



## Discussion Paper



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# Childcare policies and gender relations in Eastern Europe: Hungary and Poland compared

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Harriet Taylor Mill-Institut für Ökonomie und Geschlechterforschung  
Discussion Paper 17, 03/2012

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Berlin School of Economics and Law:**

### **Where is EU Gender Policy Going? Balance and Perspectives in the Field of Employment and the Labor Market**

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- Employment and equal opportunities considering the Scandinavian Model,
- Employment and equal opportunities in the New Member States of Middle and Eastern Europe,
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- Strategies and lobbying of gender equality political players,
- Gender dimensions of the present economic and financial crises. Speakers from European and national research contexts presented their recent work.

The summer school was funded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)* and by the *Berliner Chancengleichheitsprogramm (BCP)*.

Organized by Dr. Ingrid Biermann and Prof. Dr. Friederike Maier.

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# **Childcare policies and gender relations in Eastern Europe: Hungary and Poland compared**

**Dorota Szelewa**

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## **Abstract**

The goal of this paper is to present the main research interests that have been so far pointed out in the research on the issues of gender relations, employment and childcare policies in the post-communist countries. First, I will characterise the specifics of post-communist countries and briefly touch upon the importance of socialist or communist legacies that are still making it difficult to introduce gender equality principles and policies in most of these countries. Second, I will go from this general perspective to more concrete issues, when I present the varieties of outcomes in terms of childcare and family policies in Central and Eastern Europe. Third, I will focus more on the situation in two countries: Hungary and Poland, as they represent the two very different cases within the whole group of countries. The paper outlines some basic problems and new research results in the field of family, work and gender relations in the post-communist countries. An important message of this paper is that in spite of common historical events and economic challenges shared by the post-communist countries, we can observe a variety of child care policy mixes within this group of countries.

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## **List of Abbreviations:**

CEE	Central and East European
GYED	Gyermekgondozási díj (Hungarian childcare scheme for insured parents)
GYES	Gyermekgondozási (Hungarian childcare scheme for non-insured parents)
GYET	Gyermeknevelési támogatás (Hungarian childcare scheme for families with at least three children)

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

After the fall of communism the new democracies struggled with the processes of building modern states and institutions and tried to construct new political and economic systems from the ruins of state-socialism. For social scientists these countries have offered a new possibility of exploring different study areas. One of the new areas was studying family and generally social policies during (and after) transformation. However, the research on the development of the welfare state in the Eastern part of Europe has tended to treat this region as a monolith and has underlined its common features, stemming largely from their common communist and post-communist experience (Deacon 1992a; Hantrais and Letablier 1996; Aidukaitė 2004; Pascall and Lewis 2004; Szalai 2006). Partly, this has been a consequence of the focus on the reforms within the system of old-age pensions (Mueller 1999). Several researchers have emphasised the common challenges that the Central and East European (CEE) countries faced, of which the biggest was globalisation (See for example: Deacon 1992; 1992a; 2000). For this reason, a serious need developed later to focus on other elements of the social safety net in these countries.

Childcare policies have thus recently attracted some interest on the part of researchers dealing with issues of welfare state transformation in CEE countries (Fodor, Glass et al. 2002; Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006; Szelewa and Polakowski 2008; Szikra and Szelewa 2009). This new stream of research has begun to break with the tradition of treating this region of Europe in a holistic manner.

The topic of this paper is, accordingly, the *difference* between the mixes of family policies in the two post-communist countries: Hungary and Poland. These two countries are from the post-communist group, they were facing similar challenges within the same timeframes, both of them were regarded as successful in their 'unification with the West', and they were originally in the first round for the EU membership. For those reasons, in works on economic and social policies, they were usually put in the same cluster of countries with 'state-

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<sup>1</sup> The paper is based on my presentation during the Summer School 16–23 July 2010 at the Harriet Taylor Mill-Institute (HTMI) of the Berlin School of Economics and Law: Where is EU Gender Policy Going? Balance and Perspectives in the Field of Employment and the Labor Market. For the presentation I used the findings of my PhD Thesis: *Ideas, Rules and Agency: Public Bureaucrats and the Evolution of Family Policies in Hungary and Poland*. Additionally, many thoughts and ideas included in this paper come from the research on Eastern Europe that I did with Michał Polakowski and Dorottya Szikra, with whom I co-authored several texts devoted to these problems. All of these texts are quoted here in this paper.

I would like to thank Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences for providing support for this research.

socialist' legacies and treated as a monolith (Bohle and Greskovits 2007). Still, they have quite different family policies.

Some of these issues are at the centre of this text. First, I will characterise the specifics of post-communist countries and briefly touch upon the importance of socialist or communist legacies that are still making it difficult to introduce gender equality principles and policies in most of these countries. Second, I will go from this general perspective to more concrete issues, when I present the varieties of outcomes in terms of childcare and family policies in Central and Eastern Europe. Third, I will focus more on the situation in two countries: Hungary and Poland, as they represent the two very different cases within the whole group of countries. Some of these findings would be summarised in the conclusions.

## **2 Childcare policies in Hungary and in Poland: existing research**

As often argued by the feminist researchers on welfare state, "social provision of a generous, equitable, sustainable, and efficient supply of care is prerequisite for genuine gender equality" (Folbre 2008:375). The basic argument is that not only do childcare policies enable women to take up paid employment, but that they generally contribute to women's emancipation. Therefore, childcare policies have become an important part of studies on gender policy regimes (Lewis 2000; Sainsbury 2001; O'Connor 2004), though it has been also noted that gender regime as such includes many other dimensions, like access to education, politics, institutional guarantees of equal opportunities in the workplace and in public space, etc. (Padamsee and Adams 2002; Pascall and Lewis 2004). Instead of approaching a more holistic view, this paper focuses on childcare policies and female employment in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the examples of Hungary and Poland, as the illustration of common and diverging trends. As childcare policies, I mean both policies of cash support for families with small children (maternity, parental leaves), as well as childcare services: crèches (for children under 3) and kindergartens (for children at the age of 3 to 6). Consequently, I am also interested in how these policies could influence female employment.

With regard to their childcare policies, the picture of the post-communist countries is often highly oversimplified. It is as follows: during socialism women were encouraged to join the labour force. Special incentives included publicly-provided affordable childcare services. After the collapse of communism, governments in most of those newly democratised states assumed that society would opt for a male-breadwinner model. Therefore, by means of an example, they started to close many of the childcare centres, especially nurseries, and



withdrew from supporting them financially (Ferge 1992; Makkai 1994; Dziewiecka-Bokun 2000; Heinen 2000; Russinova 2000; Haney 2002; Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004).

While childcare policies in the Western world have already received a lot of attention, the situation in the newly democratised post-communist countries has received relatively little attention (for exceptions see: Haney 2002; Fodor 2003; Saxonberg 2003; Pascall and Lewis 2004). Perhaps due to the generally advanced level of research conducted in Hungary and on Hungary, studies devoted to this country have dominated the general research on the post-communist welfare state (Szalai 2000; Haney 2002). Exploring the welfare state development in the post-communist countries should go beyond the Hungarian example, however, once comparative studies underline differences between the countries (Saxonberg and Sirovatka 2006; Glass and Fodor 2007; Szelewa and Polakowski 2008), it is clear that focusing on one country does not allow for such generalizations. The story presented here departs from this monolithic vision of one model of the 'fourth' world of welfare capitalism. Consequently, I am not presenting conclusions based only on one case, but rather through doing a comparison. Before I come to that point, I am introducing the most important background information about the context for doing research on Eastern Europe. This is followed by presenting the analytical framework of 'varieties of familialism' that grasps the differences between family policy mixes in this part of Europe.

### **3 Background: Common trends in the social and economic development of Central and Eastern European countries**

A considerable group of feminist writers have been occupied with very general problems of the phenomenon of poverty among women during transformation, and the whole process of re-masculinisation of public policies and anti-feminism as a response to the 'pseudo-emancipation' that women experienced during the period of socialism (Fuszara 1991; Snitow 1993; Watson 1993; Penn 1994; Verdery 1994; Einhorn 1995; Gal and Kligman 2000).

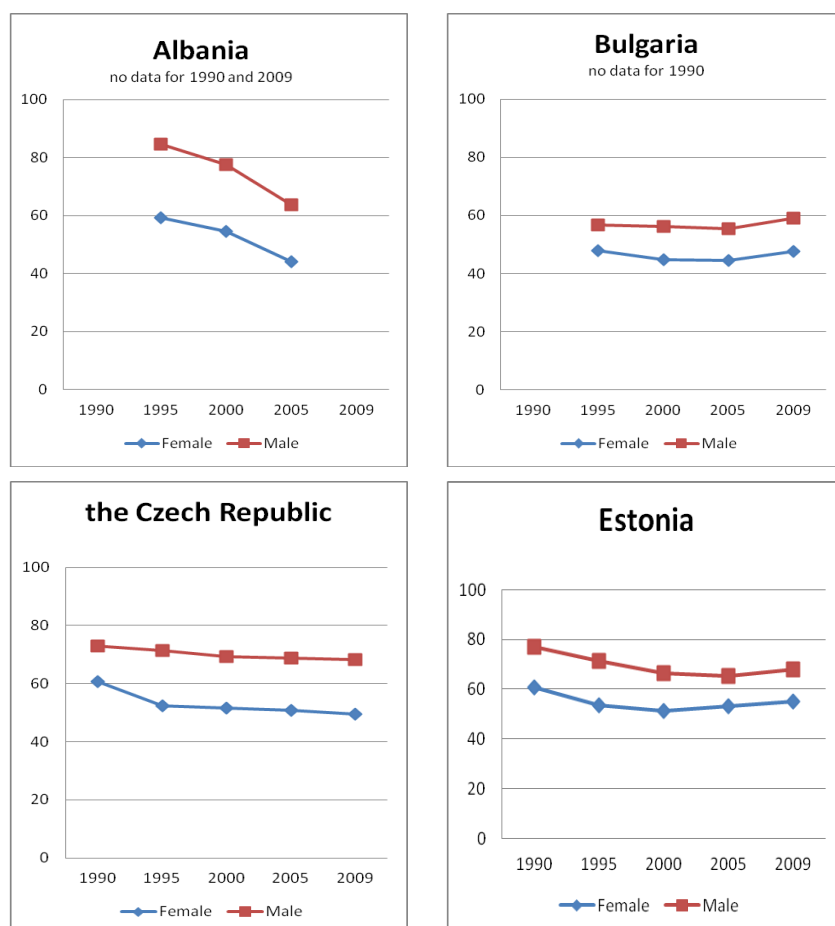
Additionally, while the situation of women was not good during state socialism, it further declined, as women were often belonging to the losers of transformation when the communism collapsed at the end of the 1980s. In general, these huge political and economic changes left some part of society behind and on the margins of the overall growing wealth. Such situation can be exemplified to a large extent by the overall decline of female participation rates on the labour market (see Table 1 and Figure 1).

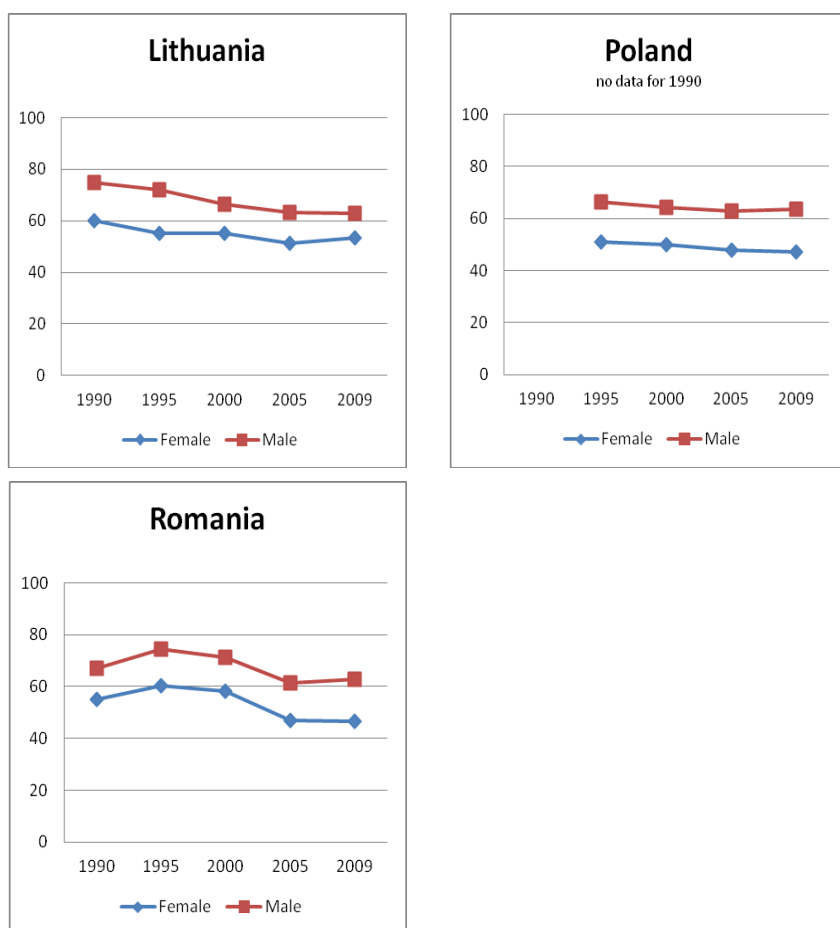
**Table 1: Economic activity rates (labour force participation rates) of women and men (all population 15+) 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2009**

Country	Sex	1990	1995	2000	2005	2009
<b>Albania</b>	Female	...	59.1	54.6	44.1	...
	Male	...	84.7	77.6	63.8	...
<b>Bulgaria</b>	Female	...	47.9	44.7	44.4	47.5
	Male	...	56.8	56.2	55.4	59.0
<b>Czech Republic</b>	Female	60.8	52.3	51.6	50.7	49.5
	Male	72.9	71.4	69.3	68.7	68.3
<b>Estonia</b>	Female	60.6	53.6	51.4	53.1	55.1
	Male	77.1	71.3	66.4	65.2	68.0
<b>Hungary</b>	Female	46.3	40.3	41.7	43.1	43.0
	Male	64.5	57.1	58.5	58.3	58.2
<b>Latvia</b>	Female	64.1	...	49.0	50.9	55.0
	Male	77.5	...	65.0	66.1	67.8
<b>Lithuania</b>	Female	60.2	55.1	55.0	51.2	53.2
	Male	74.7	72.0	66.5	63.1	63.0
<b>Poland</b>	Female	...	51.1	50.1	47.7	47.3
	Male	...	66.5	64.2	62.8	63.4
<b>Romania</b>	Female	54.9	60.4	58.2	46.9	46.6
	Male	67.2	74.4	71.2	61.5	62.8
<b>Russian Federation</b>	Female	...	...	...	47.2	...
	Male	...	...	...	56.3	...

Source: UNECE Gender Statistics, [www.unec.org/stats/gender/](http://www.unec.org/stats/gender/)

**Figure 1: Economic activity rates (labour force participation rates) of women and men (all population 15+), 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2009**





Source: UNECE Gender Statistics, [www.unece.org/stats/gender/](http://www.unece.org/stats/gender/)

Although during the last decades the rates of economic activity of women in the Western countries were rising, the opposite trend could be observed in the Eastern Europe. It is important to note, though, that apart from the trend of gender gaps increasing, in many cases these figures dropped both for women and men. Thus, the most distinct case is the Czech Republic, where during the first half of the 1990s the decline in female economic activity rate was steepest, also when compared to male participation rates. This trend was continuing during the last decade. In Romania the steepest decline took place during the last decade: female participation rates dropped from 60.4% in 1995 to 46.6% in 2009 and at the same time gender gap increased from about 14% to almost 18%.

In some countries this decline in economic activity was not that visible, though the gender gap remained or increased. In Poland, though both women and men did not experience so rapid decline in economic activity, gender gap increased from about 15% in 1990 to about 17% in 2009. The situation was also difficult due to the unemployment rates that were highest in the region and amounted to over 20% in early 2000s (GUS 2005). Bulgarian figures show a slight increase in female participation rates from 44.4% in 2005 to 47.5% in 2009, but the increase in male economic activity was more intense. As a result, gender gap

increased as well. Hungarian figures showed very low female economic activity already at the beginning of transformation and the rates were furthermore going down. Gender gap in Hungary remains considerable and equals to 15.2%.

Finally, in Estonia and Latvia gender gaps decreased a little, however, that was only because economically active population of men shrank more rapidly. Therefore, for example in Estonia male activity rates decreased from 77.1% in 1990 to 68% in 2009, while the same indicator for women equalled to 60.6% in 1990 and to 55.1% in 2009. In effect, the gender gap decreased from about 17% to about 13%.

This decline in female employment was accompanied by the state withdrawing from important functions including the provision and organisation of social policy programmes in the new conditions of hard budget constraints, market austerity reforms and so on. Importantly, in several countries state also withdrew from financing childcare facilities, and decentralised responsibility for their management to the local authorities. This resulted in closing many existing facilities in Poland, where local authorities did not want to bear this burden and in the climate of departure from communism maintaining the 'communist' childcare facilities was not perceived as a popular problem. In the Czech Republic, on the other hand, the state intentionally closed almost all the day care centres for small children and replaced them with the period of parental leave for small children: currently a parent (which most often means a mother) can stay at home with a child until the child reaches 4 years of age.

However, in spite of all of these similar challenges and huge political and economic changes, the region of Central and Eastern Europe is diversified in terms of their family policies. One study has identified four childcare policy regimes within the region with using the framework of 'varieties of familialism' (Szelewa and Polakowski 2008). The next section provides a short description of the framework and how Hungary and Poland can be contrasted with this analytical tool.

#### **4 Defining the difference: varieties of familialism**

***The meaning of familialism.*** Including family policy and especially childcare services in the analysis of welfare policies has had important consequences for the comparative research on welfare states. As soon as family policy measures and the category of gender are incorporated into the analysis of welfare state, they no longer follow Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology. Since then, many studies have focused on distinguishing between different breadwinner models (Lewis 1993; Sainsbury 1994; Sainsbury 1999). Feminist debates further contested the typologies by developing the 'one-and-a-half-earner' (Mahon

2002; Morgan and Zippel 2003) or 'two-x-three-quarter' model (Pascall and Lewis 2004).

Familialism can be understood, and has been used in different kinds of analyses, at least in two senses. First, familialism can be understood in a narrow sense as a set of policies aimed at locating the responsibility for care within the household (Haney and Pollard 2003: 5). Second, it can be treated more widely, as a 'discursive and ideological frame' (Lewis 1992; Esping-Andersen 1999; Leitner 2003; Hantrais 2004) that varies according to differences in the national processes of state development. In other words, while the first approach to familialism grasps the practical side of dealing with the task of care, the second one gives it ideological ground. Beneath, I am taking the two tasks simultaneously, which means defining the policies of familialism as the mix of childcare policies.

As the literature on tends to treat it, policies can be familialistic: locate the responsibility for care within family to a different extent, or can be de-familialising: designed to take the burden of care away from the family (Haney and Pollard 2003; Leitner 2003; Hantrais 2004). As Lynne Haney (2003) or Sigrid Leitner (2003) show, however, this is not a bipolar dimension, but one can talk about different faces or varieties of familialism, mostly depending on the *degree* and *kind* of state activity. In other words, different kinds of familialistic policies (or de-familialising) can be distinguished with regard to the answer to the following questions: *how much* family support is provided through the state, and then what *kind* of support is this.

***Dimensions of variation.*** For the identification of different types of familialism, the following policy instruments: support in cash and the provision of childcare services are taken into account. In this study, familialisation and de-familialisation refer to the location of the *task* of care.

- 1) **Familialisation:** *support in cash.* With regard to support in cash, the first and the often discussed element of childcare policies is maternity and parental leave (or childcare leave following maternity leave) and subsequent cash benefits. The function of these arrangements may vary according to their duration, the right of the father to take the leave, and the entitlements to and the level of the payments. Thus, long periods of leave accompanied by generous benefits might be a strong incentive for women to delay entering paid employment or a disincentive for re-entering labour market after giving birth to a child. And even if fathers have a right to take leave, in a situation, where women on average earn less than men, it would be a greater financial loss for the family if the

father decides to take it. In other words, in the case of longer maternity and parental leave, if this is the paid form of the leave, family is explicitly encouraged to provide care from its own resources.

As far as family allowances are concerned, they might be recognised as a kind of payment for care which is again ambiguous, as it may also serve as an incentive for taking care of children instead of taking up employment. This is why the presence of universal entitlements to the allowances will most often be associated with the explicitly familialistic regimes (the contents of each of these models is described below). The principles of taxation is a quite simple policy tool in terms of classification: while individual taxation encourages pursuing economic autonomy, in the conditions of wage gap between the sexes, the possibility of common taxation for the couples diminishes the chances for emerging an equal dual-earner family (and therefore – inspires the familial forms of care).

- 2) **De-familialisation:** *childcare services*. The situation seems to be less ambiguous in the case of childcare services. Each time they are more available and affordable, they de-familialise the responsibility for care. In the countries locating responsibility for care within the family, one can observe low state support for day-care, which results in a low level of enrolments in crèches and in kindergartens. In countries where the provision of care is not enforced on the family, childcare centres tend to be highly subsidised by the state, fees are low in comparison to the average wage, and care services are of rather higher standards – the number of children per instructor ratio is usually lower. Childcare centres for children at the age of 0-3 are here called crèches, while day-care centres for children from the age group 3-6 are kindergartens. The enrolment rate is usually understood as the percentage of children from a particular age group that are enrolled in the relevant kind of childcare centres.

Importantly, the lack of cash or service is also an indicator of the policy type (a non-action). As presented on table 2, when these two dimensions are placed together, they can produce four different policy configurations, or in terms of policy regimes – four different varieties of childcare policies.

**Table 2: The four types of familialism**

Familialisation of care (support in cash)	De-familialisation of care (childcare services)	
	Strong	Weak
<b>Strong</b>	<i>optional familialism</i> Norway, France HUNGARY	<i>explicit familialism</i> Germany, Austria
<b>Weak</b>	<i>de-familialisation</i> Sweden	<i>implicit familialism</i> Anglo-Saxon countries POLAND

Source: Leitner 2003: 358, examples of the countries: partially my own.

Out of the four regimes, one is 'implicit familialism', where the state does not provide any significant support for families in their task of providing care. As women are still perceived as the primary carers, implicit familialism firmly places the burden of care on women. The second, 'explicit' type of familialism is a 'richer' version of the previous one, as here the state pays for care. In this combination of policies, the state provides payments for longer periods of parental leave, but refrains from supporting families through the provision of care services. Women are also perceived through their role as carers – there are incentives for exercising the task of care at home, and even when maternity leave is over families are supported for certain time. The situation, where parents have the choice of using public care services and/or generous payments for home-based care is found in the third type of familialism – 'optional' familialism. The periods of leave are longer and there are more ways in which leave can be used. There is the alternative option of using day-care services, which are more affordable due to state support. Finally, the other pole is 'de-familialisation', where the element of payments for family-delivered care is weaker and families are encouraged to use public care services rather than staying at home with the family member requiring care. In this last regime, the responsibility for care is thus shifted away from the family. The periods of leave are shorter, with lots of part-time options. Most importantly, extensive childcare services are provided and are of good quality (e.g. fewer children per group). An important element of the system is also individual taxation and special incentives encourage fathers to share leave.

Within this typology, Hungary and Poland are representing, two different versions of familialist policies. The next section takes a closer look at the content of childcare policies in these two countries.

## **5 Developments in family policies in Hungary and Poland: an overview**

### **5.1 Cash for care benefits**

*Poland.* Developed during communism, the system of cash support for families in Poland was available for each family with working parents as children allowances. Their level differed according to the number of children, but also related to the level of earnings, and in that sense this kind of family support was of a mixed character: the requirement of previous employment was reminiscent of an insurance-based system, while the principle of income-testing introduced the element of the income support. The biggest change came in 1989 when the level of children allowances was established at a flat-rate. In 1995, the access to this form of cash support became restricted by income-testing (Klos and Szymanczak 1997). Furthermore, the age limit was shortened from 25 to 20 years of the 'child's' age.

The right to maternity leave and benefit remained as only available for those who are insured. At the same time, the right to a paid extended leave (after the end of the period of maternity leave), remained restricted to the poorest, though the regulations concerning the threshold for entitlement changed several times. All these changes were introduced by the social-democratic and agrarian coalition in power between 1993 and 1997. Recently, the system of family allowances has not changed significantly. In 2010 the income level for income test was slightly decreased and the levels of payments adjusted. The system is comprised of the regular allowances paid for each child, as well additional grants for lone parents and payments for parents using the childcare leave.<sup>2</sup> Family allowances are so small that they do not significantly support the family budget.

One of the most important attempts to reform the system concerned the length of maternity leave. In 1999, the Parliament amended regulations concerning maternity leave by extending its duration from 16 to 26 weeks for every birth with one child, and 39 weeks in the case of giving birth to more than one child. The new duration of maternity leave was to be introduced in two stages: first, in the year 2000 four weeks more (than before) to be given to every woman, and then in 2001 women would be entitled to another 6 weeks for each birth, and 9 extra weeks for a multiple birth (Nowakowska 2000). Finally, the obligatory duration of leave was 16 weeks, and women were to decide whether to use the additional weeks or not. In 2001 the Parliament adopted a bill that allowed for fathers to use the rest of the maternity leave in the situation in which the woman comes back to work after 16 weeks. This resulted in, for instance, 10 weeks of

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<sup>2</sup> Ustawa z dnia 28 listopada 2003 r. o świadczeniach rodzinnych [Act of 28 November on Family Allowances], Dziennik Ustaw 30.12.2003 r.



leave for the father with keeping the right to the allowance if the woman was entitled to 26 weeks. The next change was accepted in December (in force since 13th January 2002), and turned back the leave's duration to how it had been before the previous reform prolonged it, meaning: 16 weeks.<sup>3</sup> The change, as mentioned above, took place while the social-democratic coalition was in power. The obligatory duration of the leave was 14 weeks, and then the father could use the rest. It meant 2 weeks in the case of the first birth for instance.

Once again, it was the conservative coalition that came to power in 2005 which undertook the initiative to extend maternity leave. This took place in October 2006, with the coalition managing to introduce some changes, although these were not as extensive as their predecessors from 1999. In the end, the maternity leave was extended by two more weeks for women having the first and the second child (in the new version – 18 and 20 weeks respectively), and with 28 weeks of the leave in the case of multiple births<sup>4</sup>. The new law has been in force since 19<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and already assumed that the duration of maternity leave would be prolonged to 20 (2009) and 22 (2010) weeks. These plans were confirmed by the next government and the duration of maternity leave was subsequently extended.<sup>5</sup> Though the basic duration of maternity leave is still 20 weeks, an additional facultative period of maternity leave is available: 2 weeks from 2010, 4 weeks from 2012 and 6 weeks from 2014. For multiple births the leave is available for 33 weeks in the case of twins, with the number of weeks increasing again when more children are born at the same time.

Also, very recently a new paid paternity leave was established. A working father is entitled to two weeks of paternity leave with the benefit at the level of 100% of wage replacement.

Initially, the two weeks added to the maternity leave (the first change in 2006) did not change the situation significantly. This kind of support, without making the extended part of the leave universally available, or at least available on the base of insurance, is far less generous than the same systems functioning in Hungary, especially when most of the families no longer have the right to receive family allowances anymore. However, as compared to the previous governments, the one formed by the conservative coalition in 2005 was the most dynamic in reforming the system of family policy. First, they managed to introduce the extension of maternity leave. Second, an additional grant was introduced in

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.zus.pl/swiadcz/zas003.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Ustawa z dnia 16 listopada 2006 r. o zmianie ustawy Kodeks pracy oraz o świadczeniach pieniężnych z ubezpieczenia społecznego w razie choroby i macierzyństwa [Act of 16 November 2006 on amendment of the Labour Code and the Act on cash benefits from social security in case of sickness and maternity], Dziennik Ustaw no 221, position 1615.

<sup>5</sup> Ustawa z dnia 6 grudnia 2008 r. o zmianie ustawy Kodeks pracy oraz niektórych innych ustaw [Act of 16 November 2006 on amendment of the Labour Code and several other acts], Dziennik Ustaw no 237, position 1654.

January 2006 – another kind of one-time birth grant (so called ‘becikowe’).<sup>6</sup> Together, when having a baby, the family that meets the income criteria receives both grants. Interestingly, the new kind of family support, which was made available by the right-wing government just at the end of its term in office, were the tax deductions. The ultimate result of these changes was the biggest increase in the overall family support that has taken place since the beginning of transformation. In fact, the recent improvements in the system of parental leave were drafted already at the time of the conservative coalition being in power, including the special provisions for fathers.

Again, it is hard to tell, whether the weeks added to maternity leave significantly change the situation. This kind of support, without making the extended part of the leave universally available or at least available on the base of insurance, is far less generous than the same systems functioning in Hungary.

*Hungary.* Universally available childcare allowance for children under 3 taken care at home (GYES) and similar, but employment-based and earnings-related GYED were kept in place by the first (after 1989), conservative, government. Mothers, who were employed before remained eligible to TGYÁS (maternity leave), paid in the first 24 weeks after the birth of the child, at a level of 70% of the mother’s previous income. They could opt for GYED for the following two years as an ‘extended’ maternity leave. Moreover, a new type of maternity leave was also established, called GYET, which became available for parents with at least three children who could stay at home with children until the youngest reached age 8. This scheme was established in 1993 and the level of allowance equalled to the minimum old-age pension, the same amount as GYES (Szikra and Szelewa 2009).

An important change came in the mid-1990s, when the liberal coalition came to office (MSZP-SZDSZ), led by Lajos Bokros. Bokros wanted to liberalise the system of social policies in Hungary with the reform plan known as the ‘Bokros package’ (Goven 2000). One of its most important elements was a return to the principle of income testing, as far as the access to GYES and the system of family allowances was concerned. At the same time the insurance-based GYED was to be abolished. The plan was brought to life, and for four years (1994-1998), due to the new regulation, about 10%-15% of families (that did not meet the accessibility criteria) were excluded from these two family policy programs (Szikra 2005). Though a great majority of the eligible population still received this kind of benefit, the new restrictions became extremely salient politically.

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<sup>6</sup> Ustawa z dnia 29 grudnia 2005 r. o zmianie ustawy o świadczeniach rodzinnych [Act of 29 December 2005 amending the Act on Family Allowances]

Several authors describe societal mobilisation aimed at reversing these changes as one of the very few successful grass-roots initiatives supported by the media (Toth 1993; Goven 2000; Szalai 2000; Haney and Pollard 2003; Petho 2003; Szikra 2005). The usual rhetoric centred around the welfare of the mother and the child as requisite of the mother's care (Goven 2000).

The next, conservative, coalition (1998-2002) brought back the earnings-related scheme and proposed further changes. In addition to family allowances paid per child, the government introduced tax credits for children. This, plus returning to the 'old' legislation concerning an earnings-related GYED, favoured the situation of higher income families. At the same time, by establishing an income tested social assistance for poor families, and by deteriorating the real value of universally available GYES and family allowance, the conservative government between 1998 and 2002 explicitly created a 'two-track' family policy which favoured the better-off (Szikra and Szelewa 2010 ). In 2006 the next, social-liberal coalition (2002-2006) unified the system of family allowances and tax credits and established a universally available family allowances system, with the increased (flat-rate) level of allowance (more about the reform in the proceeding sections). Additionally, in 2006 persons staying at home and using GYES (childcare allowance for those taking care of children under 3 at home) were allowed to work full-time (previously only they could work only 20 hours per week) (Hemmings 2007).

In sum, the present system of cash benefits remains very generous and includes elements that were added gradually. To the GYES and GYED that had already existed in socialism, a new scheme was added for the numerous families – GYET, though GYES and GYED remained the pillars of parental leave arrangements in Hungary. The program of family allowance, on the other hand, having their roots already in the pre-war period, was sustained and their role as income supporters was strengthened (Szikra 2005).

## **5.2 Childcare services**

*Poland.* During the period of communism the network of childcare centres in Poland was developing very weakly and in fact the enrolment rate has hardly ever reached 50% for children under 6 or 5% for crèche attendance. The most remarkable changes for the functioning of childcare services also came after 1989, and were connected with decentralization of financial responsibility over day care centres. The latter was delegated to local authorities.<sup>7</sup> Because this

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<sup>7</sup> *Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991 r. o systemie oświaty* (Act of 7th September 1991 on the Education System), Dz. U. (Official Journal of Law) 1991 Vol. 95, position 425).

resulted in the direct donations from the state being cut, it meant liquidation for many of the centres if their economic calculation showed deficit.

Thus, the centres had to raise the costs of their services, but even then the payments covered only 1/3 of their expenses, sometimes as high as 50%, and the rest had to be covered by the local authorities. Higher payments discouraged many families from deciding to place their children in the centres. As Jacqueline Heinen stresses, the monthly cost of childcare centres for one child can be up to a third (sometimes even half) of an average salary (Heinen 2002). Then, almost all crèches and two thirds of the company-owned kindergartens were closed. The sharpest decline in the nurseries' attendance was directly connected with that fact. While in the 1980s every twentieth child under three attended the crèches, in the 1990s, it was every fiftieth.

One of the reasons for such a sharp withdrawal from the responsibility for maintaining childcare centres was the fact that the state completely cut their financing: in Poland, municipalities are not obliged to maintain such services for children under 3. As the central state gave up their financing, municipalities in Poland rarely run crèches and afternoon services. This situation, combined with the lack of financial support for parents after the expiry of maternity leave, means that implicitly the state locates responsibility for care within family.

Just to mention, a new law was adopted in February 2011 that established the forms of childcare centres for children under three: crèches, "children's clubs", and "daily carers" (or "nannies").<sup>8</sup> The regulation does not guarantee any permanent financial state support. Instead, the Ministry established the Programme *Maluch* [Toddler]. The programme gives the opportunity to apply for financial support for the municipalities that would like to establish one of the forms of childcare listed in the new law (Szelewa 2011).

*Hungary.* In Hungary, crèches have to be set up by cities, and the maintenance of kindergartens and schools with afternoon care is obligatory for all local governments (they can form a group with other municipalities and maintain a common kindergarten for their children.). Thus, although with major regional differences, Hungarian municipalities fulfil this task (Szikra 2008). Also in Hungary childcare services did not remain without reform. At the beginning of the 1990s those highly subsidized systems were decentralized and local authorities took responsibility for their functioning. In Hungary coverage rates dropped down to around 9%, as compared to 13.7 % from the beginning of the 1990s (Fodor 2004). Unlike in the case of the crèches, the growth of

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<sup>8</sup> Ustawa z dnia 4 lutego 2011 o opiece nad dziećmi w wieku do lat 3 [Law of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2011 on care for children under 3], Journal of Laws 2011, no 45, item 235.

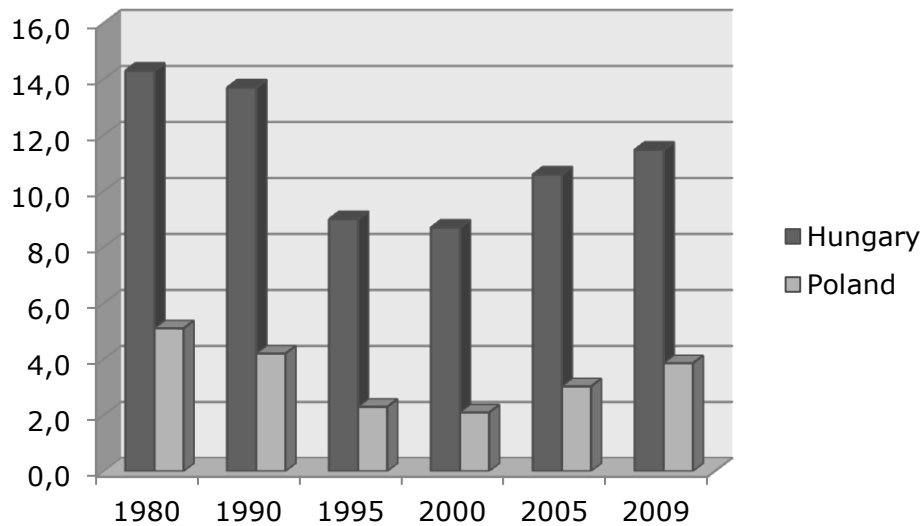
kindergartens was considerable: the coverage rate increased from 51% in 1970, to 87% in 1990 and 92% in 2000 (KSH 2004).

As far as the pupils per teacher ratio is concerned, it also represented an improvement comparing to the previous period, though the tendency to improve the quality of childcare services was already present in the mid-1980s. Therefore, while at the beginning of 1980s there were 16 pupils per teacher, present standards were approached already in 1986 (UNESCO).

Finally, due to the decentralisation of responsibility for the functioning and, partially, for the financing of childcare centres, prices for childcare services were increased, though it remained highly subsidized and, therefore, it still represents affordable standards. The Hungarian government still provides about 25-30% of the cost of maintaining one child in the centre. That might be important when considering the differences in payments. Therefore, parents in Hungary have to pay about 4,000 HUF per child per month, which represents less than 10% of the net average wages in Hungary (Fodor 2004). Parents still have to pay only for the meals. At the beginning of the 1990s attempts appeared in Hungary to raise the fees even more. However, the government established a ceiling level for the parents: the highest possible contribution at the level of 15% of all the costs of maintaining a child in the centre (ibid.).

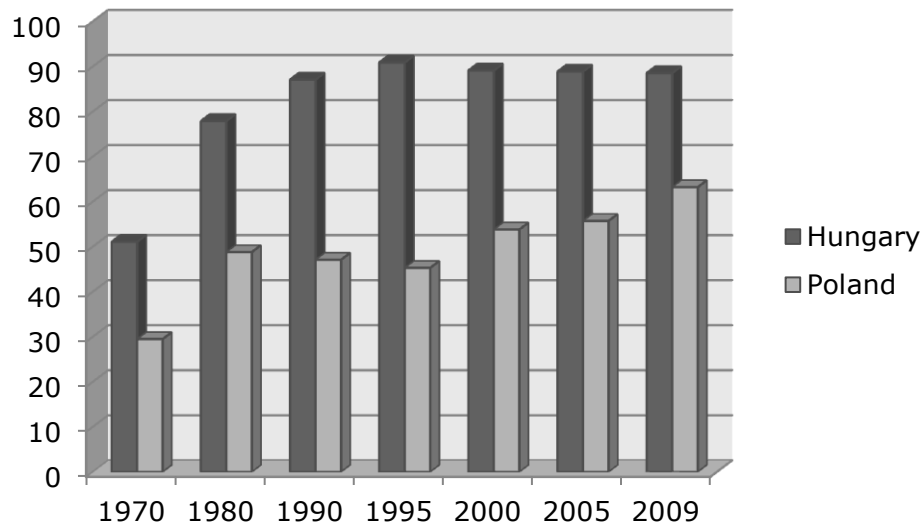
To sum up, in both countries those reforms resulted in a sharp decrease in the percentage of children attending nurseries: in Poland from about 5% in 1985 to nearly 2% in 2001 (GUS 1986, 2002) and in Hungary dropped down to around 9%, as compared to 13.7 % from the beginning of the 1990s (OECD 2004, Fodor 2004). However, there is a difference between Hungary and Poland also in this respect. While in Hungary the drop took place at the beginning of the 1990s, it was still about two times more than Poland ever had (9% in Hungary in 2000 as compared to 'better times' in Poland in 1985 when it was only 5% of children under 3). Figures 2 and 3 show the dynamics of changes in enrolment in Hungary and Poland for crèches (from 1980s) and kindergartens (from 1970s).

**Figure 2: Percentage of children at the age of 0-3 enrolled in the nurseries in Poland and Hungary 1980-2000**



Source: Hungarian and Polish Statistical Offices, TransMonee database, own calculations.

**Figure 3: Percentage of children enrolled in kindergartens in Hungary and Poland 1970-2009**



Source: Hungarian and Polish Statistical Offices, TransMonee database, own calculations.

The accessibility of crèches is low in both of these countries. The distance between Hungary and Poland remains the same, only that the recent trend is a slow and not remarkable increase in enrolment: from 9% (1995) to 11,2% (2009) for Hungary and from 2,3% (1995) to 3,9% (2009) for Poland. With regard to enrolment in kindergartens the distance between Hungary and Poland was biggest during the 1990s, when the access to childcare in Hungary was still slightly rising, while in Poland that was the time of decline in the provision of pre-school education. After this initial period of transformation, the provision of

childcare services in Poland started to improve to cover more than 60% of children at the age of 3-6 and the overall difference between Hungary and Poland has diminished. It is difficult to say whether this trend would continue: a part of this increase in enrolment in Poland could be explained by the provision of temporary programs of 'alternative' childcare services (part-time childcare, afternoon service, etc.) financed by the EU structural funds. It has been noted that after the EU funds have been used many of these newly set up centres are not continuing their activities due to the lack of financing from other sources. In other words, it is still hard to say whether these statistics indicate a transformative change or only a slight shift in the trend continued so far.

### **5.3 Summing up the comparison**

The present scheme of family support in Hungary was to a large extent formed already during communism. The basic duration of maternity leave is 24 weeks, and on the level of 70% or 60% of a previous salary (depending on the length of previous employment). Furthermore, the 'extended' childcare leave is built on three tiers. The first one (GYES) guarantees universal flat-rate cash benefit for the duration of the leave (3 years) and allows for paid work after the child's first birthday. The second scheme (GYED) gives an insurance-based right to benefit (requires 180 days of previous employment) for two years since the child's birth with no right for taking up employment during that period. The level of benefit amounts to 70% of the parent's former income. These two tracks can be combined: after the expiry of GYED, parents can use the remaining duration of GYES (one year). The third track (GYET) has a universal character and is intended to provide support for numerous families: it might be used by families with at least three children, who are then entitled to a flat-rate benefit.<sup>9</sup> To give an example: when the mother has paid employment, she can use 24 weeks of maternity leave, then stay on GYED until the child's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, and then switch to GYES that is a guaranteed flat-rate payment until the child reaches the age of 3. GYES is often used by women without any employment (Glass and Fodor 2007). These parents (women) that have at least three children can afterwards decide to use GYET to take care of a child under 8.

The Polish system is less complicated and less generous than Hungarian one. Maternity benefit is paid on the condition of previous employment of at least 6 months. The leave's duration is 20 weeks in the case of the 1<sup>st</sup> child, 31 – in the case of twins, and 33 weeks in the case of triple birth and then the number of

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<sup>9</sup> This information comes from many different sources, but mainly from Eva Fodor's Statements and Comments on Parental Insurance and Childcare as a contribution within the Peer Review Programme of the European Union. Available at <http://peerreview.almp.org/pdf/sweden04/hunSWE04.pdf>

weeks increases by two together with each more child. The benefit amounts to 100% of the previous wage. 14 weeks are reserved for women, and obligatory. Father can use the rest of this maternity leave, plus they are entitled to a week of paternity leave with an adequate benefit fully covering his wage. This can be followed by another kind of childcare leave and its basic duration is 24 months. As stated above allowance attached to the leave is income-tested. There is no possibility of taking up paid employment in any of those two schemes, and none of them gives universal entitlements. As compared to 86% of parents receiving some support for the children under 2 in Hungary, in Poland only about 35% of families are entitled for the extended leave and corresponding allowance.<sup>10</sup> In both countries fathers are equally entitled for taking at least one part of the leave, however, only about 1% of all fathers decide for using this option (Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004, Fodor 2004). Table 3 sums up the findings and presents the comparative data.

**Table 3: Comparison of family policies in Hungary and Poland**

Dimensions of variations		Hungary	Poland
Maternity leave	<i>Entitlement to benefits</i>	Universal	Employment-based
	<i>Duration (in weeks):</i>	24 weeks	20 – one child born Plus facultative: 4 weeks (from 2012) 31 – two children 33 – three children 35 – four children 37 – five and more children Plus facultative: 6 weeks (from 2012) 14 – compulsory
Paternity leave	<i>Entitlement/ period/ level of benefit</i>	Insured fathers/ 5 days/ 100% replacement rate	Insured fathers/ 2 weeks/ 100% wage replacement
Further parental leaves	<i>Entitlements for benefits</i>	Universal (GYES) Insurance-based (GYED)	Income-tested
	<i>Duration</i>	GYES 3 years GYED 2 years (from birth) GYET - until the child's 8 birth	2 years
	<i>The level of benefit</i>	GYED – 70% of gross earnings GYED – flat-rate	Flat-rate
	<i>Work option availability</i>	Yes	No
	<i>Available for the father</i>	Yes	Yes
	<i>Special incentives for fathers</i>	No	No

<sup>10</sup> My own calculations based on Balcerzak-Paradowska 2004 and ZUS 1995, 2001, 2002, 2004, and Glass and Fodor 2007.



Dimensions of variations		Hungary	Poland
Childcare services	Rate of children enrolled in crèches (0-2)	11,5%	3,9%
	Rate of children enrolled in kindergarten (3-6)	89%	63%
	Quality (pupils/teacher)	12	11
	The no of children per group	25	25
	Affordability (ceiling for payments as % of maintenance cost)	25%	No limits
Family Allowances	Entitlement	Income-tested; From the birth of children until the 18th (if studying until the 25th) birthday.	Universal From the birth of children until the 18th (if studying until the 24th) birthday
	Level	About 6% of average wage per child	About 1.9% of average wage per child

Source: my own compilation/research

Similarly, in both countries a decrease in the percentage of children attending crèches could be observed: in Poland from about 5% in 1985 to nearly 2% in 2001 (GUS 1986, 2002) and in Hungary from 13.7 % at the beginning of the 1990s to 9% in 2000s (OECD 2004, Fodor 2004). Then again the figures got a bit higher during the last decade. The situation is similar with regard to kindergartens. Thus, for children at the age of 3-6 in Poland the coverage rate has usually been about 63% in comparison to present 89% in Hungary.

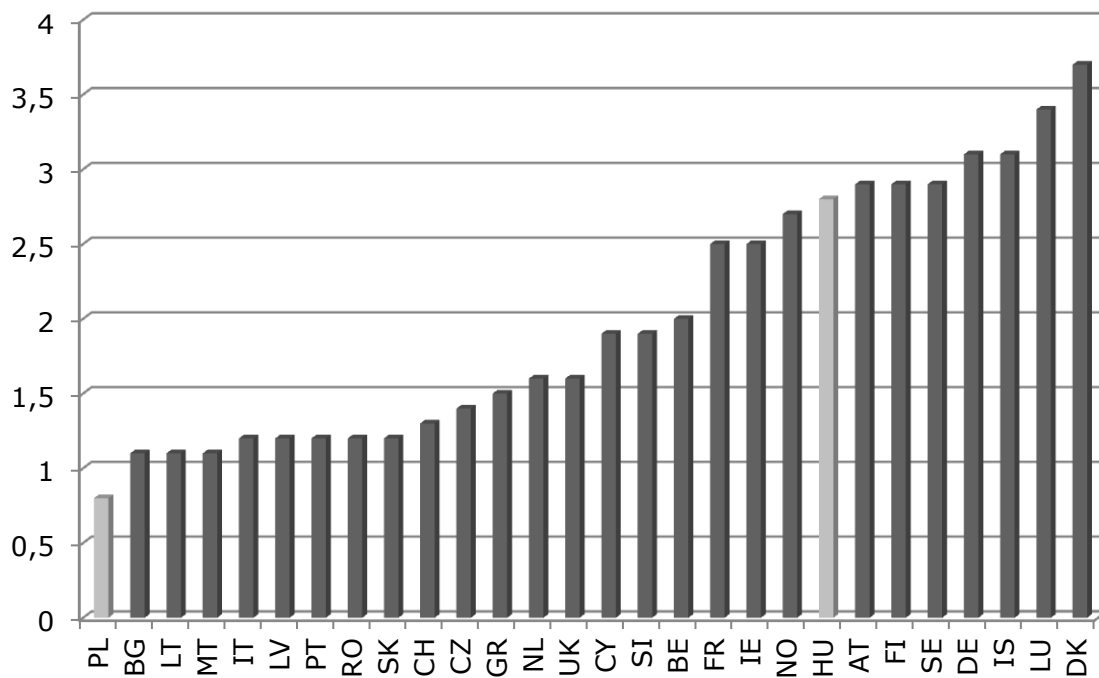
As far as the number of children per group is concerned it is usually 10-12 children per group in nurseries in Hungary (OECD 2004), while about 20-25 children are enrolled (and present) in one group in a Polish crèche. This is a question of quality of the service and might be important information for parents deciding whether to send their child to the crèche. The number of children per group in kindergarten is similar in Hungary and Poland and amounts to 25 (OECD 2004, GUS 2002). However, there are differences in the level of fee. Parents in Hungary have to pay less than 10% of the net average wage in Hungary. In Poland the payments usually reach about 250 PLN, about 20% of a net average wage in this country.<sup>11</sup>

Even when compared in a broader international context, the distance between these two countries is remarkable. Figures 3 and 4 should give a basic picture of these two countries put in international comparison. Consequently, with regard to cash benefits for families, Poland remains the country with the smallest percentage of GDP spent for family cash support in the EU, while Hungary is found among Scandinavian countries. Similarly, when comparing enrolment rates for kindergartens, Hungary is one of the leading countries with regard to the

<sup>11</sup> My own calculations based on information from Polish Central Statistical Office available at <http://www.stat.gov.pl/komunikaty/komunikat.php?id=13>

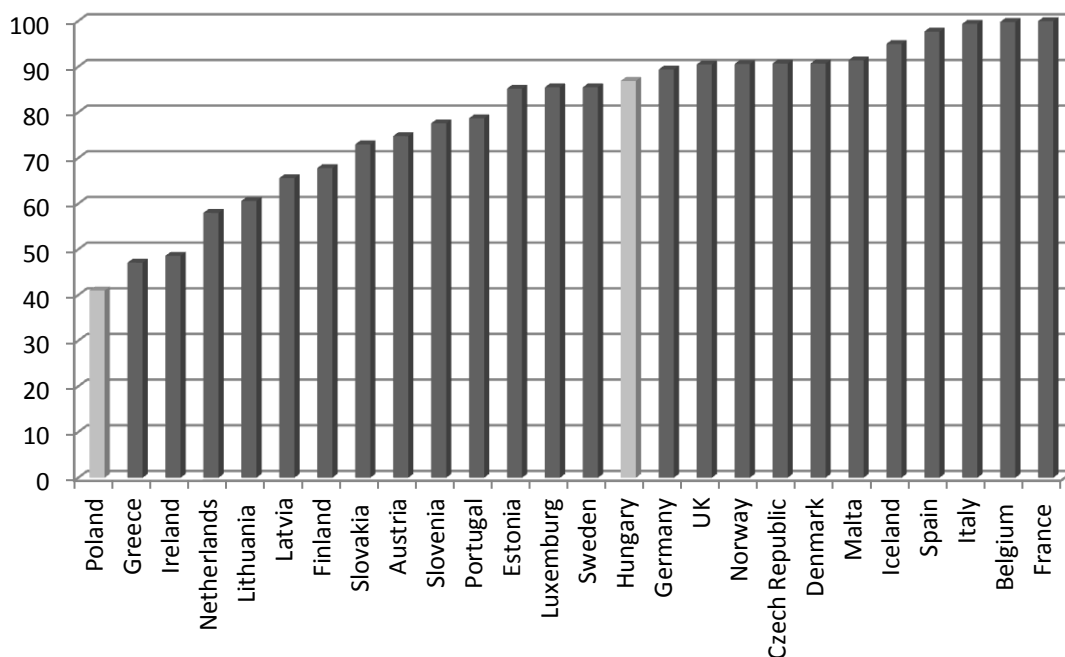
provision of public services for children, while Poland has the lowest enrolment rate in the European Union.

**Figure 4: Welfare expenditure for families/children as % of GDP in the European Union**



Source: European system of integrated social protection statistics (ESSPROS)

**Figure 5: Average enrolment rate of children aged three to five years of age in pre-school educational programs in the European Union (2006)**



Source: OECD Education Database.

In the wider context for comparison, when all the EU countries are taken into account, the Polish mix of family policies resembles that of Italy that can also be labelled as 'implicit familialism'. This is due to the low levels of public childcare services provision for the smallest children in both of these countries and due similar arrangements with regard to maternity leave. Like in Poland, Italian mothers receive relatively generous maternity benefit for the first months after the child's life (80% of replacement rate), but then there is no special scheme for childcare provided at home (Naldini and Saraceno 2008). Policies towards families and women in both of these countries are also likely to be influenced by the strong position of Catholic values and institutions, as well as familialistic and conservative views on gender roles. A recently growing sector of private childcare services would on the other hand push Poland into the direction of Anglo-Saxon solutions.

Hungarian version of familialism could be compared to German system, with its high support in cash for the families (in practice: mothers) that take care of the child at home. On the other hand, higher (than in Germany) enrolment rates of children in crèches and kindergartens, the possibility to work without losing the entitlement to childcare allowance, and the presence of different options situates Hungary closer to Scandinavian countries. However, also due to worse structural conditions (and the lack of jobs available) (Hobson, Fahlén et al. 2011), as well as because of the dominance of conservative ideology, Hungarian version of familialism is not promoting women's employment and economic autonomy.

## **6 Conclusions: from state socialism to further familialisation of childcare policies**

The goal of this paper was to present some general problems of employment and work/family life in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This text has outlined some basic problems and research results in the field of family, work and gender relations in the post-communist countries. Important message of this paper is that in spite of common historical events and economic challenges shared by the post-communist countries, we can observe a variety of child care policy mixes within this group of countries. First, though I presented some of the most important developments in the research on childcare policies and gender relations in the region. Second, for grasping the differences in policies I proposed to use the framework of 'varieties of familialism' as the most appropriate one for showing the range of childcare policies in the post state-socialist world. Third, I proposed to focus on two contrasting cases: Hungary and Poland.

In sum, Poland represents a relatively poor support for childcare. Though the periods of leave are long, only maternity leave is connected with a high level of allowance, and only mothers (fathers) with employment record have the right to

use the scheme. With regard to the 'extended' childcare leave and allowance, most families do not receive this support, as an income test needs to be met. Faced with the lack of affordable and easily available care services, families are implicitly encouraged to provide care by themselves, which means it is done mostly by women. In other words, childcare policies do not support family or women in the 'reconciliation' task, and care is considered a private task.

The case of Hungary is especially interesting. Though policies resemble the dual-earner model, one could hardly say that there is any individualism in the approach to family policy: women are expected to perform the duties of childcare. In this way Hungarian model is more 'realistic'. Women in those two countries feel it is better for them to have paid employment, because families need double incomes. The difference lies in the way they are supported in this 'reconciliation' task. In Hungary the state supports mothers in reconciliation of their domestic and professional obligations. However, because of the lack of jobs available, the prevalence of conservative ideology on gender roles and due to still weak development of crèches, these policies in reality do not lead to increase in women's economic activity.

None of these two systems supports sharing care responsibilities between both parents, and none of the countries pursues the policies of explicit mobilisation of female labour force. Further research on work, welfare and gender issues could reveal some important social processes that go beyond the historical and economic developments.

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