'micro-nursery' - these are very popular at the moment. A 'micro-nursery' means that a mom at home looks after two or three other children (in addition to her own). In the last 5 weeks of parental leave, mothers can start working half-time. This stretches their leave period to 10 weeks and they can gradually resume the employment process. At this time, they catch up on what they have missed and find out what's new, it's a great thing. And it gives their children time to slowly get used to the kindergarten or nursery.

The model of the grandmother being the child-minder doesn't work in Denmark at all. Danish women are employed and active. There is no need for grandmothers because every family is guaranteed institutional pre-school care. In Denmark nowadays, it is completely common that both parents work either for economic reasons or because they want to be actively employed and not only look after children.

When our family started to live between both countries, Denmark and the Czech Republic, in Czech I was lacking institutional pre-school care and had to ask the grandmother to help. In Denmark, a kindergarten for children over two-and-a-half years old did the job. When our daughter was seven, we decided to settle down in the Czech Republic because we felt that the two educational systems were incompatible. Four years ago, we had a son. I am currently taking the Czech maternity/parental leave to look after him. With my career (independent businesswoman), I had the ambition to go back to work quickly and I was very surprised that I was 'given' a four-year-long maternity/parental leave. Apparently, there was no other option for me in the (social care) system.

In the Czech Republic, some people believe that it is a shame to put your kid in institutional care too early. In Denmark, children go to nurseries between the ages of 8 months and 1 year. I feel that it's not as hard for them when they are little. I also know there is a study that says that Danish children are the happiest in Europe. Every parent goes to work there, has a career, is happy and has a happy child. If a mother is forced to stay at home for 4 years, she might become frustrated. And so might her child."

In summary:

- In Denmark, the maternity leave period is followed by a 32-weeks-long period of parental leave which can be claimed by both mothers and fathers. Both parents can thus take turns in childcare in the course of this time period. Parents are allowed to work up to a half-time throughout both maternity and parental leave. It is also possible for parents to prolong the period of parental leave by 8 or 14 weeks.
- Parents in Denmark can also postpone their 32 weeks of leave and claim them later until the day their child reaches the age of 9.
- The government contributes 50 % of the parent's previous salary. The employer pays their employees either a partial or a full salary throughout the leave (according to the employment contract).
- 6.4 % of parents on maternity and parental leave are fathers.

Sweden: Individuals As the Foundations of the State

Pay gaps between women and men and the low levels of professional confidence among Czech women are both related to the long periods of time women take off work for the purposes of maternity and parental leave. On leave, women are often professionally and socially isolated. As mothers, they also frequently encounter secondary discrimination by their employers. It is common that companies are not interested in employing mothers with small children who have been taking a break from work for several years. In the eyes of the employer, these women are not valuable employees and with the help of legal glitches or gaps in labour regulations, companies seek ways to terminate their employment. Even though women on parental leave are protected against dismissal by law, there have been cases of women getting a notice on the first day back at work, with the official reasoning that their position would no longer be needed. Another common and illegal practice is that upon returning to work, women find out that their new job requires lower qualifications or involves fewer responsibilities than the position they occupied prior to leave. Alternatively, the new position might be called the same but its description is dramatically different than the original one. All these practices are common despite the law guarantee the same type and level of work to employees returning from maternity or parental leave. Women in these situations face the decision to either accept a job below their qualifications or to give notice themselves. Employers often hope for the

latter because if a worker leaves of her own volition, she is not entitled to severance pay. European studies² have shown that for more than a half of Czech mothers, parental leave entails a termination of employment in their original company or workplace.

Lucie Svobodová is the former Director of the Czech Centre in Stockholm. She has two children, ages 4 and 11. She says: *“I don’t think it is necessary to put your life on hold because you have children. Although my child is the most important thing in my life, I have spent lot of time and energy on getting an education and a career for many years and don’t see why I should postpone working, especially given the uncertain perspective of return. When I’d won the competition for the Director of the Czech Centre in Stockholm and then found out I was pregnant two weeks later, I decided that I was going to manage both. I was going to Sweden where working mothers were not viewed as heartless; I knew I wouldn’t be discriminated for going back to work after three of four weeks at home with the baby.*

In Sweden, both parents are entitled to parental leave. Each parent is obligated to take 60 days of non-transferable parental leave and in total, parents can claim 480 days of leave between the day their child is born and the day it reaches 8 years of age. It is also a trend in Sweden that both parents really share parental leave. Women usually spend the initial period at home and men take over after about half a year. In Stockholm, it is common to see men pushing strollers, fathers or grandfathers meet in coffee shops and discuss their offspring. I am surprised with how little has changed in the Czech Republic. When I look at the streets or playgrounds, I still see primarily women taking their babies out for a walk just like in the old days. Men are involved in childcare a little more than before, but it is much less common than I would like to see. Only a man who spends not hours but days looking after a child can understand what it means to take care of children, the household and to go to work.

An important principle in the Swedish society is that individuals, not families are the foundation of the state. What does ‘family’ mean today anyway? There is range of models and variations on the family nowadays. Partners can separate and the family structure can change but you need to know that you can continue to function fully as a free and a valuable member of the system.

The state does a great deal to secure pre-school education for children 15 - 18 months old and the government-funded system is open to everyone. It includes mainly communal kindergartens run by the state. There are also private organizations which need to follow the pre-school curriculum introduced in 1998, according to

² e.g., Riedmann, Arnold (ed.): *Working Time and Work-Life Balance in European Companies*. Eurofound 2006.

which a pre-school is an educational institution and not just a place to 'park' your children. The Swedish model treats children as individuals too. A boy playing with a doll or a girl banging nails into a wooden log would never be subject to ridicule.

When I came back to the Czech Republic and tried to enrol my child in the kindergarten, I learnt that we'd placed 53rd below the cut-off line. The director of the kindergarten wasn't able to tell me, or the other fifty parents, what to do in this country where private pre-schools are very expensive because they get no subsidiary funding. In Sweden, the government has been helping to fund private kindergartens since 1999 so the fees are about the same everywhere. There are usually three levels of fee based on parents' wages but they don't vary with the different type of kindergarten - they are about the same whether you come to a communal, a government-run or a private operation. Private kindergartens must adhere to the norms set forth by the Education Act as well as the curriculum of the school but none of these demands reflect in the school fees. What's important is that you have a choice. In Sweden, 80% mothers (and 90% fathers) go to work. The society does all it can to support working parents and the fertility rate in Sweden has been growing in the last decade."

In summary:

- The Swedish government provides parents with a parental allowance for 480 working days in total. Parental leave can be taken immediately after the birth of a child or at any other time but no later than the day the child reaches the age of 8. Mothers can claim up to 420 days of parental leave and fathers must take the other 60 days - if they fail to do so, the government retains the father's portion of the allowance.
- The aim of the family policy in Sweden is to "equalize the living conditions of families with and without children, to support the work-life balance of both parents and to provide special assistance to families in difficult life situations."
- Swedish companies are obligated to allow all their female and male employees with small children (including managers and workers in high-level positions) to work on flexible and part-time basis
- Employees taking leave are entitled to 80% of their income until their child reaches 18 months of age. Many Swedish companies also support their employees in the form of additional contributions to their parental

allowance for as long as 6 months. With this help, parents can look after their child for a half a year without any reduction in income.

In the light of this comparison, it is not an exaggeration to say that Czech women pay an extremely high price for their parenthood. It is a result of a combination of factors. A change is needed both in regard to specific provisions and in terms of the widely shared views and beliefs about maternity and parenthood. Effective organization of pre-school care for small children in the Czech Republic ought to become a government priority. Employers should be motivated to meet the needs of women-mothers and to offer them flexible or part-time contracts. If they are interested, women on leave should also be given opportunities to get involved with their job before the end of the two years, which currently mark the shortest possible period of parental leave. It would also be nice to see a change in the social climate towards a more positive attitude toward women who wish to work even when they have small children so that they do not feel discouraged. Finally, childcare should no longer be considered a solely woman's job. That both parents look after children needs to become the norm. The experience of Czech mothers living in Scandinavia is inspiring in all these regards and can lend direction to the Czech government, the Czech society and Czech mothers themselves. A shift toward these progressive trends would help unleash the potential of all parents to contribute to the common good, the potential which is currently lost in frustration and insecurity. Then, the isolating experience of maternal and parental leave would become a valuable and respected period of time devoted to parenting.

Kateřina Jonášová is a journalist. Pavla Frýdlová is a film-maker.



Early Childcare in the Czech Republic: Services Offered by Prague 4 Nurseries

Simona Hanusová

The public authorities in the Prague 4 capital district and its department of health services operate three public nurseries with a total capacity of 110 children. The facilities at Kotorská Street, Rabasova Street and Kukučínova Street serve parents of children one to three years old. Nurseries can play an important role in the work-life balance of families and assist them in going back to work. The overall aim of nursery services is to support employment among women and men on parental leave by removing the barriers these parents may face in the job market. The Prague 4 District Department of Health operates the following early childcare programmes: monthly and five-day nursery care, day care and babysitting in people's homes.

Nursery Services

The basic service of a nursery is traditional daily childcare. This service is utilized by single parents and by families in which both parents go to work every day. Children are eligible for day care if they are one to three years old, but the recommended age for starting nursery is two years. In the process of registration, parents are required to fill out an application form and get it signed by their paediatrician. The paediatrician's signature is needed to confirm that the child has been immunized and is in good health. The nursery staff consists of qualified paediatric nurses and caregivers with special training in psychology and teaching. Both groups of professionals are also required to continue their education in the form of courses and seminars. Children and parents address the staff as 'aunties'. The 'Aunties' help children to adapt to the company of others, to teach self-care skills and to carry out psychomotor and speech development activities. There are two or three nurses per department and every nurse usually has one assistant. The department team looks after five to six children.

Children usually take several days to adjust to the nursery environment. For this reason, the intake process is organized in stages: the first day, children spend two hours in the facility in the company of their parent. After that, the time of the children's stay gets longer with each day while the presence of the parent gets shorter. The old-fashioned system of separating children according to age is no longer observed. Children of different ages learn to be considerate of others, younger children learn from older ones and together they form a natural community. During the day, children play in the playroom and in the garden and participate in educational activities, which are sorted into six categories. The Thinking Skills programme uses stories and rhymes to foster children's imagination and speech skills and introduces children to their surroundings, including the natural world of animals and plants.

The Manual Skills and Art Programmes focus on developing children's fine motor skills through the use of construction and toy kits and by working with putty, glue, cut-outs, drawing and painting. Physical Education fosters gross motor skills, movement and agility with the help of simple physical exercise. Physical Education combines well with the Music Education Programme where children learn to dance and move to music, practice their sense of rhythm and learn to listen and sing. Finally, the goal of the Social Skills Programme (Moral Education) is to grow self-confidence in the children and to develop their social skills at the time they are making their first friends. Here, children are introduced to the basic rules of social conduct in the form of simple rules.

Nurseries serve food that meets the legal norms for nutrition, specifically norm No. 12 on dietary guidelines for toddlers. The nursery menu is set by nutrition experts according to these guidelines, making sure that meals are tasty and do not repeat themselves. The nursery staff also pay attention to proper hydration and regular intake of fluids by the children. The parents are informed about the meal plans via notice boards so that they can better plan their dinner menus. Children are never forced to eat their meals in the nursery but they are encouraged to be independent about eating and to observe basic table manners. Small children get help from the nurses on staff, who also feed them during other activities if necessary.

There has been a growing interest among parents in putting children in nursery care for only five days per month or less. This time restriction corresponds to the parenting benefit regulation, which says that if they observe the limit, parents do not lose their parenting leave allowance. The five-day nursery programme meets these demands and represents a compromise between traditional full-time care and hourly babysitting. Parents can plan to use these five days per month to work, run administrative errands, arrange doctor appointments or to relax. The same programme is prepared for both the children who attend nursery daily and those who only come for a few days per month. Finally, if parents are in an emergency and cannot find childcare so that they can run an important or urgent errand, they can take advantage of the babysitting service, which is available for as short a time as one hour.

Encouraging Employment among Parents of Children under Three

Both month-long and five-day nursery programmes are funded entirely from the District of Prague 4. Neither the national government nor the City of

Prague contribute any funding. For this reason, parents active in Prague 4 are the preferred clients of the local nurseries.

In 2010, the District Department of Health Services in Prague 4 received a grant under the Operation Programme Prague - Adaptability (OPPA) for its project 'Supporting Employment among Parents of Children under Three'. The project runs from August 1st, 2010 to August 31st, 2012 and its goal is to increase employment primarily among women and to improve their opportunities for sustainable career growth by reducing the gender segregation in the job market. Another important goal of the project is to help families achieve better work-life balance by developing a range of childcare services.

Additional project aims include:

- Growing the capacity of the current nurseries so that as they can serve as many parents as possible who would then have the option of staying at work or returning to work after or during parental leave. Specifically, nurseries in Prague 4 plan to increase their capacity by 10 places by the end of the project period through more efficient use of the current space and by hiring more staff.
- Offering current nursery services to other parents/children on a short-term basis when children in regular care are absent from school. The purpose of this additional service is to utilize the full capacity of the nursery by occasionally offering a financially accessible childcare service to parents on parental leave. The babysitting services are also going to be expanded by at least 10 %.
- Creating a new, professional babysitting service in the homes of families (so-called Home Care) with the help of experienced and qualified providers. In this way, parents on parental leave would get a short-term relief if they work part time, for example. The plan is to provide 5, 000 babysitting hours throughout the course of the project period.
- Setting up an internet booking portal to enable parents to book short-term childcare services (home and in the nursery). The portal will also inform parents about the nursery facilities, activities for children held by the city or other organizations, legal information for parents and so on.
- Supporting parents wishing to return to work (or to stay at work) through

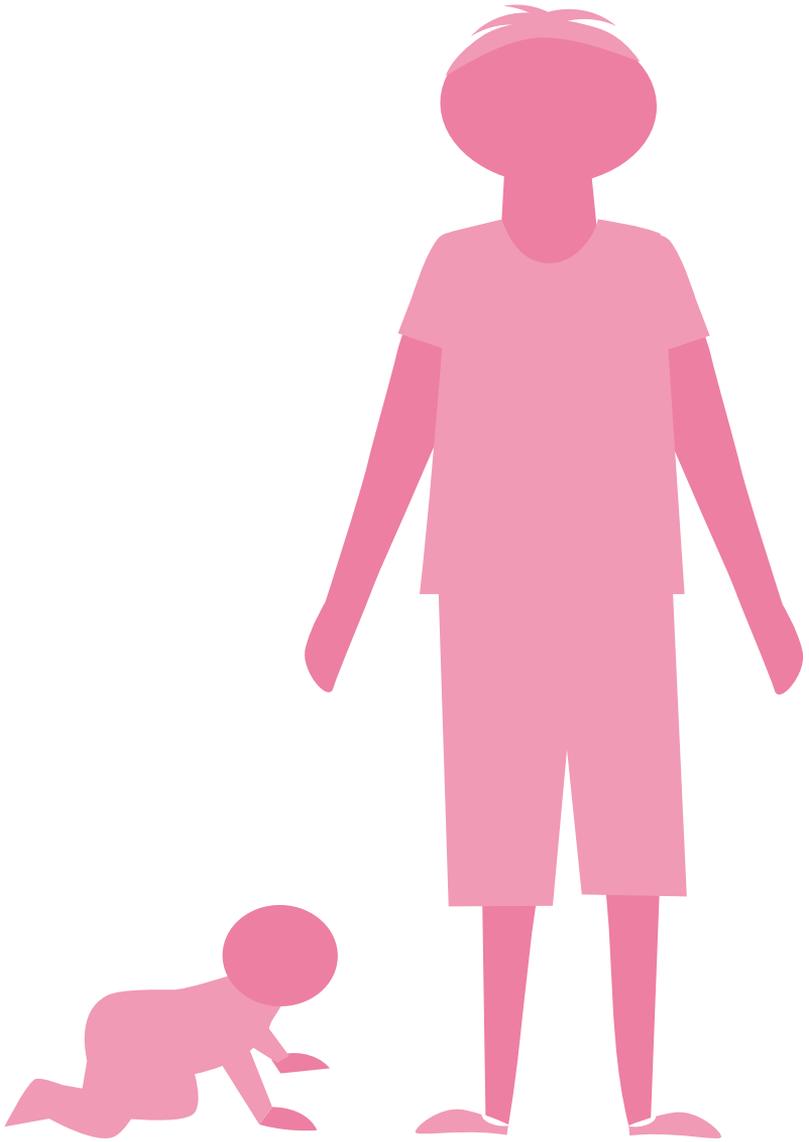
work-life balance counselling in the form of six educational 'open door' events. A library specializing in work-life balance literature will be created as a part of the project and parents will be able to loan the books for extended periods of time.

By expanding current services and adding new ones, the project will increase parents' flexibility both in terms of their time and space. In this way, it will help parents actively participate in the job market, to grow in their careers, gain economic independence and help prevent social isolation.

In August 2010, the capacity of one of the departments at the Kotorská Street nursery was expanded by 10 new places. All the spots were filled easily because the demand for nursery services by far exceeds the current supply. In October 2010, short-term home babysitting services were launched and the first parents and caregivers entered into contracts. New babysitters are being hired at the moment but the interest is greater than the capacity of the Health Services in the case of this service as well. To be hired, the babysitters must have teaching credentials or training in health or social care and caregivers of older generations need to have proven experience with childcare. They also must have a clean criminal record. All new hires attend a 2-day training course in one of the three nurseries.

Parents seem to appreciate the references and qualifications of the caregivers provided through the programme. Another asset of the programme is the simple booking system of www.zzpraha4.cz. Parents simply submit their requirements via the portal and the nursery coordinator arranges babysitters according to their needs.

The author is a head nurse in Rabasova nursery, Prague 4, Czech Republic.



Gender Studies, o.p.s.

Gender Studies, o.p.s. is a non-governmental non-profit organization that has performed the function of information, consultation and education centre in the area of relations between women and men and their position in society. The goal of the organization is to gather, analyse, work with and disseminate further information related to gender-relevant issues. Via specific project, GS actively influences change concerning equal opportunities in different areas such as institutional mechanisms, labour market, women's political participation, information technologies etc. GS also runs a library covering variety of publications and materials related to feminism, gender studies, women's and men's rights etc. For further information go to www.en.genderstudies.cz

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