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FAMILY POLICY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC AFTER 1989: FROM GENDERED AND ENFORCED DE-FAMILIALISM TO GENDERED AND IMPLICIT FAMILIALISM

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INTRODUCTION: FAMILIES AND CHILDREN – A NEW CHALLENGE FACED BY THE WELFARE STATE

The concept of the second demographic transition (van de Kaa 1987) connects changes in family and reproductive behaviour with deeper cultural changes in postmodern society – changes towards democratization and towards the individualization of values and lifestyles, with female emancipation forming part of the process. One consequence of these changes is that the fulfilment of parental aspirations may, in many cases, be achieved with fewer children in the family, and other life choices may even win out over parental aspirations.

Changing life values do not represent the only significant social change with an impact on family behaviour. According to Esping-Andersen *et al.* (2002:2), "revolution in demographic and family behaviour [is] spearheaded by women's embrace of personal independence and lifelong careers [and] marriage is less an act of economic necessity and more a question of individual choice. This also means proliferation of new and less stable household and family arrangements." Postmodern society and the global economy provide increased freedom of choice to family members. On the other hand, these new realities entail new insecurities – such as employment insecurity, income insecurity, and insecurity in family relationships – and risks.

Care obligations (both childcare and eldercare) accepted by family members, especially women, only increase these risks. Risks have become complex, often blocking individual choices in social and career situations, and also complicating relationships between partners. If we accept the

concept of families as rational beings, then their risk aversion behaviour can be predicted (McDonald 2000).

Esping-Andersen *et al.* (2002) point to the "child gap": the difference between the number of children a family has expressed the desire to have, and the number of children they actually have. This measure can indicate the extent to which other structural factors influence demographic and cultural behaviour. Esping-Andersen *et al.* (2002:63-64) offer the following list of factors that limit potential parents' individual life choices: the direct cost of having children, difficulties with the successful co-ordination of employment and childcare duties, and the difficulties young people face in family formation.

The possibilities of influencing family behaviour by welfare state intervention can be considered. "The policy challenge boils down to two principal issues. First, how to make parenthood compatible with a life dedicated to work and careers as well. This is usually identified as the question of 'women friendly policy'. Second, how to create a new and more egalitarian equilibrium between men's and women's lives – the gender equality issue" (Esping-Andersen *et al.* 2002:20). If we understand demographic and family behaviour as an interaction of cultural and structural factors, then social policy can, to a certain extent, provide individuals with improved choices and opportunities to integrate a career and a family life. In this way, indirectly and only to a limited extent, social policy can influence the fertility rate and labour market participation. Esping-Andersen shows (2002:81) that the traditionally negative correlation between female participation in the labour market and the fertility rate turns to a positive correlation in post-industrial societies. Esping-Andersen suggests that the coincidence of high labour market participation with an acceptable fertility rate has been achieved in some countries mainly through welfare state interventions.

Castles (2003) explains this "great reversal" in the correlation between women's employment and fertility rates similarly, as a consequence of not only a deep change in individuals' values but also in real options with which they could pursue these new preferences. "Progressively replacing preference both around the assumption that women's primary role is motherhood, and that work and motherhood are largely incompatible, are a new set of preferences, proceeding from [the] assumption that women have the same right and often the same financial need to work as men and that fertility must somehow be combined with demands of working life [...] Given such preferences, strong employment prospects for women become an important precondition for family formation" (Castles 2003:218-219). According to Castles, economic theories of the increasing opportunity costs of maternity (Becker 1991) or the increasing financial rewards from postponing motherhood (Easterlin and Crimmings 1991) reflect precisely

these considerations regarding women's employment prospects. Under these circumstances, a family-friendly policy that aims to improve both partners' employment prospects, mainly when they raise children, is a very crucial factor. According to Castles, these prospects may be influenced by a broader range of factors and policies, most important among them women's education, formal childcare arrangements, female employment, and flexible working hours.

Under conditions of market transition, the impacts of complex societal changes on family formation have been very intense, deeper than ever before in EU countries. Families have clearly been exposed to new transformational risks, such as unemployment and poverty, but they also enjoy more options regarding their life chances. During this period in many post-Communist countries – the Czech Republic is a telling example – the number of new marriages and the fertility rate have decreased significantly below the average level for EU countries. This paper deals with how these new transformational risks and opportunities affect family formation as well as existing families with children. Welfare state responses addressed to families with children are evaluated as a crucial condition influencing both of these factors.

This paper raises two hypotheses. First, we posit a very fast shift in women's aspirations, one which reflects their new opportunities as well as the pressures of transformational risks. Secondly, we claim that women's aspirations conflict with and are inhibited by the following obstacles: changes in family roles evolve much more slowly than professional aspirations; the impact of transformational risks on families with children is enormous; social policy is insensitive to the shift toward professional aspirations. These conflicts seem to affect demographic behaviour more than they affect participation in the labour market, which for both partners remains at a high rate, similar to that of the period prior to 1990, although the unemployment rate increased.

CHANGES IN DEMOGRAPHIC BEHAVIOUR AND SOME SIGNALS OF CHANGE IN VALUES IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC IN THE 1990S

The "extensive" population regime developed gradually in the Czech Republic under Communism (cf. Rabušic 2001), and as compared to Western European countries, was characterized by high nuptiality, fertility, abortion, divorce and death rates. Marriages and pregnancies often occurred at the beginning of women's reproductive cycles. The establishment of this model represented a shift back to the traditional Eastern European family type and had fairly complex causes.

At the same time, women were induced to join the labour market in large numbers. Labour market gender segregation by industry type, profession, and remuneration was significant. Women often worked in less demanding, lower paying jobs than men, so that they had enough energy left for the demands of housework and childcare (services were poor and consumer goods were hard to obtain). There was a tendency to have children in rapid succession, because return to work was an economic necessity – one family income was not sufficient to maintain even the most basic standard of living.

Shortly after the collapse of the Communist regime in 1989, its extensive population regime fell apart. Change was apparent in all respects. The decrease in the number of new marriages was the most significant; however, the decrease in the fertility rate was more pronounced. The number of marriages fell by almost half, and the fertility rate dropped by more than half.¹ In the 1990s, Czech family behaviour began to follow the trajectory of other EU countries. The decrease in nuptiality and fertility is even more significant in the Czech Republic than in any other EU country, while the average female age at first childbirth is currently only slightly lower.

Table 1: Family behaviour in selected countries in Europe (2001).

Country	Aver. no. children/female	Aver. age at first childbirth (women)	% of children born out of wedlock	Marriage rate for unmarried women (per 1,000)
Sweden	1.57	28.2	55.5	47
Netherlands	1.71	28.6	27.2	54
Denmark	1.74	27.4	44.6	70
UK	1.63	29.1	40.1	54
France	1.90	26.5	42.6	63
Austria	1.31	26.5	33.1	46
Germany	1.42	28.2	23.4	56
Italy	1.24	28.0	9.7	58
Slovenia	1.21	26.7	39.4	43
Czech R.	1.14	25.3	23.5	47
Poland	1.29	24.5	13.1	57
Hungary	1.31	25.3	30.3	44

Note: Countries are listed as per Human Development Index.

Source: "Recent Demographic Developments in Europe 2002" Council of Europe Publishing, Human Development Report 2003, UNDP.

¹ The number of abortions also decreased; the average age at entry into first marriage and at first childbirth increased. The number of children born out of wedlock also increased.

Shifts in values as well as economic pressures and risks ("cultural factors" as well as "structural factors") motivate family behaviour. Young people's decisions on family life have been strongly influenced by the new market environment in two respects: first, life chances have grown and young people's prospects improved, especially women's career prospects. In 1994, nearly half of Czech respondents (49.2%) stated that work best ensured women's independence – 13% fewer than in Sweden.² By 2002 this number had increased to 60%, the same as in Sweden.³ Correspondingly, 67% of Czechs who were asked in 1991 thought that "a woman has to have children to feel happy", but only 44% held the same opinion in 1999.⁴ In this respect, Czechs not only came to more closely resemble their Western European counterparts, but they (together with Slovenians) even came to consider children less important for women's satisfaction than respondents in some EU countries (e.g. France, Germany, Italy). In 1991, similarly, 70% of respondents agreed that "a pre-school age child will suffer if his/her mother works"; this percentage fell to 47% in 1999 (Halman 2000).

This apparent shift in attitudes towards women's professional careers should be understood as a widening of values and aspirations rather than as a waning desire to have children. The desire to have children persists, as in other countries, exactly because of the emotional satisfaction connected with having children. In the Czech Republic in 1994, just as in many other countries, a majority of women (85%) agreed with the statement that "watching children grow up is life's greatest joy" while only 5% disagreed. Esping-Andersen *et al.* (2002:62) conclude, based on ISSP data from 2000, that "...there is strong evidence that people's desire for children has not waned. European men and women (in the 25-34 group) exhibit a striking convergence in what number of children they would consider optimal. The EU average is 2.4 children with virtually no variation [...] Hence, we must be concerned with the obstacles that citizens face in forming families of their choosing." The *child gap* as a ratio of fertility to preferred number of children is approximately 0.6 in Europe (it is the lowest in the Southern European countries, approximately 0.5).⁵

Using 1994 ISSP data⁶ for comparative purposes, our findings for the Czech Republic are very similar. For Czech respondents the optimal

² Probably due to the negative experience of some women who were forced to work for economic reasons only, and could not properly perform their caring role in the family.

³ Data: ISSP (Gender and Family) 1994 and 2002. We are grateful to the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences for providing data sets from this research.

⁴ Data: EVS 1999.

⁵ The measure of *child gap* as suggested by Esping-Andersen actually tells us how well parental aspirations are fulfilled (1 = fully, 0 = not at all).

⁶ ISSP 1994: Family and Changing Gender Roles II, 1,024 respondents.

number of children was 2.15 (only 1% considered no children as optimal; 67% preferred two children). In 1994, the fertility rate was 1.44 and the *child gap* 0.67, which is close to the European average at the end of the 1990s (specifically, it is close to the rates for Germany, France, Sweden, Belgium, Finland and Ireland). But the fertility rate continued to decrease in the following years and in 2002 the *child gap* was 0.51 while the optimal number of children was still 2.14 on average and 67% of respondents preferred two children.⁷ This convinces us that children are still valued and so is the wish to have children in such numbers that maintain the reproductive balance.

It is a different question to what extent it is possible to balance increased labour market (career) aspirations with young people's family formation aspirations under new economic and social circumstances. Without even considering the structural obstacles, we can observe that several cultural factors block such a possibility. One such cultural obstacle is the persistence of gender division in family roles. While women's career aspirations have been raised, the traditional understanding of family roles has not changed much. The paternalistic model of family makes career building difficult for women if the family raises children.

The Czech attitude to the division of family roles is still rather traditional, and Czech men are less prepared than men in many Western countries to take on an equal share of childcare responsibilities. In 1994, only 25% of Czech respondents disagreed with the statement that "a man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family." Meanwhile, in Sweden the rate was 70%, in the Netherlands 64%, in Italy 50%, in the UK and Germany 48%, and in Slovenia 43%. During the 1990s, this attitude did not change significantly in the Czech Republic. In 2002 the share of those who disagreed with the statement was still only 29%, while in Sweden, for example, it was 76% and even in Poland it increased from 20% to 34%.⁸

ECONOMIC PRESSURES AND NEW RISKS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

The other group of factors in family behaviour are the structural conditions under which these life aspirations are pursued. New market risks, increasing living costs, and the high opportunity cost of parenthood impose many pressures on family formation.

⁷ Calculated from the crude fertility rate in 2002 and CVVM (Institute of Sociology) survey of January 2003 (Šalamounová and Šamanová 2003).

⁸ Data: ISSP – Family and Changing Gender Roles.

Czech Families with Children, and Poverty

In the Czech Republic, income deprivation and poverty, as measured in terms of income, are lower than in most other European countries. However, the fact that the cost of housing doubled during the 1990s (it increased from 10% to more than 20% of the total average family expenditure) is of key importance to young Czech families. This shift also significantly increased the difficulties young people face in starting their own households.

At the same time, families with children faced relative income losses during the market transition. In the first phase of the transformation, poverty increased only slightly (cf. Večerník 1999), mainly because of the low level of unemployment (which was between 3 and 4%). However, the poverty profile changed as it shifted closer to the situation typical of market economies: poverty shifted from pensioners to families with children. Single parent families were hit hardest, so that by 1996 families with children represented 91.2% of the poor households in the country (Večerník 1999).

The Czech economic transformation accelerated between 1995 and 2000. Unemployment rose from 3.5% in 1996 to 9.4% at the end of 1999, and has since remained at that level or has even increased. Household poverty levels, especially for families with children, are even higher now than in 1996. Households with young children are more susceptible to poverty for two main reasons: income is being spent on more family members while fewer family members (women) are available to work. Data shows that unemployment (or inactivity) is a decisive factor in poverty, more important than the number of children.

In spite of the low general poverty rate in the Czech Republic – much lower than the EU average – the concentration of poverty (indicated by the poverty risk index) is much higher in the Czech Republic. There are striking differences in poverty risks, with unemployment and children in the family playing a decisive role. Women's employment prospects have acquired crucial importance for the family's economic wellbeing.

Table 2: Poverty and poverty risks by household characteristics.

	Czech Rep. 2000		EU 13 1996	
	% poor	Poverty risk	% poor	Poverty risk
Working (at least 1 person)	5.2	67	13	77
Not working/unemployed	43.8	562	51	296
Pensioners	7.3	94	19	109
Other inactive	53.2	682	53	306
Single, under 65	15.2	195	22	126
Single, over 65	12.3	158	25	146
Couples under 65, no children	2.2	28	9	53
Couples over 65, no children	1.2	15	16	94
Couple + 1 dependent child	5.0	64	10	60
Couple + 2 dependent children	5.8	74	14	81
Couple + 3 or more dependent children	17.9	229	25	144
Couple + dep. and non dep. children	9.3	119	17	97
Single parent	26.1	335	32	184
Other	6.8	87	18	106
Total	7.8	100	17	100

Note: Poverty line as 60% of median per capita equalised income (elasticity scale = 1.0 head of household, 0.5 other adult, 0.3 children).

Source: Czech Statistical Office data 2002, own calculations, EC 2000.

Women with Children, and the Labour Market

Two models of women's participation in the labour market have emerged in modern market economy systems:

- The first one is the "interrupted" professional career, in which women leave the labour market temporarily for a short period of time before and after their child is born, providing care in the child's early years;

- The other one is the "continuous" professional career, which in principle resembles a man's career: women try to minimize the interruption of their professional career (it is easier if they have fewer children).

The second model (of a continuous professional career) is more appropriate for ensuring the equal position of women in the labour market, but in this case another problem occurs: how to balance the opposing demands of motherhood and a professional career. The model

appears in two forms: the "full and full worker model" (both partners work full-time) and the "one and one-half worker model" (while raising children, one of the partners restricts his/her working activity to a part-time job) (Vleminckx 2002).⁹ The latter form is more suitable for a mother, although certain disadvantages in the labour market remain associated with it. Due to rising incomes and living standards in advanced economies of EU countries, the *income effect* on labour supply formation is more significant.¹⁰ Labour demand for flexible forms of employment increases, and thus the share of people working part-time has grown in these countries: in the case of women, about one third of jobs held are part-time on average. In the Netherlands, the number is as high as two thirds.¹¹

In the Czech Republic, as in other post-Communist countries, women's employment was high as the economy was based on the extensive use of labour. The state also supported women's employment by providing inexpensive childcare services. Women's participation in employment was necessary in order to meet the basic needs of a family with children. On the other hand, the professional structure, job positions, and the income structure were gender-segmented to a great extent: women's earnings were understood as supplementary to men's earnings, and their job positions were to be less demanding to allow women to perform the double role of mother (caregiver) and worker. We label this model, referring to Leitner's (2003, see below) classification, *gendered and enforced de-familialisation*.

Thus, the traditional role division inside the family did not change, despite women's increased employment.¹² Under such circumstances, the model of an interrupted career was easy to practice, as the interruption lasted for a relatively short time. Childbirths were condensed into short periods of time and children's care was quickly transferred to nurseries. The tax-benefit system favoured families with more children. Because most people had limited opportunities to build a truly lucrative career, no threats connected with the risk of job loss or substantial financial loss were present. *The model of traditional family role division with working mothers* worked quite well.

⁹ In addition, a "part-time, part-time model" is emerging (two part-time jobs in the family) although is not yet very widespread.

¹⁰ Once real incomes reach a certain level, increase in income tends to be associated with a decreasing labour supply and leisure is preferred by the workforce.

¹¹ Vleminckx (2002) demonstrates on data from EU countries that women leave the labour market or restrict their participation in it when men's earnings are high enough. It is not only real wage increase that plays a role, but also social policy, which corrects and supplements family incomes through taxation and benefit packages.

¹² Čermáková (1997) labelled this a specific "gender contract".

The economic transformation did not significantly change gender segregation in the labour market with respect to positions or earnings. In fact, the labour market became additionally gender-segmented with respect to employment stability. Women mostly occupy the secondary segments of the labour market, and hence the risks of unemployment are much higher, especially for women with children or women expected to have children, who are exposed to employer discrimination.

Due to these varied types of labour market segmentation, women's wages are about 30% lower than men's. Thus the *income effect* is weak and the model of the one and one-half worker that is more suitable for balancing work and care is difficult to implement – only about 8% of working women are employed part-time in the Czech Republic.¹³ Moreover, the traditional division of family roles significantly overloads working women who are also caring for children. In spite of the generally increasing opportunities of Czech women to “build a career”, several obstacles in the labour market have emerged for people who have childcare obligations. These obligations put them at a disadvantage in meeting employers' demands and competing for positions. Given the poor protection of employees through collective bargaining, in their hiring and firing practices employers discriminate easily against people with childcare obligations. In a survey of the unemployed in seven districts in the Czech Republic (2001; 812 respondents, 489 of them women), 25% of women indicated that they were rejected by an employer because they had a young child. This was considered as valid a reason for rejection as insufficient qualification for the job (Sirovátka and Mareš 2003). In short, due to rigid gender roles in the family, rigid employment patterns, and discrimination in the labour market, raising children puts women at a serious disadvantage in terms of their employment prospects.

The women's employment rate in the Czech Republic in 2000 for the 25-54 age group was 73.7%. This is above the OECD average and comparable to that in Austria, Germany, UK, USA, Portugal, and Poland. However, there are large differences in the gender gap in employment when we compare women with no children and women with two or more children: the gender gap compared to men of the same age category is only 5% for women with no children but is 33% for women with two or more children. This is a difference of 28%. It is comparable to Germany, whereas the gap is only 11% in Portugal, 19% in Austria, and 23% in the UK and the USA. In the Czech Republic the fact that having a child is a professional handicap is even more obvious in the unemployment rates. Czech married women aged 25 to 44 with children face a risk of unemployment about three times higher

¹³ This pattern is already familiar in Southern European EU countries where wages are below EU average.

than men do, while the difference between men and single women without children is negligible.¹⁴

Table 3: Specific unemployment rates of men and women (4Q 2003).

Age	Single		Married		Married, children		Single, children	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
15-24	16.9	17.3	14.2	14.0	18.3	24.2	23.5	30.9
25-34	8.2	7.2	4.9	5.7	4.2	12.9	14.7	22.1
35-44	10.8	12.1	5.6	9.5	3.1	8.1	8.2	12.4
45-54	13.8	11.4	4.4	6.5	3.4	6.4	4.1	12.9
55-64	9.2	5.8	3.3	5.6	3.0	2.4	7.0	1.3
64+	7.8	2.2	3.7	3.2	-	-	-	35.5
Total	11.2	10.2	5.6	7.5	4.6	10.3	13.4	16.3

Source: Czech Statistical Office, Labour Force Survey 2003, special unpublished calculations.

The significant change in family behaviour in the Czech Republic to a large extent arises from the confluence of two trends: changes in people's life chances and values, on the one hand, and increased career disadvantages for mothers – with their attendant negative impact on family income and risk of poverty – on the other.

CZECH PRO-FAMILY POLICY

During the 1990s, more attention was paid to the patterns of family policy in EU countries than before. Esping-Andersen (1999) introduced the concept of de-familialisation when analysing the extent to which the welfare state enables working parents to be relieved from childcare obligations. Korpi (1999) used a similar approach when he distinguished the continental model of general family support and the Scandinavian dual earner model. According to Korpi, these two strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, while the third “market” approach, which neglects the issue of family altogether, is rather distinct. Leitner (2003) assumes that strong familialist policy (explicit familialism) may be associated with a strong de-familialist effort (optional de-familialism

¹⁴ In 2000, women's average age at first childbirth was 25; the average age for all births was 27 years (Šalamounová 2002).

emerges) while implicit familialism emerges in the case of the state's weak effort in both dimensions.

Other authors emphasize gender aspects; namely, they focus on the extent to which family policies support the sharing of childcare responsibilities by both partners (Sainsbury 1999; Saxonberg 2003). Three general patterns emerge from these considerations. The first is the "market" oriented model, which is not frequently applied in family policy. The second, the "general family support" approach, corresponds to the outdated trade-off choice between work and childcare and therefore mainly supports family incomes by supplementing the breadwinners' incomes at times when mothers do not work. Thus it simultaneously encourages mothers' absence from the labour market. The third is the "dual earner" approach, which is most engaged in the support of both partners' labour market opportunities. It enables the sharing of childcare responsibilities by both partners and also provides formal care services.

When evaluating the adherence of Czech family policy to these models of family-oriented policy, we need to focus on three core aspects: first, the protection of income and alleviation of poverty in families with children; second, the role of family-related policies in improving women's employment opportunities; third, the impact of the policies on the balance of work and childcare between both parents.

In the Czech Republic, unlike in many Western European countries, women's participation in the labour market was high in the past and their participation rate is not considered to be a problem. The decrease in fertility after 1990 has been perceived as a problem only during the last few years, whereas at the beginning of the transformation it was regarded as a short-term deviation. In relation to families, social policy tended to concentrate on eliminating the affects of the transformation on families with children. Thus it sought to compensate for direct child-related costs. Limited public budgetary resources were allocated to eliminating the direct danger of social risks, and social policy was designed as a social safety net and a "compensatory" tool to respond to direct transformational effects. Political representations were mainly interested in compensating for the slump in real income¹⁵ in households which were most affected by the differentiation of earned income during the transformation. Another significant aim was to relieve the pressure on the labour market by introducing the option of early retirement and a longer period of women's inactivity while bringing up children. These initiatives were aimed at the most basic political objectives: to maintain system legitimacy, political acceptability of reforms, and social equilibrium.

¹⁵ Caused by price liberalization and new risks connected with the increasing cost of living and with the labour market (unemployment).

Poverty Alleviation: From Family-related Benefits to a Social Safety Net

At the beginning of the transformation the social security system was intended mainly to create a social safety net. Soon the concept of a minimum subsistence level was defined, and social assistance benefits protecting this minimum standard of living were introduced. Other benefits to compensate for real income decrease caused by inflation shock ("state compensatory benefits" and "housing benefits") followed. In 1995, these benefits were included in a new "state support benefit" system, which included non-contributory benefits mainly aimed at families with children. This state support benefit system was based on the principle of income testing.¹⁶ Since 1996, allowances intended for children (child benefits and social supplementary benefits) have been maintained in their real value only for the lowest income bracket. Levels for the middle and upper income brackets were cut dramatically to reduce expenditure without exposing the population, as a whole, to too high a risk of poverty.

The entitlements to and the amounts of the main state support system benefits (child benefits, social supplements, housing benefits, commuter benefits) have been determined by household income in relation to the subsistence minimum. As household income increases, claims to most of the family-related benefits as well as the amount of received benefits decrease.¹⁷ Thus the whole welfare benefit system intended for the economically active population is actually markedly focused on low-income families; the rest are more or less neglected. Furthermore, this system is supplemented by social assistance benefits which guarantee a mere subsistence level.

Adjustments to the real amount of the subsistence minimum gradually lagged behind both salary hikes and living cost increases, so that the state social system benefits decreased in relative standards as well as in their real value during the second half of the 1990s.¹⁸ Between 1996 and 2000 real wages increased by 9% while the real value of the subsistence minimum level (if housing cost increases are combined with the list of common household expenses) fell by 7% (Sirovátka, Jahoda and Kofroň 2002). Also, due to increasing wages in relation to the subsistence minimum, the entitlement of families with children to family-related benefits was automatically reduced for all income brackets except the lowest.

¹⁶ The state income supplement was transformed into the social supplement. Its amount – as well as that of the child benefit and the housing benefit – increases proportionately as the household income decreases.

¹⁷ There are also some untested benefits defined in relation to the subsistence amount: namely parental benefits and birth allowances.

¹⁸ The subsistence minimum is adjusted (valorised) according to the increase in living costs by 5%; in 1998 this rule was temporarily changed to a 10% limit (because of recession).

Table 4: Development of the real value of child benefit amounts received by Czech households (by deciles group, weighted by persons).

Decile	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average
1996	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
1998	87	85	61	83	59	51	43	20	52	107	75
2000	100	95	75	72	63	70	58	48	31	55	85

Source: Family budget surveys 1996-2000, in Sirovátka, Kofroň and Trboła 2003.

This "compensatory" benefit system makes use of dispensable financial resources mainly to eliminate potential poverty risks, and the program is indisputably a great asset to families with children. In keeping with its aims, the benefit system successfully prevented a more noticeable increase in income poverty despite the previously mentioned relative and real decrease in benefits and without any increase whatsoever in social protection expenses.¹⁹ This was achieved in the face of a decrease in real population income during the initial transformation period, an increase in living costs during the whole period, and increased unemployment in the late 1990s. Its effectiveness in keeping poverty in check and its economic efficiency (financial savings) are the main reasons the system was identified, on the basis of data from the mid-1990s (Sainsbury and Morissens 2002), as the best in Europe and retained a high ranking even at the beginning of the 21st century. The only issue to be discussed is its reduced effectiveness in the case of specific groups: single mothers, families with 3 or more children, and the unemployed (since unemployment is the main cause of poverty in families with children).

On the other hand, the role of the social insurance benefits aimed at the working-age population became less significant. In 1998, unemployment benefits were cut from 60% to 50% of net wages for the first three months of unemployment and to 40% for the next three months. The unemployment benefit is paid only for 6 months, and then the unemployed must claim means-tested social assistance. The reduction of unemployment benefits and the decrease in the minimum real amount of subsistence brought, in the second half of the 1990s, a higher rate of material deprivation to unemployed families with children. In the Czech Republic, income compensation during maternity leave is provided for 26 weeks, which is longer than the standard in EU countries (typically 16-18 weeks). However, the compensation rate is 69%, which is identical with sickness benefits,

¹⁹ The total expenditure on the social protection system during the 1990s hovered at the level of 20-21 percent of GDP, even with a new calculation base (early retirement pensions, unemployment, and social allowance).

and furthermore until 1999 it was limited by a very low ceiling, which significantly decreased its level compared to wages. All in all, the social protection system seems to be a highly targeted one: it compensates mainly low-income households, for whom "social support" benefits represent approximately a third of their total income on average.

Access to Work: From Guaranteed Employment to Weak Labour Market Policies, and from Care Services to Extended Parental Leave

For families with children, access to work represents the most effective way to prevent poverty, and it also appears to be a crucial factor in family formation decisions, both in general and specifically in the Czech Republic. Because women's unemployment while they are bringing up children is about three times higher than men's, active labour market policy has a potentially significant impact on their participation in the labour market. However, the scope of active policy measures is rather limited in the Czech Republic. In 1999-2003, when unemployment rose to 9-11%, active employment policy expenditure was slightly below 0.2% of GDP, while the average of OECD countries having a similar average unemployment rate was about 1% of GDP and EU countries with comparable unemployment rates dedicated much bigger funds to this area (see OECD 2001-2003). Active labour market policy measures are characterized by another problem: poor targeting at the most vulnerable groups (such as the long-term unemployed, unqualified, and handicapped), who are noticeably underrepresented in labour market training measures (cf. Sirovátka and Rákoczyová 2001). Adverse selection has negative effects on, e.g., women who are outside the labour market in the long term. Considering this general picture, we must conclude that the scope of measures aimed at the employment of women with children is quite limited, and this material disadvantage negatively influences their labour market prospects.

Women's employment constituted a major political objective under the previous regime, and consequently an extensive network of facilities for children of pre-school age was built. Pre-schools (for children from 3 to 6 years) were easily accessed even after 1990 because they continued to be subsidized by the state. Attendance expenses, including meals, were reasonable for parents – approximately 4-6% of the average monthly wage. In contrast, after 1990, nursery (for children under 3) capacity was reduced, and the attendance charge increased markedly.²⁰ While in 1989 there existed 1,313 facilities and nearly 53,000 vacancies in nurseries for children aged under 3,

²⁰ The amount of the fee is determined by the city council. According to one example, the fees for families with income less than double the subsistence minimum is about 10% of women's

in 1993 there were only 247 facilities and slightly over 9,000 vacancies and in 2000 only 65 facilities and slightly more than 1,800 vacancies – with further reductions expected (*Zdravotnická* 1990, 2001).

Nurseries are currently found only in larger cities, and only women with salaries significantly above average can afford them. In contrast, the availability of formal childcare arrangements for children aged 0-3 years has been repeatedly identified as the most effective tool to influence women's employment prospects and family formation at the same time (Esping-Andersen 1999, 2002; Castles 2003) and has become one of the measures recommended by European Employment Strategy guidelines. The Czech government has favoured a completely different approach. After 1990 state policy tended to aim at easing pressure on the labour market and did so, among other ways, by discouraging the employment of women with very young children. At the beginning of the 1990s, maternity leave was extended up to 4 years and was covered by parental benefits, which are about 15% of the average monthly salary. It was permissible to have a part-time job while on maternity leave, but earnings were limited to 1.5 times the minimum parent subsistence until 2003 (*i.e.* about 30% of the average monthly salary). Furthermore, a child could not spend more than 5 days a month in a pre-school. This restriction resulted in a small increase in part-time jobs and the limited ability to balance work and childcare. Due to these arrangements only 44% of children aged 3 to 4 years attended pre-schools in the Czech Republic, compared to 100% in France, 71% in Denmark, 68% in Hungary, 62% in Sweden and Germany, 52% in Portugal, and 50% in Great Britain (Annex to OECD 2001). At the same time, nursery attendance is unusual in the Czech Republic:²¹ less than 1% of the relevant cohort attend nursery schools. On the other hand, children aged over 2 years are allowed to attend a pre-school if there are places available, and thus about one quarter of the cohort of children between 2-3 years of age currently attend pre-school (calculations based on Matějková and Paloncyová 2004).

As a whole, these measures – the absence of nursery facilities for very young children, support for women's prolonged absence from the labour market due to childrearing, the inflexibility of employment forms/arrangements – tend to keep women out of the labour market while their children are young. There are no extensive and sufficiently effective tools

average wage; if the income is more than double the subsistence minimum level then the fee is about 20% of women's average wage (these are the most typical cases); if the income is more than 3 times the subsistence minimum, the fee is about 40% of women's average wage.

²¹ It must be noted that due to negative experiences with collective facilities, Czechs tend to distrust them; unlike Scandinavians, Czechs can hardly imagine high-quality services provided by public institutions.

for women's full integration into the labour market when they return to work, and because of their long absences they are markedly disadvantaged. The range and focus of active measures is not sufficient.

Finally, a significant redistributive effort to compensate quite a wide range of families for low income (up to 1.6 times the subsistence minimum, *i.e.* about a third of the households) corresponds with a social-democratic regime. It compensates low-income families with children, but it does not sufficiently protect the living standard of families. Maternity and childcare benefits are low (often about 50% of net income or lower).

Evidently, it is possible to compensate the family sufficiently through income-based benefits only if the compensation is based on the main breadwinner's (usually, the man's) earnings, and the woman's (lower) earnings are replaced with (primary income-based) childcare benefits. This explains why women's parental leave may also last longer. However, it is then unrealistic for a man to share some periods of the parental leave, because his forfeited income would almost always be greater than hers. Families with only one earned income get relatively high compensation once all the various benefits are summed up (as a result of the targeted state support benefits). These replacement rates typically reach 70-90% in households with an unemployed or inactive woman (assuming the woman does not have a university degree or above-average income).²² In general, these high compensation rates are due to the fact that in the Czech Republic, women's wages represent on average only 72% of men's wages, so their contribution to the total household income is very small. Altogether, income-tested social benefits can to a large extent compensate them easily. Sometimes the compensation for earned incomes for households with one employed member is rather high and sets the trap of unemployment for low-income groups, mainly for women.

Thus women's high unemployment and unemployment risk is increased by several circumstances: a highly redistributive family-based benefit system, the insufficient scope and poor level of facilities for children under 3 years (or the lack of alternative solutions) and inadequate scope, targeting and quality of active labour market policies. The high rate of women's unemployment contributes to high poverty rates for families with children.

In summary, a vast array of circumstances, including social policy measures, are working in tandem to keep women out of the labour market, both when their children are young and then, due to natural barriers to re-entry, also later. Naturally, these circumstances have the effect of gradually worsening their situation in the labour market, which in turn worsens the material deprivation of families with children.

²² The same applies to a female breadwinner with a child. In contrast, if a man is unemployed, the replacement rate decreases to under 70% on average; to under 50 percent for men with secondary education.

Acceptance of Family-related Policies by the Public: the Legacy of the Past

Economic pressures and challenges have induced policies with short-term objectives that alleviate acute poverty, by providing income compensations to the most needy, and that contain the public expenditure – very much resembling the residual/liberal model. The second core feature of the policy has been a paternalistic shift from institutional to family-based childcare, in which the gender division of childcare obligations is implicit. Thus the outdated pattern of gendered and implicit familism has been established, which places people's preferences related to work and family life in opposition.

On the other hand, public opposition was not strong when the new pattern of gendered and implicit familism was implemented. This may be partly explained by the legacy of the past, the still powerful gender contract based on male dominance and gendered family role division.

Another legacy of the past, one of negative experiences with the old pattern of balancing work and care, also contributed to the acceptance of this new policy design by the public – women to some extent welcome the opportunity to provide better care to their children than was possible before (and in fact, they now have no other choice). If the Czech public desires any improvements in family policies, these preferences are (in contrast, for example, to Sweden) mainly for familist measures such as compensation benefits (parental leave, child allowance) rather than for day-care services, employment policies, or flexible working arrangements.

Table 5: Preferences about child-related policy measures (the ratio of the supported policy measures – three measures could be mentioned by respondents).

Policy measure	Czech Republic	Sweden
Duration of parental leave	23	40
Availability of childcare	20	64
Child allowance	52	29
Level of parental leave	59	3
Flexible working conditions	11	40
Suitable accommodation	41	16
Cost of education	21	15
Tax relieves	35	37
Fight against unemployment	24	42

Source: Fahey and Spéder 2003:75, based on Eurobarometer 2002.

In sum, in the Czech Republic we can trace a shift from the gendered and enforced de-familist policies, which supported institutional care outside the family, and women's participation in the labour market while accepting marked gender segmentation in the labour market and gender division of family roles. Surprisingly, the direction of this shift is not directed towards the Swedish de-gendered and "optional de-familialism", which supports both family formation and labour market participation through family-friendly policies, building on gender equality both in work and childcare. Instead, in the Czech Republic, de-familialisation has been rejected and family responsibility in childcare emphasized, while the gender division of family roles has remained almost untouched. Paradoxically, typical familist policies (child benefit packages, maternity and parental leave benefits) are weak as well. Instead, a social safety net has been developed.

CONCLUSION

In the Czech Republic, a welfare system which can be labelled "compensatory" and passive has developed. Some of its characteristics, such as the targeting of social benefits and the low level of insurance benefits, correspond to a liberal model. Other aspects, such as the emphasis on women's exclusion from the labour market while they are caring for young children and the failure to facilitate their labour reintegration, correspond to the classic model of a conservative regime. In these respects the system may be labelled a re-familialised regime (Hantrais 2003) or, rather, a gendered and implicit familism (Leitner 2003).

We may conclude that while families' labour market aspirations have significantly increased for both parents after 1990, gender role divisions within the family have adjusted only partially. Thus families are confronted with a high unemployment risk for women who want to have children and with a rather passive social policy that favours "general family support". Despite the fact that the system of social benefits as a whole works effectively, the unemployment risk is higher for families with children than for the rest of the population, and so in turn the poverty rates are higher for this group.

This policy pattern of the passive compensatory welfare state runs counter to the newly prevalent cultural values of the second demographic transition. By weakening women's position in the labour market, the pattern contributes to the aggravation of social problems such as unemployment and poverty in families with children. Pragmatically speaking, it makes family formation more difficult and more dangerous. Thus, if we accept that families are rational agents whose risk aversion behaviour can be predicted (McDonald 2000), we can conclude that the existing welfare state policy contributes to low fertility rates in the Czech Republic.

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Society, Reproduction and Contemporary Challenges

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