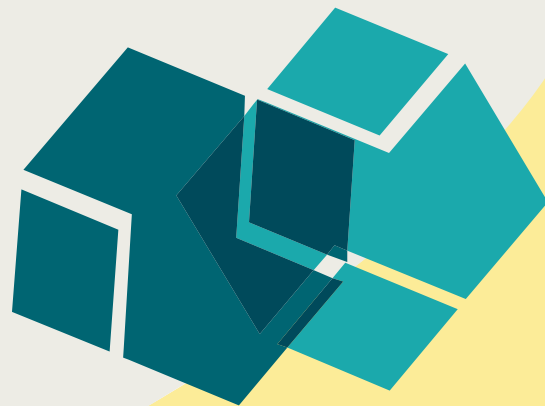




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Family Policies and Female Labour Force Participation in the Visegrád-countries.

Has there been a move towards flexibility since 2000?

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Abstract

The employment of mothers in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has continued to be the lowest within the EU in the past decade (Eurostat 2013a). Families, at the same time, continue to have fewer children than in most of the old EU member states (Eurostat 2013b).

Reforms of family policies that would allow for more flexibility and choice for parents of small children would help overcome obstacles of maternal employment and would contribute to the welfare of families with children. We investigate whether there has been a move towards more flexible care policies for parents with children under the age of 3 in the four Visegrád countries. We traced the continuous volatility and thus unpredictability of the family policy systems in all the four countries during the 2000s but also identified important shifts towards the increased flexibility of the leave systems as well as child-care services. Such changes, however, often happened only on the level of legislation with limited implementation and thus a lack of plausible positive development in the actual outcomes.

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1. Introduction

The employment of mothers in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries has continued to be the lowest within the EU in the past decade (Eurostat 2013a)². Families, at the same time, continue to have fewer children than in most of the old EU member states (Eurostat 2013b). The reverse correlation between female (and especially maternal) employment rates and fertility rates (e.g. OECD 2014) is confirmed by the Visegrád-countries where a sharp drop has been experienced in both cases since the fall of state socialism. While causes for low maternal employment rates as well as low fertility rates are very complex, experts agree that one of the most important determinants of both is the availability or lack of sufficient and flexible childcare services for small children. Another line of argument emphasises the role of fathers: Although there is an uneven distribution of unpaid domestic and care work even in the Scandinavian countries, countries with a relatively high share of fathers taking up paternity leave, and more even distribution of at-home care and other work display both higher female employment rates and higher fertility rates (e.g. Feyrer et al 2008, Eydal and Rostgaard 2014). Bad chances for employment and “child-penalty” on the labour market on the one hand, a fast increase in the educational attainment of women (Husz 2006) and the reliance on maternal care-work in the case of children below 3-years of age in these countries on the other seem to have provoked a “maternity strike” in the Visegrád-countries, similar to that experienced by Germany in the mid-2000s. The low level of child-bearing among the middle-class has become a central political concern especially in Hungary and Poland recently (Ingлот et al 2012).

In this paper we analyse changes in the flexibility of family policy arrangements in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia since 2000. Our main concern is whether we experience a move towards more flexible family policies in these countries. Has there been a shift towards “optional familialism” (Leitner 2003)? Has the number of choices increased for parents when deciding about the form of care for their children below kindergarten age? Do parents live with the new possibilities or do changes remain on paper? To put it another way: Have the old, “maternalist” and “familialist” arrangements that have crystallized during the state socialist period been preserved even after these countries joined the European Union in 2004? Besides international datasets (EU, OECD) we gathered substantial information from national institutions, statistical offices, ministries, research institutes as well as national experts of family policies. Lack of comprehensive datasets especially on child care institutions considerably hindered our work.

Four aspects of flexibility of family policies are considered in detail:

1. First, the construction of the length and amount of maternity and parental leaves and related benefits is examined. Have these systems moved towards ensuring autonomy for parents to set and adjust *the length and the amount of benefits* to their needs and priorities?
2. Second, flexibility is examined in respect to the possibility to share care-work between parents. Are there any measures in the parental leave system that encourages *fathers’ increased involvement* in care work?
3. Third, possibilities of employment are analysed in relation with parental leave schemes. Are there *incentives to take up employment* inbuilt in parental leave schemes? Or the contrary: are there

2 Baltic states, however, have had higher female employment rates than the V4 and the EU15 countries which might deserve further analysis (see Figure 1).

considerable disincentives/barriers within the family policy system that discourage parental employment?

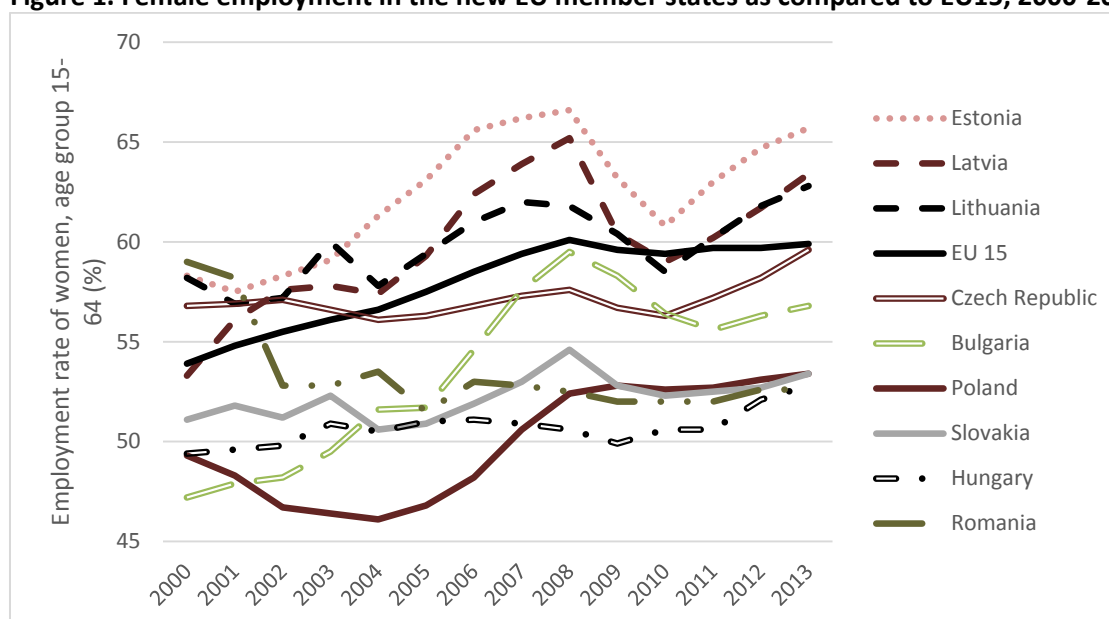
4. Last, but not least access to childcare services is scrutinized. Has there been a considerable increase in the *supply of services* for families with children below kindergarten age? Have there been reforms aiming at the *flexible adjustment* of facilities to the needs of parents (e.g. opening hours, fees)? Are such services harmonized with parental leaves or are they separated from each other, or even mutually exclusive programs?

In the first part of the paper we set the stage with some important background information on the trends of *female and maternal labour market participation* and of *fertility rates* and the *gender distribution of unpaid care and domestic work* since the fall of state socialism and refer to existing barriers (Part 1 and 2). In the next part of the paper we turn to the examination of *legislative changes in family policies*. We have to make a limitation at this point: Our study is only concerned with programs that are related to care for children below kindergarten age. Family allowance, family tax credits, social assistance for poor families and kindergarten are excluded from this study. We concentrate on the organization and financing of care work, whether institutional or parental. Our study thus includes the detailed analysis of paid and unpaid maternity and parental leaves and child-care services) in the four Visegrád-countries (Part 3.1 and 3.2). We analyse whether and how these programs underwent substantial reforms in the past decades in terms of increased flexibility of care for small children. At the end of the country-sections on parental leaves we provide a summarizing figure on the most important legislative changes since 2000. While the first part of each section contains a detailed description of *legislative changes*, the second part contains an assessment of the *implementation and impact* of legislative changes. Our analysis shows that while certain legislative changes point towards increased flexibility, *de facto* change in caring patterns has rarely been present in the Visegrád-countries. In other words, we scrutinize whether legislative changes lead to increased flexibility in reality or not. When examining changing child-care regulations and practices we also consider the possible effect of the *European Union* through directives, Open Method of Coordination (especially gender mainstreaming) or through financing provided by the Structural Funds. Have there been considerable resources devoted to family policies and flexible child-care in the four countries in the past decade? In the concluding chapter we provide a detailed summarizing table on the changes and their directions. This is followed by policy recommendations on needed family policy change in the Visegrád-countries in order to increase flexibility and possibly contribute to the reversal of desperate labour market and fertility trends in the region.

2. Trends of female and maternal labour market participation in the Visegrád-countries

There has been an overall trend of increasing female employment rates in the EU countries between 2000 and 2011. As pointed out by Csillag et.al. (2014) we can observe a slight increase in the Visegrád countries as well. At the same time, there has also been a divergence between the “old” and the “new” member states in this respect as post-communist countries exhibit a considerably slower development compared to EU average (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Female employment in the new EU member states as compared to EU15, 2000-2012



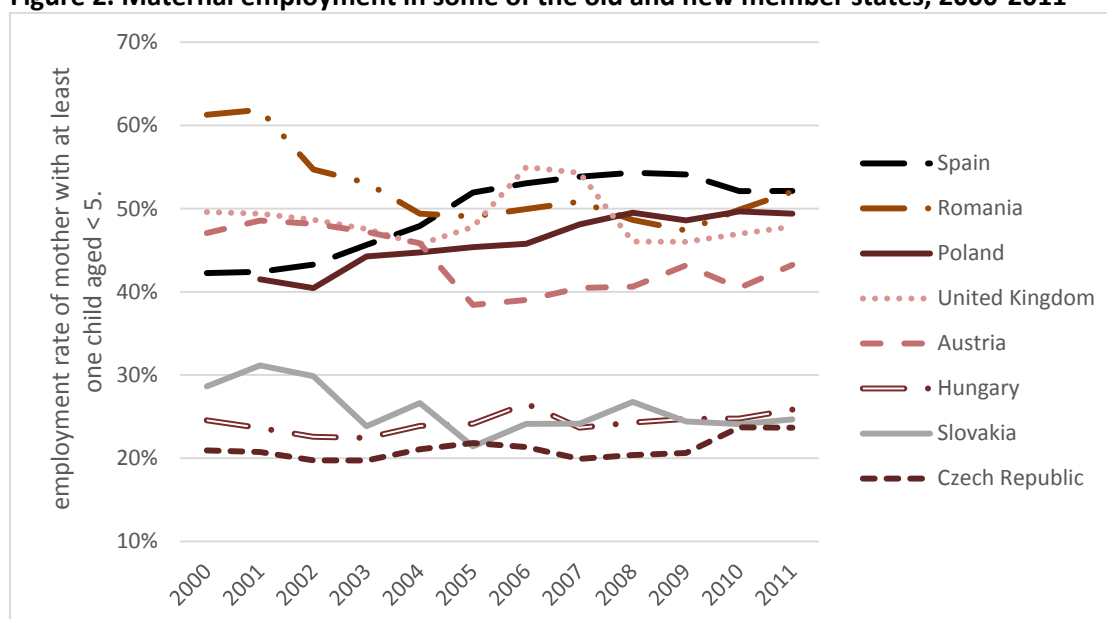
Source: Eurostat 2000-2013

While female employment rates continuously diverged from the “old” member states in the Czech Republic, in Hungary and in Slovakia, Poland exhibited a different trend. Here the rate increased also when compared to the average of the EU15 in the period of 2005 and 2010. Following the great recession the growth has slowed down and begun to decline also in this country. In absolute terms we can observe the highest female labour force participation in the Czech Republic in the whole period (between 61 and 62 percentage points) which corresponds to the EU-average. The other three countries, however, have remained well below the average with rates between 55 and 57 per cent. Figure 1 also shows that female employment in the Baltic states has been higher than in the Visegrád countries, and have also exceed the EU average.

Female and male employment was effected by the crisis differently. The private sector (dominated by men) reacted with lay-offs, the public sector (dominated by women) with freezing or decreasing wages and freezing staff, at least in the initial phase of the crisis (Köllő 2011). Women were thus more affected by cuts in their wages, whereas men by lay-offs (Bálint et al 2011). All in all, men lost their jobs in a larger share than women and this is ‘a general European phenomenon’ (Frey 2011).

Importantly, the daily hours worked by women in the Central and Eastern European region are much higher than in the EU15 countries. Although there has been an increase in the share of atypical, part-time and precarious employment of women during the crisis years (Pietruchova 2013; Skóra 2013; HCSO Stadat 2013), it is still true that women in the New Member States of the EU (NMS) work longer hours than women in the old EU-members (Frey 2011). Thus if we calculate the number of working hours the difference between EU 27 and NMS female employment rates nearly diminishes (in the case of Hungary to 1.5 per cent – *ibid.*). Also, part-time jobs can hardly be considered as a solution to tensions between work and family obligations in the CEE countries given the low wages that do not provide the possibility for economic independence.

Figure 2. Maternal employment in some of the old and new member states, 2000-2011



Source: Own calculation based on EU-LFS 2000-2011. To eliminate cross-country differences in the definition of labour market status, we use the narrowest definition of employment which is based on any work (one hour or more) for pay or profit during the reference week (LFS core variables and HHMOTH).

Child penalty, described as the difference between the labour force participation of mothers and childless women (Waldfoegel 1998; Budig, Misra and Boeckmann 2012) is especially big in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary where maternal employment has been 27-28 per cent in 2012 which is just half of that of female employment (around 56 per cent in the Visegrád states) (Csillag et al 2014)³. The Czech Republic, with relatively high female employment and (despite a considerable increase recently) still the lowest maternal employment rate exhibits the greatest difference between employment rates of women and mothers with children below the age of four (35 per cent in 2012). Poland, on the other hand (alongside with Romania) have the highest rate of maternal employment (50 per cent of all mothers) – a rate similar to the employment rates of Spain and the UK. Child penalty is much smaller in this country with a mere 5 per cent difference between female and maternal employment rates in 2012.

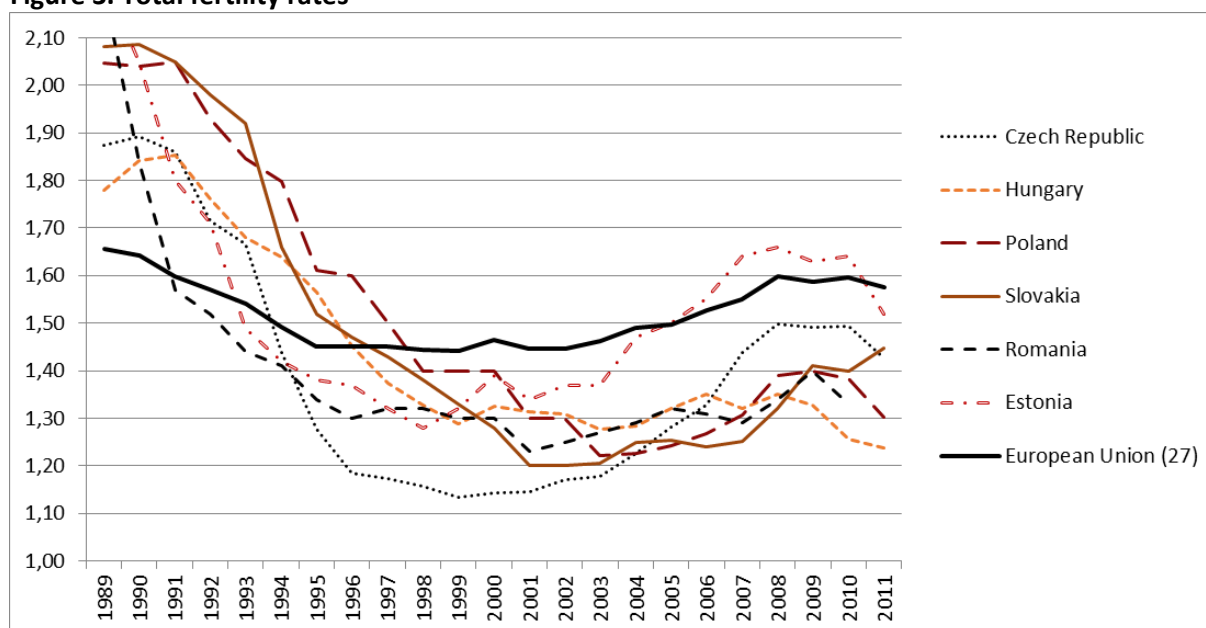
When considering cross-country variation Csillag et al (2014) found the widening of maternal employment gap in the early and mid-2000s (between 2001 and 2007) and the narrowing of the gap later on (between 2007 and 2011). V4 countries lagged behind reducing child penalty in this period with Slovakia being the last in the line. Following 2007, however, the negative effect of having a child declined more in the V4 countries contributing to the reduction of the gap which might be explained with the expansion of child care services in these countries (Csillag et al 2014).

³ Child penalty usually includes the difference between the earnings of mothers and that of childless women. In this study, however, we did not consider this data.

3. Trends in fertility rates in the Visegrád countries

While in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia and in Hungary total fertility rates (TFR)⁴ had started from a relatively low level in 1989 (1.87 and 1.78 average number of children/woman respectively), they were above 2 per cent in Slovakian part of Czechoslovakia and Poland (2.08 and 2.05 respectively) (Figure 3). A continuous fall of TFR could be observed during the 1990s in all CEE countries. TFR in the Czech Republic reached the record low 1.13 child/woman in 1999, when it slowly started to climb back relaxing around 1.4-1.5 by the end of the decade. An especially sharp drop was experienced in Hungary between 1995-1997 (from 1.57 to 1.37) which is attributed to the austerity package (including the ceasing of insurance-based parental leave) of 1996 by demographers (Gábos and Tóth 2001), although later studies find that this effect was small (Gábos et al 2009). This is the only country with no considerable development of fertility rates in the whole period: after a modest rise between 2003 and 2006, the total fertility rate reached a new trough of 1.23 in 2011. An especially steep decline marked the development in Poland where TFR got to its lowest point in 2003 (1.22), alarming politicians about population concerns for the first time in Polish history (Inglot et al 2012). Family policies and the promotion of female labour force participation might have played a role in reversing the negative trend at least temporarily. However, mass emigration of young people and their families from the country contributes to the still very low TFR in Poland (1.3 in 2011). A similar trend can be traced in Slovakia with the lowest rate of 1.20 in 2000 and 2001, while since then a steady increase with 1.45 child/women born in 2011.

Figure 3. Total fertility rates



Source: Eurostat (2013b).

Fertility rates of all four Visegrád-countries have deviated from the EU-trend in the early and mid-2000s, and remained below the EU-average (1.57 in 2011) throughout the period. Slovakia and the Czech Republic have, however, converged to the EU recently.

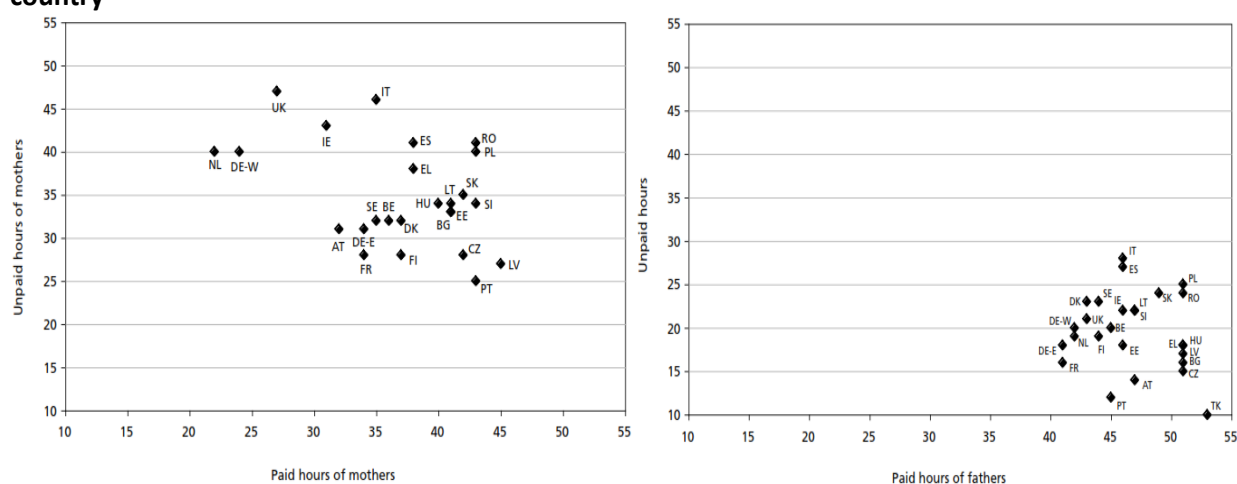
⁴ Total fertility rates (TFR) stand for the number of children per woman aged 15-49 in correspondence with the fertile period of women.

4. Gender distribution of domestic work in the Visegrád countries

Women work longer hours in the household in Central-Eastern and Southern Europe than in the Western and Northern part of the Continent (Aliaga 2006, Herche 2010). The lower employment rate of women in these countries contributes to their longer hours in unpaid domestic work, but women who have a paid job as well still spend more time doing household chores than men (Eurofound 2012, Aliaga 2006, Csillag et al 2014). The relatively unequal gender distribution of domestic work follows a similar pattern within the Visegrád group. Women do around 71% of the total daily domestic work in Visegrád countries, compared to 65% in the Nordic countries and around 84% in Southern Europe (Sani 2014, European Social Survey 2010).

The share of domestic work is similarly high, around 61-65% in the case of working mothers. According to the Eurobarometer survey of 2003, employed mothers do about 28 hours in the Czech Republic, 35 hours of unpaid work a week in Hungary and Slovakia, and 40 hours in Poland, with their paid hours varying much less (between 40 and 43 hours) (see Figure 4 below). By contrast, employed men spend between 15 (Czech Republic) and 25 hours (Poland) a week on domestic chores.

Figure 4 Average paid and unpaid working hours of employed mothers and fathers in 2003, by country



interrelated factors of attitudes, education, family policies and the gender distribution of household work and their influence on fertility and employment in the Visegrád countries.

Table 1 Daily hours spent on domestic chores, minutes

	Total employed population			Primary education or less			Tertiary education		
	men	women	%	men	women	%	men	women	%
1986/1987	58	185	76	63	222	78	62	183	75
1999/2000	57	160	74	67	205	75	58	161	74
2009/2010	62	152	71	77	199	72	79	157	67

Source: CSOH (2012). Note: % shows women's average share in the total minutes of daily household work.

5. The development of maternity and parental leaves in the Visegrád-countries between 2000-2013. Legislation and implementation

As we have shown above, all four Visegrád countries have been facing considerable fall in fertility rates and at the same time shallow maternal employment rates (though with considerable differences among the countries) since the fall of state socialism. Concerns about low rates of fertility have historically led to increased political attention on family policies (Gauthier 1998). Fertility concerns seem to be the primer *endogenous* driver for family policy change in the post-1990 era especially in Hungary and Poland. While the first country has traditionally exhibited a pro-natalist family policy (Szikra 2011) Polish policy-makers have started to be concerned about low fertility rates in the mid-2000s for the first time in history (Inglot et al 2012).

Low female employment rates on the other hand, have been central concerns of the European Union. The EU has put pressure on these countries to increase female (and within that maternal) employment rates and to fulfil requirement set up in the Lisbon-strategy. Since their EU-accession, such pressure has become an important *exogenous driver* for family policy reforms within the Visegrád states. The EU has been eager to influence countries to increase gender equality through the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) as well as through “gender mainstreaming” imposed not least in its distribution of the Structural Funds. The OECD has called for a reform of family policies in Hungary suggesting to cut long parental leaves and the shifting of resources from leaves towards high quality child-care services (OECD 2007). Recently, the European Commission, when evaluating the plans to distribute Structural Funds in the New Member States, it has recommended the Czech Republic to

“...increase significantly the availability of inclusive childcare facilities with a focus on children up to three years old, and the participation of Roma children, notably by adopting and implementing the law on private childcare facilities and strengthening the capacities of public childcare facilities.” (European Commission 2013a)

In the case of the Polish National Reform Program for 2013, and convergence programme for 2012-2016, the Commission ascertained that

“[W]ith respect to early childcare, government efforts have concentrated on implementing the ‘Toddler programme’. As a result, the number of nurseries has almost doubled over the last two years, but is still extremely low in relative terms and do not satisfy demand. Poland took only minor steps to address the extensive use of temporary employment.” (European Commission 2013b)

The EU's Barcelona targets set the aim to place at least “90% of children between 3 years old and the mandatory school age and at least 33% of children under 3 years of age” in child care services to “remove disincentives to female labour force participation” (European Council 2002). The EU also calls for the increased involvement of fathers in parenting as set up in the amended Parental Leave

Directive of 2010, which requires Member States to grant at least one month of the leave period on a “non-transferable basis” to the “other” caring parent, which means usually the father.

All in all there have been considerable domestic (population concerns) and outside pressures (increased female employment and gender equality) put on the governments of Visegrád-countries to develop and reform their family policy systems. Fiscal pressures especially since the recent economic crisis set a rather tight framework for introducing costly programs. At the same time considerable resources coming from the EU structural funds have contributed to the fulfilment of some of the family policy-related aims, including the increased flexibility of child care arrangements.

This part of the paper deals with legislative (*de jure*) changes and their implementation and outcomes (*de facto* changes) carried out in relation to (1) maternity and parental leaves and related benefits and (2) child care services for under-3-year old children in the Visegrád-countries. Our findings will be presented this way: First we present the legislative changes (*de jure* changes) of individual programs (maternity leave, parental leaves and related payments, child care services) in each country. Following each country-section we present an overview of how these legislative changes have been carried out in reality (*de facto* changes). All the way through our focus remains on the *flexibility of the length, amount and timing of leaves as well as the access to and time-policy of child-care services*.

5.1. Maternity and paternity leaves and related benefits

Maternity leave (hereinafter maternity leave and maternity allowance), the oldest form of social and health-related protection for mothers, provides unpaid leave for insured mothers for a few weeks before and after delivering a baby. The leave itself is typically regulated within the Labour Code of the given country, whereas the related payment – usually a relatively generous financial support – is usually defined in social insurance legislation. Maternity leaves typically promote full-time parenting during this period especially for mothers, although a slight change is observable with respect to the involvement of fathers in childrearing following birth. Maternity leave is usually also linked to labour market protection: the preservation of mother’s workplace for the period of the leave. The four Visegrád countries represent different dynamics of changes in the 2000s: Poland stands out with notable extension of the leave whereas Hungary is on the other end of the spectrum with some cautious cuts. We have observed changes in the length of maternity leave, fluctuations in the level of wage replacement rates, flexibility and the share of both parents.⁶

5.1.1 Maternity leave in Poland

Poland offered the shortest period of maternity leave among the countries at the beginning of 1990s: 16 weeks with 100% wage replacement level without ceiling. In the early 2000s a great fluctuation was observable. Within two years the number of weeks was increased to 26 weeks. Out of the 26 weeks 16 weeks were provided exclusively for mothers but the rest could be taken by the father as well. Thus fathers got entitled to take their share of the maternity leave in 2001 (Szelewa 2012). However, this measure was soon reversed and from 2002 till 2006 maternity leave was once again 16

⁶ The general trend in a broader Eastern European perspective has been to have around 20 weeks of maternity leave (e.g. 18 weeks in Lithuania and Estonia, both at 100% replacement rate), and daddy leaves around two weeks (e.g. one month in Lithuania and 15 days in Bulgaria). Two cases stand out of these trends: Bulgaria with a maternity leave of over a year with fathers optionally eligible for the leave after 6 months, and Romania and Lithuania with one month of daddy leave introduced (in compliance with the EU leave directive).

weeks out of which 14 weeks were reserved for mothers and the remaining two weeks functioned as an option of prolongation or a possibility for the fathers to go on leave (Szelewa 2012; Inglot et al 2013). Since 2006 a dynamic development has been present. From year to year the length of maternity leave was increased reaching the current length of 26 weeks, keeping the obligatory “maternal” period at 14 weeks (Szelewa 2012; Inglot et al 2013). Since 2010, mothers may be employed part-time following the obligatory period. The amount of maternity allowance stayed intact – full wage replacement without ceiling. Recently a major change was introduced. Besides the 26 weeks maternity leave, mothers are granted the possibility to prolong the leave for an additional 26 weeks which was introduced as “new parental leave”⁷. In practise this offers mothers a longer period, 52 weeks to be spent on leave entailing monthly benefits at the level of 80% of previous wage. Mothers choosing the shorter option (initial 26 weeks with 100% wage replacement), are entitled to prolong their leave, but in the second 26 week period they are eligible for 60% wage replacement without a ceiling (Michon and Kotowska 2013). Another particularity of the Polish system is that it has long distinguished the prime birth of the mother and the subsequent births: as for each subsequent birth maternity leave has been extended by two weeks. The job-protection of mothers also increased since 2009.⁸

According to the legislative changes, Poland is the most progressive among the four countries in relation to increased involvement of *fathers* in caring for small children. Since 2001 fathers can go on leave after the obligatory 16, later 14 weeks of maternity leave (Szelewa 2012; Inglot et al 2013). The number of weeks available to fathers was increased in accordance with the prolongation of maternity leave. Similarly to Hungary, Polish fathers were granted one week exclusive (non-transferable) *paternity leave* in 2008 (with 100% wage replacement), which was increased to two weeks in 2012. As opposed to the Hungarian “daddy days” the Polish leave is more flexible: The two weeks can be utilized any time within the first 12 months (Michon and Kotowska 2013). Plans include the extension of paternity leave to four weeks by 2014 (Inglot et al 2013).

As strange as it sounds, there has been no official statistics available on the number of mothers (or fathers) taking up maternity allowances until 2012. Statistics from the year 2011 show that 478,2 thousand mothers were on paid maternity leave in that year which increased in 2012, and fall back a bit again in 2013 (Table 2).

Table 2. Number of persons receiving maternity benefits (in thousands)

I-XII 2011	I-XII 2012	I-XII 2013
478.2	526.1	513.2

Source: Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (ZUS), 2011-2013

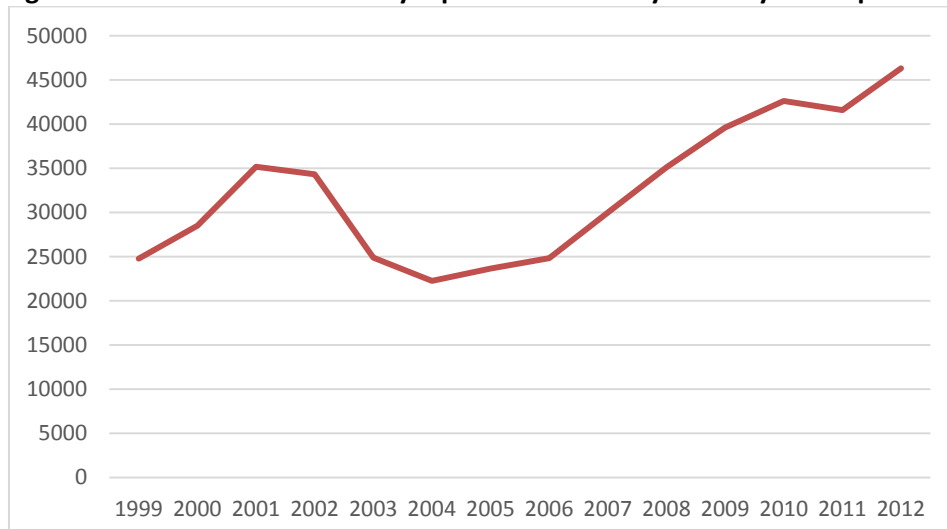
There is, however, statistics provided by the Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) about the *total number of days* parents spent on maternity leave. Figure 5 shows the doubling of days between 2004 and 2012 (from around 22 thousand to 46.3 thousand days) with only a slight drop in 2011. As fertility rates have declined in this period the development is most likely to be due to the changes in

7 Authors prefer to refer to the „new parental leave” as part of the maternity leave scheme as it serves the same function as the initial 26 week-long maternity leave and it can be considered its prolongation.

8 Since 2009 employees who choose part-time work after having children are protected from the involuntary termination of their contracts up to 12 months, and employees returning from maternity leave should be allowed to return to their former position or one that requires similar qualifications. See WorldatWork, 2008 <http://www.worldatwork.org/adimComment?id=31773>

Polish family policies: The increased period of the leave and also the possibility to combine it (after 14 weeks) with part-time employment since 2010. All in all data shows the *increasing popularity* of maternity leave in Poland.

Figure 5. The total number of days spent on maternity leave by Polish parents, 1999-2012



Source: Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych (ZUS), 2011-2013

We could not detect statistics on the number of fathers who share the 26 week-long maternity leave with mothers, and there is only some sporadic information on paternity leave. According to Michon and Kotowska (2013) “16,600 out of 100,000 entitled fathers took advantage of the paternity leave in the 12 months up to August 2011; in the next 8 months, the number of fathers taking leave was 14,200, implying an increasing take-up rate”. Another study examined the situation after introducing the extended maternity leave (Millward Brown in Skóra 2013). Results show that only 30% of entitled women want to prolong their leave to 52 weeks. Only 4% of young mothers and 10% of pregnant women would like to share maternity leave with the father of their child. We turn back to the involvement of fathers in the section about parental leaves.

5.1.2 Maternity leave in the Czech Republic

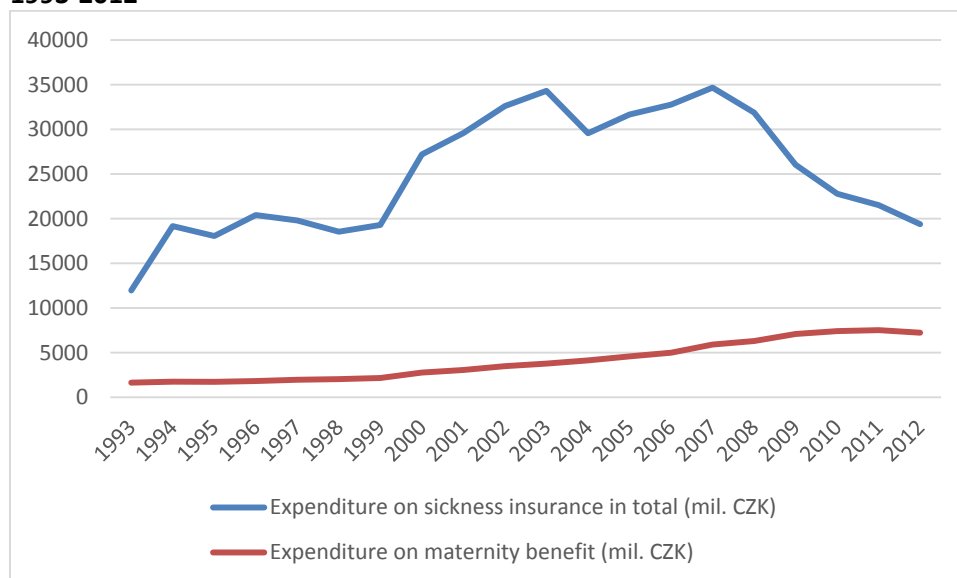
Reforming the system of maternity leave meant frequent changes in its amount, more precisely, the replacement rate of the related benefit in the Czech Republic, which was shifted to a **more equal share** of the payment between high and low income earners. As in the pre-1990s the length of maternity leave has been kept at 28 weeks. The amount of allowance has been altered several times: Until 1993 it was 90% of previous wage, reduced to 67% in 1993 and increased to 69% in 1995 (Hašková et al 2009). In 2005 the calculation of the amount was altered. The rate remained at the level of 69% but the income-base of the calculation became progressively decreased for higher earners, i.e. those whose daily wage does not exceed CZK 480 (€ 16). Between CZK 480 (€ 16) and CZK 690 (€ 23) the gross monthly income-base was reduced to 60%. At the same time, earnings over CZK 690 (€ 23) were not taken into account (disregarded). In 2008 the rate was increased to 69% again. Another change in relation to the calculation was made in 2009 introducing a fourth level: From CZK 786 (€ 29) to CZK 1,178 (€ 44) 60%, between CZK 1,178 (€ 44) and CZK 2,356 (€ 88) 30 % of the daily gross wage is taken as the bases for calculation, while earnings over CZK 2,356/day (€ 88) are not taken into account when calculating the amount of maternity allowance. The replacement

rate was increased by 1% in 2009. In the subsequent year it was decreased to the level of 60% and it was reversed back to 70% in 2011 (Kocourkova 2012).

In relation to the sharing of childcare between the parents a major step was made in 2009, when *fathers* got entitled to take leave after the 7th week following the birth. According to a recent change, in case the father opts for taking the leave it needs to be at least 7 subsequent days. As a quite unique measure the legislation allows for “switching” between *parents* as frequently as wished, but in compliance with the 7 days minimum length (Kocourkova 2013). This means, for example, that after the 7th week parents can decide that for one week the father and for another week the mother takes care for the child, and so on. All in all, these complicated changes since the mid-2000s account for an equalizing, or in other words, *social democratic turn*⁹ in the calculation of the amount of the maternity leave in the Czech Republic, and an *attempt towards flexibility* and *fathers’ involvement* in the case latest measures concerning shared maternity leave. Paradoxically, since 2006, these changes were carried out by right-wing governments. At the same time, there have been no initiatives for the introduction of a non-transferable paternity leave in the Czech Republic as of 2013.

The changes made with regard to maternity leave and related benefits cannot be easily measured, neither interpreted due to the lack of data. There is no evidence on the take-up of the leave, thus we have to rely on the data provided on changes in spending on maternity leave (Figure 6). This shows that in 2012 the Czech state has spent more than four times the amount of the 1993 spending on maternity leaves (1623 million CZK and 7224 million CZK respectively) – but this does not tell us much about the real value of the benefit, especially not about the changing level of the benefit received by individuals.

Figure 6. Expenditure on maternity allowance out of total sickness insurance in the Czech Republic, 1993-2012



Source: generated by the author based on “Basic indicators of labour and social protection” 2009, 2013

Another indicator might be that according to the Life Trajectories survey 84% of parents of children under 6 years of age agreed with the statement in 2010: “Mothers should provide daylong care to a

9 By this we mean that poorer mothers receive a higher share of their income whereas better-off mothers get a smaller proportion of their previous earnings leading to a „suppressed” scale of benefits (as compared to earnings).

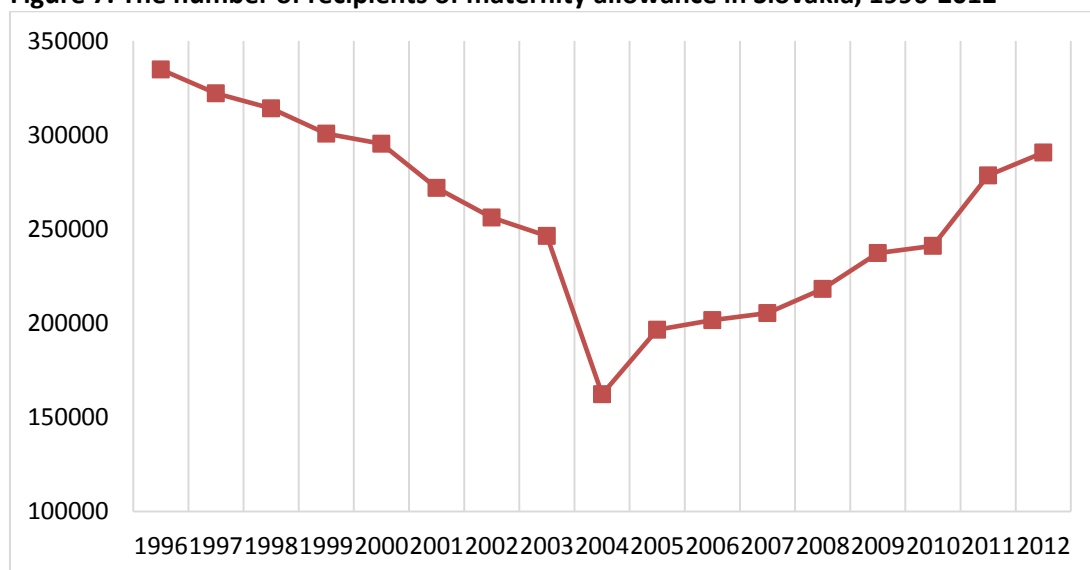
child under three” (Saxonberg et al 2012). It might be relevant to add that more than half indicated *strong* agreement with this statement. Another study also shows that highly gendered perceptions persist about home care of small children child as the ideal (Höhne et al 2010). Data on fathers sharing maternity leave is completely lacking. We turn back to the role of Czech fathers in child-care when it comes to parental leaves.

5.1.3. Maternity leave in Slovakia

Similarly to the Czech Republic the departure point was a 28 weeks long maternity leave with 90% wage replacement rate in Slovakia, in force until 2003, when major reforms took place in the field of social policy. The allowance was drastically cut to 55%. The issue of maternity allowances was revisited in 2010, when the government decided to increase the length of the leave to 34 weeks. In 2011 and 2012 the amount of the allowance was also increased by 5-5% reaching 65% of wages with a ceiling of 1.5 times the national average monthly wage (Gerbery 2013). Similarly to the Czech Republic there has been no initiative about an exclusive paternity leave.

Contrary to Poland and the Czech Republic there is available data on the take up of maternity leave in Slovakia. This shows that the number of beneficiaries of maternity allowance *halved* from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s (from 334.789 in 1996 to 162.312 in 2004), partly due to the decrease in fertility rates but to as a result of the austerity measures adopted in 2003. Since its nadir in 2004 the number has been *slowly increasing* reaching 290.654 recipients in 2012 (Annual Report on Social Situation of the Population - years 2005-2013).

Figure 7. The number of recipients of maternity allowance in Slovakia, 1996-2012



Source: Annual Report on Social Situation of the Population - years 2004-2012

All in all the development of Slovakian maternity leave depended primarily on *economic cycles*: In times of austerity it was drastically cut later, when the Slovakian economy started to recover, the amount as well as the length of the leave was increased.

5.1.4. Maternity leave in Hungary

Maternity leave [terhességi gyermekágyi segély] has remained 24 weeks with 70% replacement rate with no ceiling all the way through the 2000s. Rules of eligibility became stricter in 2010: 365 days instead of 180 days of employment have been required within the previous 2 years to receive

maternity leave. *Paternity leave* has remained five days with 100 per cent replacement rate, provided in the first week after the birth of the child. According to the new Labour Code of 2011 the leave can be utilized within the first two months following the birth which is a sign of increased flexibility. The benefit is paid by the employer and then reimbursed to the employer by the treasury. Similarly to the Czech Republic and Slovakia there has been no public discourse on “daddy leave” or sharing maternity leave with fathers in Hungary.

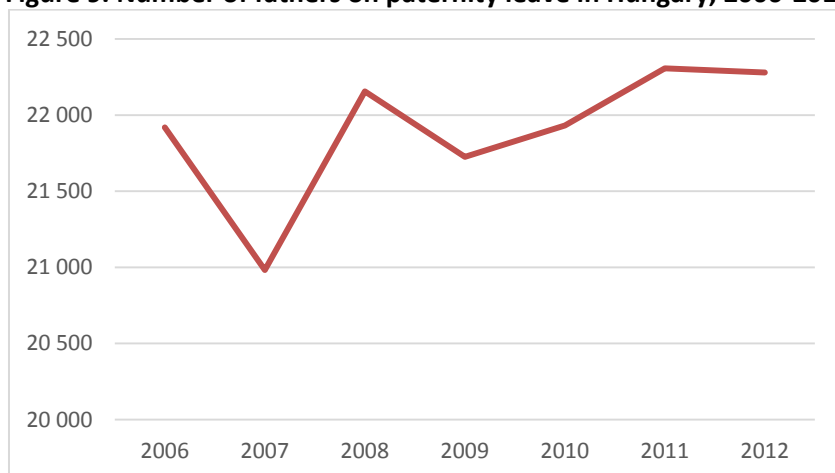
Hungary has the most detailed official statistics on family-related payments out of the four Visegrád-countries. According to the data on maternity leave there has been a *considerable increase* in the number of recipients from the early to the mid-2000s (from 24.000 to about 30.000) followed by a continuous *decrease* until the end of the decade (Figure 8.). The number of beneficiaries was 25.223 in 2012, which meant 27.94% of all mothers (calculated by 90.269 babies born in 2012). Changes might be due to economic and demographic factors: There has been a slight increase in female employment rates in the early 2000s thus more women got eligible for maternity leave. This was followed by a long-term crisis and a slight decrease of female employment rates until the end of the decade. At the same time, the number of babies born has continuously decreased as we presented in the first part of the paper, implying an automatic decrease in the number of beneficiaries.

Figure 8. The number of maternity leave beneficiaries in Hungary, 2001-2012



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), STADAT database, various years

Figure 9. Number of fathers on paternity leave in Hungary, 2006-2012



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), STADAT database, various years

Fathers take-up of paternity leave is illustrated by Figure 9, which shows a drop between 2006 and 2007 but since then the number stabilized around 22.280 fathers which means 24.68 % of all fathers.

5.2. Parental leaves

Parental leave (Hereinafter parental leave and parental allowance) usually starts once the maternity leave period is completed. However, in some countries (e.g. Hungary) universal parental leave starts at birth, and is available for mothers who would not be eligible for maternity leave due to the lack of previous employment. Thus parental leaves are not always linked to employment. In some countries (especially Scandinavia) long-term parental leaves are called “cash-for-care” schemes. Parental leave is often paid but on a lower level than maternity leave. Parental leaves cover a longer time-period, usually until the child is likely to be accepted to a child-care institution (kindergarten). These leaves have become part of the family policy systems of the Visegrád-countries during state socialism, typically the late 1960s early 1970s. Parental leaves have been designed – among other important factors like demographic concerns – to withdraw masses of mothers from the labour market. In three out of the four Visegrád-countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) parental leaves have been extended during the harsh economic period of the early 1990s to buffer female unemployment. On the other hand, they have remained important obstacles to increased female labour market participation. Similarly to maternity leaves the once laggard Poland has shown the most impressive changes especially since the end of the 2000s, whereas the system of long leaves has remained more or less frozen in Hungary. Slovakia exhibited important legislative changes pointing towards more flexibility but in reality not much has changed concerning the patterns of care-work. It is nonetheless true that mothers have remained the prime carers for children below kindergarten age in all the four countries, promoted by extended leaves.¹⁰

5.2.1. Parental leaves in Poland

Poland is the only Visegrád-country where payments related to parental leave (urlop wychowawczy) have not only been bound to previous employment of the father or the mother but also to means-testing, i.e. only poor working families are eligible. In the late 2000s eligibility has been limited to families with less than 25% of the average wage; 40% in case of single parent families (Plomien 2009). Currently (December 2013) the amount of the allowance is PLN 400 (€96) per month if monthly household income per capita does not exceed PLN 539 (€130). The standard length of parental leave is 24 months, which has been increased to 36 months for parents taking care of more children and also single parents in 2004 (Michon and Kotowska 2008). Another novelty of 2003-2004 family policy reform was the launch of different take-up models of parental leave, a notable move towards flexibility. Parents can choose to utilize the leave continuously or divided into four periods (Ibid). In addition to this, parents got permitted to work part-time or study during parental leave. In 2007 possibility to utilize two or three years of parental leave was extended to the child’s fourth birthday. As both parents are eligible to parental leave the Polish legislation allows to take up the leave parallel (mother and father together) for a maximum of three months. Although parents were allowed to work, as of 2007 employment this entailed the loss of parental allowance (Ibid). This

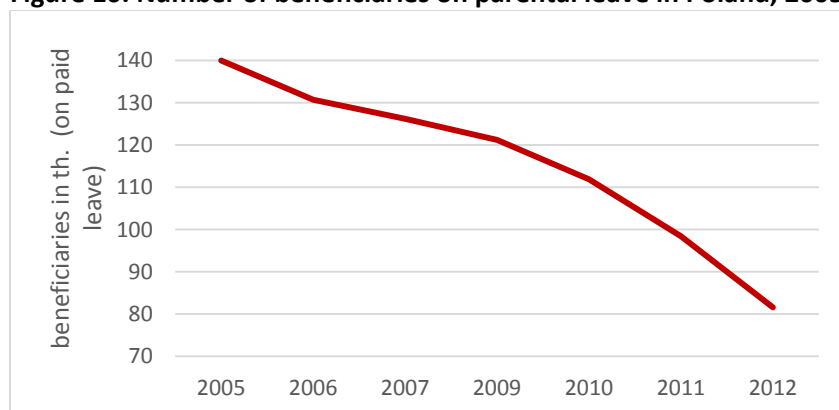
10 The general trend in Eastern Europe is to have parental leave up to (app.) two years, with flexible options in some countries (like in Lithuania), and coverage of non-insured workers in some countries with a low amount of flat rate child care benefit (in Estonia). We must note the decisive steps of the Romanian state towards work incentives for mothers: Parents who return to work before the end of their parental leave receive 115 Euro monthly “stimulant” until their child reaches the age of 2.

measure was later on, in 2009 abolished and currently parents can work and receive parental allowance at the same time. The legislation is not entirely specific in this respect thus allows various interpretations. On the one hand the Code says that parental leave is provided to exercise personal care for a child. On the other hand while working, legally, a parent gives up some part of his/her personal care for a child. It is up to interpretation whether working 6-8 hours per day means a parent has resigned from a personal care for a child and therefore becomes unqualified for parental leave.¹¹

When considering parents on paid and unpaid leaves together we can observe that their number declined from 336,000 in 1993 to 139,000 in 2000; a major reason behind this trend has been the rapid decline in fertility, the number of births dropping from 547,700 in 1990 to 378,300 in 2000 (Michon, Kotowska 2012). According the Polish Social Insurance Institution (ZUS) 231,902 parents were on paid or unpaid leave in 2012 and their number decreased by 2013 (212,846). When taking account of those on paid parental leaves, we experience a similar decrease: Since the early 1990s their number halved by the early 2010th (from around 200 thousand to around 100 thousand) and continued to decrease until today. A tentative explanation to the continuous decline – besides falling fertility rates – might be the decreased threshold of means-testing. Another reason might be the increased possibility for mothers to be employed following the first birthday of children due to the expansion of the economy during the 2000s.

At the same time, the total *number of days* spent on parental leave have continuously *increased* since the early 2000s reaching their peak in 2009 (9535.9 thousand), and then started to decrease (7978.9 thousand days in 2012). The data until the third quarter of 2013 shows the days on leave have begun rise again. The amount of the leave (22% of the average wage) has increased over the years as shown in table 3, mainly due to the rise of average wages.

Figure 10. Number of beneficiaries on parental leave in Poland, 2005-2012



Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland 2013, 288.

Less educated women are more likely to take-up the leave than those with secondary or university education. Most mothers took full-time leave (97%) despite the right (since 2003) for part-time employment during the leave period (Baranowska and Kotowska, 2006). All in all the above described trends suggest that fewer mothers take parental leaves but for a longer time period. This might mean a bifurcation of the usage of leaves: Less educated, low income mothers, who would not be able to

¹¹ Art. 8 ust. 1 i 2, 109 ustawy z dnia 12 marca 2004 roku o pomocy społecznej (t.j. Dz. U. z 2009 roku, Nr 175, poz. 1362 ze zmianami).

get (back) to the labour market, stay at home for a longer time while mothers with better labour market position get back to work earlier.

Table 3. Number of days in and average daily amount of parental leave in Poland, 2003-2011

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Num. of days in thousands	4 444,8	4 308,2	4 905,1	5 334,7	6 256,3	7 875,9	8 535,9	7 708,6	8 118,6
Average daily amount in PLN	36,22	38,13	39,64	44,20	46,72	51,55	54,47	63,45	66,88

Source: Statistical Yearbooks of Poland; Michon & Kotowska, 2012; ZUS-Statistical Yearbook of Social Insurance, 2005, 2007, 2011.

There is an uncertainty in the statistics about *fathers'* taking parental leave. Using the EU-LFS (2006-2010) the estimated number of fathers on parental leave with children under age 5 was 3.9% in 2006. Since 2009 the proportion almost doubled per year, in 2010 it was 8%. Another research (Matysiak 2007) based on 1495 respondents (N Male – 486, N Female - 969) found that only 2.6% of men declared that they have taken parental leave in the past 12 months, whereas 50% of women declared to utilize the leave.

5.2.2. Parental leaves in the Czech Republic

Parental leave¹² – provided for parents with previous employment record – has remained three years since its introduction. Parents can also opt for a flat-rate parental allowance until the 4th birthday of the child since 1995, however job protection is guaranteed for three years only. This allowance is available also for non-working parents. Take-up of parental allowance practically required full-time parenting in the early 1990s – only small income was allowed and the child could not attend daycare facilities. Since 1995, limited access to daycare was allowed. In 2004 the limit on income was abolished but limited access to daycare continued (Hašková et al 2009). The year 2008 brought major changes. A multiple option model was set up offering three different possibilities for parents (mostly mothers). A shorter 2 year-long parental allowance reaching 11 400 CZK (€ 445) per month, a standard 3 year parental allowance of 7600 CZK (€ 297) per month and a long 4 year parental allowance of 7600 CZK (€ 297) during the first 21 months after maternity leave and 3800 CZK (€ 148) for the next two years (Kocourkova 2009; MISSOC database). All models allow parents to work while receiving parental allowance without any financial constraints. However as one of the main barriers, parental allowance is still conditioned to the *limited use of childcare services*. Until 2012 this meant that children under 3 could attend childcare facilities for a maximum of 5 days per month. At the age of 3 children could attend kindergarten 4 hours a day. Recently, according the shorter parental allowance option, children under 2 years of age can use these facilities 46 hours per month (app. 11 hours/week). Children above 2 are not subjected to any limitation.

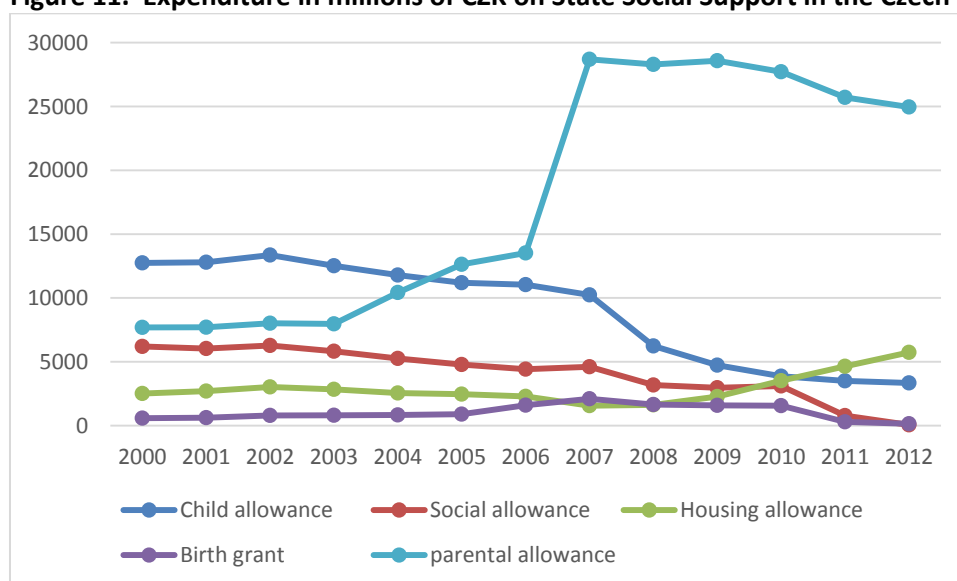
The amount of parental allowance was gradually increased from 13% of average gross wage in 2003 to 40% in 2007. In 2012 the amount of parental allowance was maximized in 220 000 CZK (€8,593) for the whole parental leave period (Kocourkova 2013) and its utilization depends on the parental allowance model chosen by parents.

12 Up to 2001 parental leave used to be called additional maternity leave. It was introduced in 1964. During the research we prefer to use the term parental leave also for the pre-2001 period taking into account its primary function.

Data on expenditures as well as on number of monthly beneficiaries shows a sudden increase from 2006 to 2007 and a slight decrease since then (Figure 11). On the one hand, the considerable increase is reasoned by smaller scale baby-boom starting in 2003 (fertility rate 1,18) and reaching its peak in 2008 (fertility rate 1,5), but more importantly from 1 January 2007 new calculation of flat-rate benefit entered into force, doubling the amount of parental allowances (Act No. 112/2006 of Coll.).

Data, however, is limited on the on the impact of the recent restructuring of the system. Saxonberg et al (2012) found (based on a sample of children born between 2000-2010) that 13 % of mothers spent 0-12 months on the parental leave; 16% of mothers spent 13-24 months; 44% of mother spent 25-36 months; 21% spent 37-48 months; and 6% of mothers spent more than 48 months on full-time parenting. As Hašková (2011) shows since the introduction of the multi option model more than 60% of mothers chose 3-year model and slightly less than 30% “chose” 4-year model based on a survey Life Course 2010. This indicates that despite the benefits of the multiple-option model *not much has changed in real life* in relation to patterns of care for small children in the Czech Republic where most mothers “opt for” 3 years of paid leave. Reasons might include the continued social pressure on mothers to care for children at home and especially the lack of day-care services for small children. Based on the limited data accessible on the main patterns, schemes and tendencies the multiple-option model it is still a question if at all parents are using the freedom of choice.

Figure 11. Expenditure in millions of CZK on State Social Support in the Czech Republic, 2000-2012



Source: Basic Indicators on Labour and Social Protection, 2013

Even though the current parental leave system allows the parents to share child-care responsibilities, less than 2% of beneficiaries of parental benefits were **fathers** in 2012. A survey from 2004 showed that 50.1% of fathers receiving the benefit were from the age group of 30-39 years. Younger fathers were less eager to take the leave (age 25-29 years – 19.2 %; 18-25 years – 11.3%). More fathers take over parenting responsibilities at the age of 2-3 of the child (29.8%), while the share of those taking care of younger and older children is equally 25.3% and 24.8%. 3.9% of fathers care about children older than 4 years. 16.2% of the father are on leave with children under 1 year (Nešporová 2005). Fathers spend usually less than one year on parental leave (Křižková et al 2005). It is quite typical that men on leave were previously unemployed (Ibid).

All in all fathers still play the role of secondary care-takers in the Czech Republic. One of the main reasons behind this might be the relatively low amount of the leave benefit. The attitude of employers is also limiting fathers' real chances to take on more care activities (Podoby otcovstvi, 2010). Despite all barriers a new perception of fatherhood is developing, as claimed by Marikova (2009). A research found that the younger generation of fathers engages in more activities with their children than older generations (Podoby otcovstvi, 2010). Still, it seems that caring of the child by the father does not really change the gendered perception of caring roles. According to a qualitative study mothers are further considered as the primary care-takers who "were born" for this task, while in case of fathers this ability to care for a child is "acquirable" (Marikova 2009).

5.2.3. Parental leaves in Slovakia

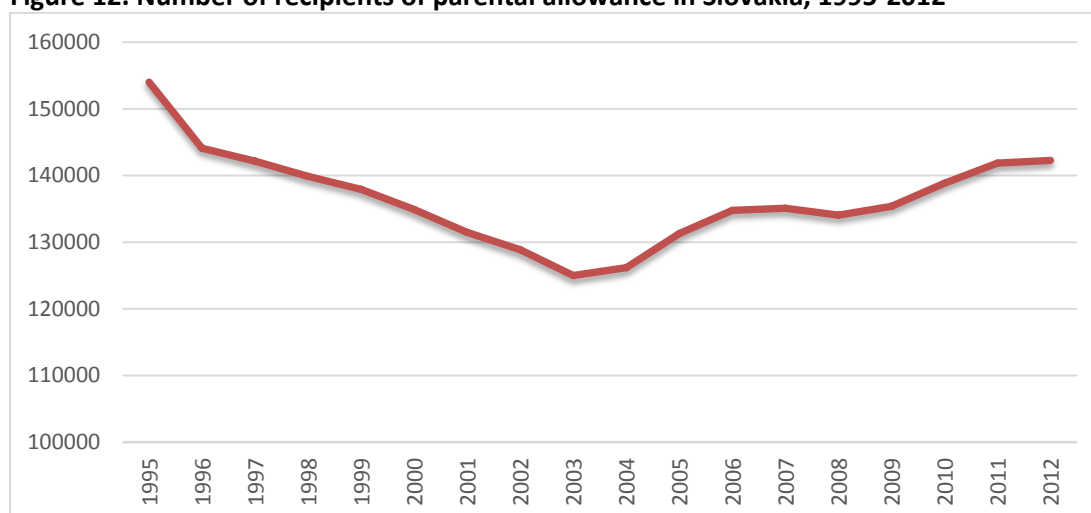
During the early 1990s parental leave (or "additional maternity leave" as it used to be called) lasted for three years in Slovakia and there has been no significant change in this respect since then. The allowance used to be flat-rate. Employment of caring parents was limited both with respect to working time (two hours per day) and also with respect to income (800 CSK in 1992, 1000 CSK in 1993). Later on the legislation allowed employment and studying for full-time parents, however with a reduced amount of benefit. Since 2006 there has been no limitation on employment of parents on leave. At the same time, similarly to the Czech Republic, the legislation has strictly *limited the use of public childcare* and has suggested relying on "legal" or "natural persons" to ensure care of the child (i.e. nanny/baby sitter and grandmother and other relatives). This closure was lifted in 2008 by the introduction of so called childcare allowance, intended to cover the costs of childcare provided either by a facility or by a physical person - professional or family member (Act. No. 561/2008 of Coll.). The new regulation resembles a "voucher" system where the state covers certified costs of childcare services (legal entities) up to 158.67 EUR per month coinciding with the amount of parental allowance. In case of "physical persons" the amount of childcare allowance equals to the 25% of parental leave (flat-rate/fixed benefit). Nowadays, the amount of childcare allowance is 230 EUR and 41.10 EUR respectively. Interestingly, childcare allowance has been financed by *EU funds*, with 45.166.474 EUR devoted to the program in the period of 2009-2013.¹³

In 2011, the Labour Code was amended allowing parents to utilize the three year-long parental leave until the child reaches his/her 5 years if agreed with the employer (Labour Code - Act No. 311/2011 of Coll.). The shortest period of parental leave should be one month. Theoretically this modification grants parents higher *flexibility* in arranging their family and work-related tasks, however it was not very much welcomed by the employers. Besides the employers' attitudes the extreme scarcity of childcare facilities also complicates work-life reconciliation. Therefore it is questionable how and if it functions in practise at all.

From the mid of nineties the number of recipients of parental allowances showed a decrease: In 1995 more than 150 thousand allowances were paid monthly, while in 2003 only 125 thousand. From 2003 the number of beneficiaries began to rise slowly. In 2012 it was slightly more than 140 thousand in a month (Figure 12).

¹³ This national project falls under the Operational Programme No. 2 – Enhancement of Social Inclusion – Support for work-life reconciliation. Another, similar project has been run in the Bratislava region: "Enhancement of Employment, Social Inclusion and Extension of Capacities in Bratislava County" with 3.406.711 EUR allocated for the period of 2009-2013 (Annual Report on Implementation of Operational Programme Employment and Social Inclusion, 2013).

Figure 12. Number of recipients of parental allowance in Slovakia, 1995-2012



Source: Annual Report on Social Situation of the Population - years 2004-2012

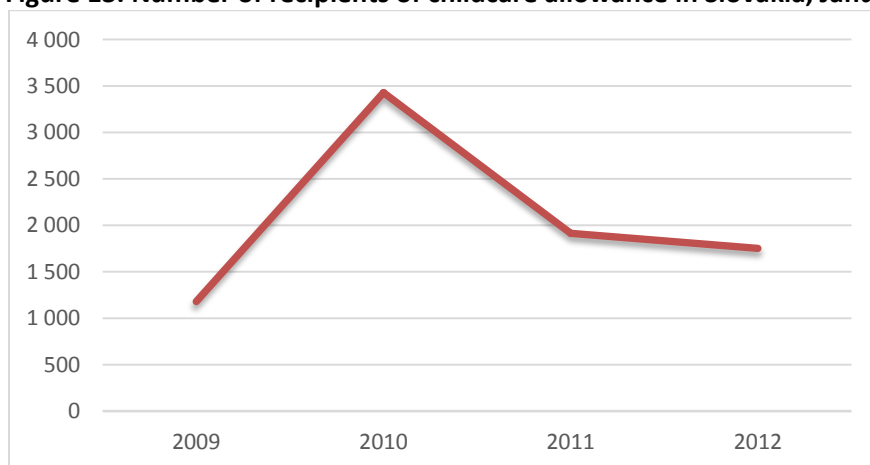
Employment of parents (primarily mothers) was discouraged in the early-2000s with limited amount of benefits, and this is reflected in the statistics: In average there were 700-650 mothers monthly utilizing this opportunity. However, since this “penalty” was lifted in 2005, there has been no data collected about the number of employed parents. Since childcare allowance has been introduced in 2009 (to support working parents on the first place, mothers to ensure day-care for their children) allowance linked to parental leave has been conditioned to full-time care for children. In other words: One can either receive parental allowance *or* childcare allowance. This latter amount is used for paying for a nursery, child-minder or a “natural person” (i.e. grandmother) to care for the child. Institutional care is valued higher by the Slovakian state with higher rate of childcare allowance one of the aims being *to foster the setup child care facilities*. However, the amount provided through childcare allowance is hardly enough for running such institutions thus without state-funding there is still a great scarcity of such services in Slovakia (see section on child care services). To complicate the picture the prohibition to work while on parental leave was lifted in 2011.

As Figure 13 shows, the number of applicants for childcare allowance dynamically increased reaching 5715 recipients in December 2010. 95% of the beneficiaries were women and the average amount of allowance was 63.6 EUR in the same year. 1983 applications concerned institutional care, 2269 application for care provided by a “physical person” or by grandparents (Holubová 2011). The number of beneficiaries dropped to less than 2000 in early 2011. This considerable decrease was caused by the fact that working parents got eligible for parental allowance once again. Thus for those working parents, who could not access institutional care for their children (which is the majority of parents) it was financially more favourable to opt for parental allowance.¹⁴ While the whole setup is quite puzzling it can be supposed that finally only those parents opt for childcare allowance who can arrange institutional care for their children given the higher state contribution for childcare services. From that time on the number of recipients has remained on the same level not exceeding 2000 recipients. Another obstacle for more parents utilizing child-care allowance is an administrative one:

¹⁴ The difference was 123 EUR in case of child older than 2 years; in case of a child under 2 years the difference was even bigger 215 EUR if we suppose that those parents are getting back to the labour market sooner who were working prior the birth and who were eligible for higher rate parental allowance.

The complicated way of disbursement of the allowance tends to deter applicants from claiming it (Jacková and Pietruchová 2012).

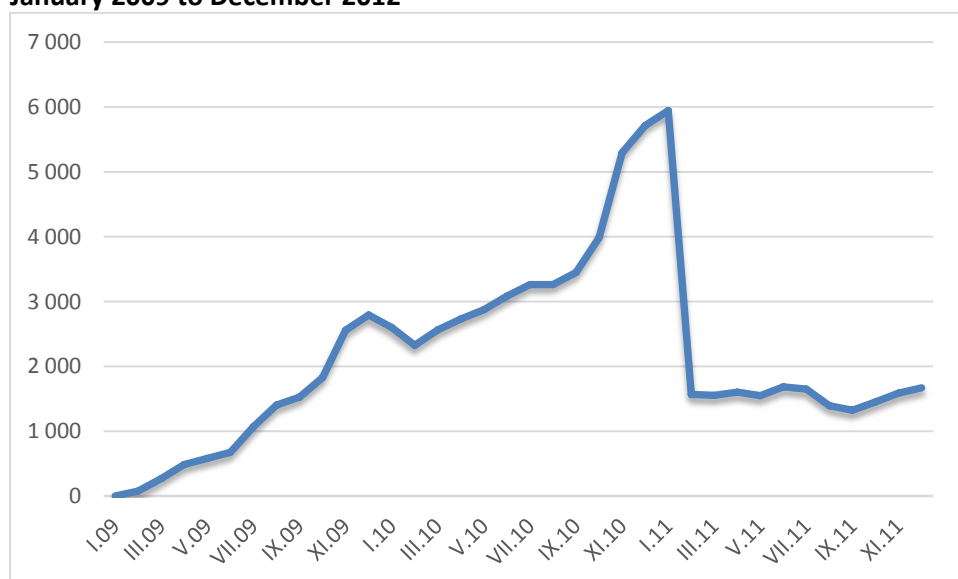
Figure 13. Number of recipients of childcare allowance in Slovakia, January 2009 – December 2012



Source: Annual Report on Social Situation of the Population - years 2004-2012

Figure 14 illustrates well the very sudden drop of the number of beneficiaries of childcare allowance from December 2010 to January 2011 when a great number of parents decided to opt out from childcare allowance and choose parental allowance instead as employment was (again) made possible while taking up parental leave. This sudden change illustrates well the sensitivity of parental leave and child care benefit systems to unexpected policy change.

Figure 14. Average monthly number of parents taking up childcare allowance in Slovakia from January 2009 to December 2012



Source: Statistics of the Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, 2012

Similarly to the other Visegrád-countries a slow but steady shift in attitudes about caring is present: While 71,8% of respondents agreed in 1991 that a pre-school child suffers from the employment of the mother, the rate decreased to 63,2% by 1999 and to 40,9% by 2008 (Gerbery 2010).

5.2.4. Parental leaves in Hungary

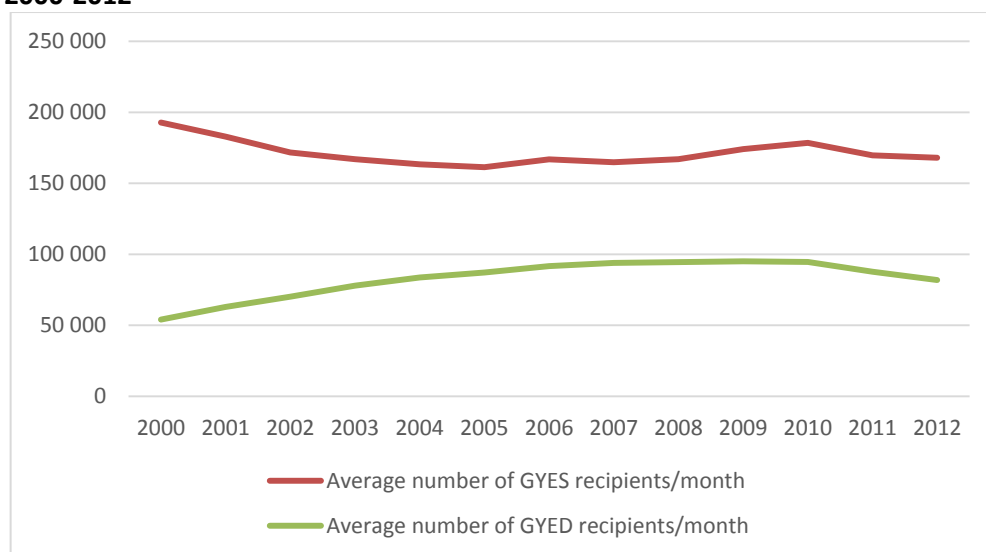
Hungarian families can choose from three types of paid parental leaves: An insurance based allowance (GYED) with 70% wage replacement rate (with ceiling) until the second birthday of a child; a universal flat-rate allowance (GYES) until the third birthday of a child; and an additional universal flat-rate allowance (GYET) for parents raising three or more children where the smallest child is between three to eight years of age. The most considerable reform attempt was executed in 1996, when the insurance based two-year long parental allowance GYED was ceased and the universal flat-rate benefits GYES and GYET were made means-tested (Inglot et al 2011a). The changes, especially the cancellation of GYED were highly resisted. GYES had been already restored in 1998 becoming a universal, flat-rate entitlement, while GYED has been reintroduced in 2000 (Inglot et al 2011b).

The eligibility for GYES, following the first birthday of the child, has been extended to grandparents in 2002. Mothers were enabled to return to employment while receiving allowances in 2006 when a 50% exemption of social contributions was set for employers of women returning from parental leave (Inglot et al 2011b). Major cuts commenced in 2009, when GYES was attempted to be shortened to two years by the interim Socialist government, while the eligibility of GYED was made slightly stricter. This reform was again reversed by the new Conservative government (just like in 1998), and thus GYES has remained three years long as introduced in the end of 1960s. Receiving GYED, which requires a work-record before the birth of the child, has not allowed parents to take up any employment until 2014 when this limitation was lifted and parents were allowed to work after the child's first birthday – just like it has been the case with the universal flat-rate GYES though with an upper limit of 30 hours/week since 2011. Recent reform attempts are also directed to boost fertility rate and especially the birth of second and subsequent children in a relatively short time after the first one, especially among the middle-class. The so called “GYED-extra”, introduced in 2014 means that mothers who receive GYED for their children and have another baby while on the leave, will continue to receive the benefit for the first child, while being eligible for the benefit for the newborn baby as well.

As in the case of maternity leaves, Hungary provides the most accurate statistics on allowance recipients. As *Figure 15* shows, there has been a slight increase in the take-up of insurance-related parental leave (GYED) through the 2000s, and a slight decrease followed by a slight increase from the mid-2000s in case of universal parental leave (GYES). There has been a considerable decline, however, in the case of both leaves since 2010. If we consider both leaves we can see a drop from 273 thousand to 257 thousand recipients between 2010 and 2011 (nearly 15 thousand recipients) followed by a further decline to 249 thousand by 2012. Although there has been a decline in birth-rates, this in itself does not explain the “loss” of 24 thousand mothers. Although there has been no research scrutinizing this issue, two explanations might be plausible: First, it is possible that mothers take up employment earlier than before, thus not utilizing the full three year period of the leaves. This is not (yet) reflected in the statistics on maternal employment (*Figure 2*) but might be in line with the slight increase of female employment as shown in *Figure 1*. Another explanation might be the increased migration of Hungarians since 2010. Research indicates that the younger generations, especially skilled men have left the country in the greatest numbers (Sík 2013), and it can also be

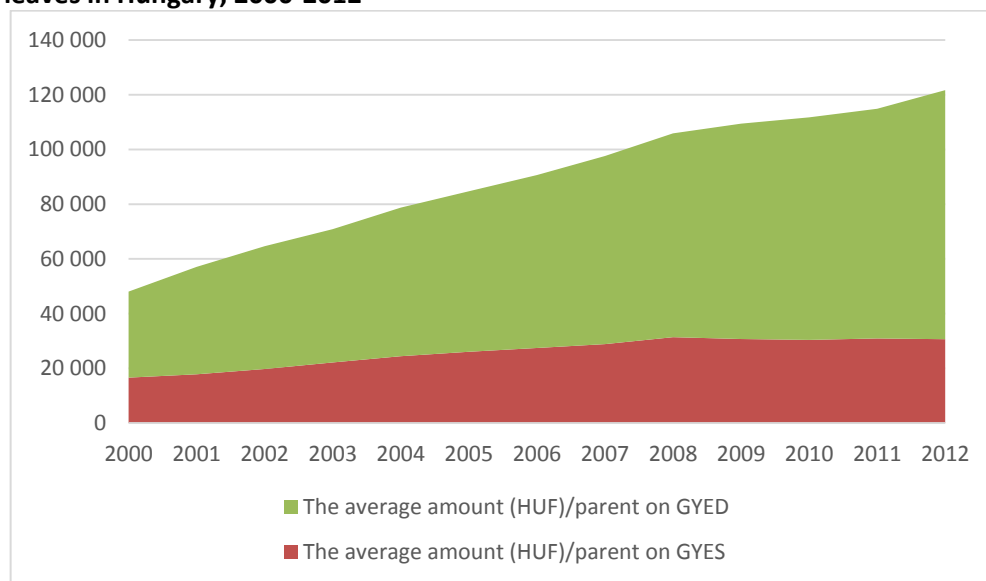
supposed (with no research underpinning this hypothesis) that their families have gradually followed them.¹⁵

Figure 15. The take up of universal (GYES) and insurance-based (GYED) parental leaves in Hungary, 2000-2012



Source: Central Statistical Office, STADAT

Figure 16. The average amount/parent of universal (GYES) and insurance-based (GYED) parental leaves in Hungary, 2000-2012



Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), STADAT

As Figure 16 shows, the level of the benefit has been indexed in the case of GYED whereas universal GYES has only been increased according to the level of the minimum pensions until 2008. Since then its amount has been frozen and thus lost its real value by app. 20 per cent. As about twice as many women are taking up GYES than GYED (168 thousand and 81 thousand in 2012 respectively) most mothers fared ill since the outbreak of the crisis. If we also consider that their households are

¹⁵ Altogether app. half-million Hungarians left the country in the past four years to work abroad. Destinations include Germany, Austria and the UK but also some of the Scandinavian countries.

probably the poorer ones (as GYES is utilized by mothers with no previous employment record, which also means lower level of education and skills) and that family allowance (universal benefit per child, not considered in this study) has not been indexed either, we can conclude that subsequent governments did not try to protect worse-off mothers and their children from poverty during the years of the crisis.

6. The development of child care services in the Visegrád-countries since the 2000s

This study is concerned with child-care services for under-3-year-old children in the Visegrád-countries.¹⁶ We were eager to know whether there has been any change concerning the *availability* and the *flexibility* of these services in the past decade in the Visegrád-countries as such services would be crucial for successful strategies of reconciliation of family obligations and employment. Public nurseries have been widespread under state socialism especially in Czechoslovakia and Hungary. However, coverage of children has never exceeded one-third of children of the age cohort 0-3 years, and the facilities were concentrated in cities. In Czechoslovakia the role of factories remained important throughout the whole period, up until 1989, whereas in Hungary, local councils (with central state support and guidance) took over most of the nurseries of factories in the 1960s (Scharle 2010; Hašková 2011). This explains why nurseries could be maintained as part of the system of child- and family policies in Hungary (although with considerable drop in the number of facilities in the early 1990s), whereas, with the closure of large (mainly heavy industrial) factories nurseries were also ceased in Czechoslovakia with no successor. Poland has been a laggard in this respect where informal care for small children, and even for children between three and six years of age, has remained quite common throughout the state socialist period with app. 10 per cent of under-three-year old children attending nurseries (Szikra and Szelewa 2010; Inglot et al 2011a). Kindergartens, being part of the state education system, enjoyed a more privileged status under state socialism and have remained a more important part of child-care services ever since.

Today, nurseries are typically regulated by the *ministries of social affairs* in the Visegrád-countries. There is considerable difference between the Visegrád-countries not only in levels of coverage but also in the way nurseries and other facilities for small children are administered and regulated. In some of the countries the state has been reluctant to take over, finance and even to regulate such facilities (especially in the Czech Republic and Slovakia), whereas in other countries (like in Poland) there is a gradual move towards state involvement, or new, more flexible and cheaper options are promoted (as in Hungary).

6.1. Child care services for children under 3 years of age in Poland

Nurseries used to be considered healthcare institutions including preventive actions as well as childcare for children under 3 years until the 2011 Crèches Act.¹⁷ According to the previous legislation, each public nursery was expected to comply rules about the qualification of employees (doctors, nurses, pedagogical staff), the exact sizes of rooms etc.¹⁸ Establishment and maintenance of nurseries was the primary competence of local municipalities though they were eligible to state

16 Baltic states generally exhibit a higher share of children under 3 years of age in publicly organized care than Visegrád countries (Estonia 23.6%; Lithuania 15.6% and Latvia 17.7% in 2010). Recently, municipalities started to pay child care allowance to parents whose children could not get access to early childhood services in Estonia and Latvia.

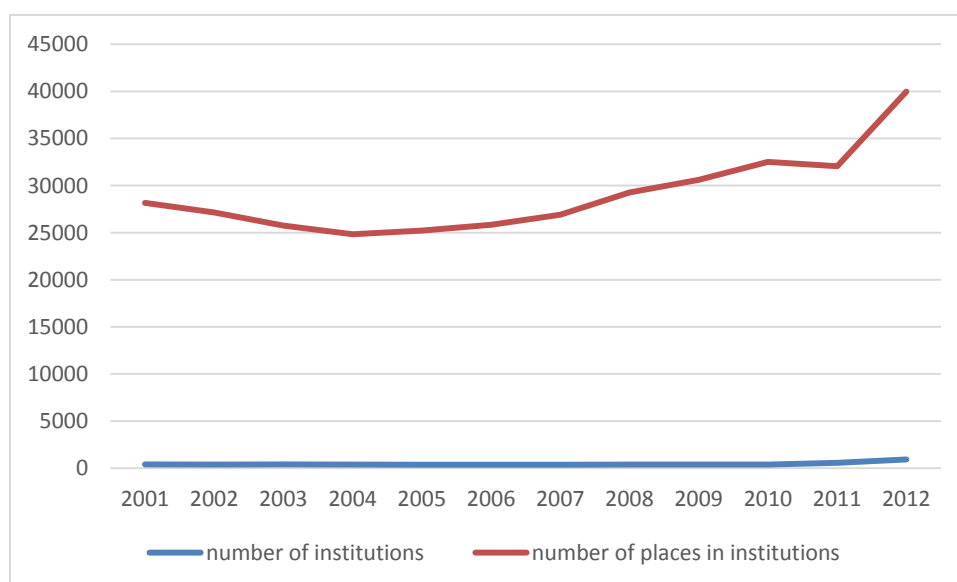
17 See Act of 4 February 2011 on Care for Children up to the age of three.

18 See Act of 30 August 1991 on Healthcare Facilities.

subsidies of their operational costs and further contributions to cover meals (Lange and Fratzczak 2010; Inglot et al 2013). The 2011 legislation shifted the supervision of childcare to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (Eurydice 2012; Inglot et al 2013). The range of childcare facilities has been extended. On the one hand childcare centres or “clubs” can be established; on the other hand the care of nannies, at least partly, became formalized with the possibility of partial state funding (Eurydice 2012). Municipalities tend to focus on ensuring compulsory childcare for children aged five years in kindergarten.¹⁹ Children aged 2.5 years are admitted only in exceptional cases to kindergarten, although there are examples of crèche sections established within kindergarten as well (Brańska 2008). The state supports the institution of registered nannies by co-financing of the nanny’s health and social insurance (Matysiak 2011).

Allocations from the state budget increased from 50 % to 80 % according to the new legislation, which boosted the creation of nursery places by about 7000 in 2011-2012.²⁰ The government intended to reach the Barcelona targets of the EU to place one-third of children up to three years in nurseries by 2020. Today local authorities (*gminas*) are responsible for public nurseries. At the same time, tax incentives encourage employers to set up workplace nurseries financed by the European Social Fund. For 2007-13, over EUR 305 million has been allocated to ECEC with special focus on the development of preschool facilities in rural areas where participation rates are lowest (establishment of new kindergartens, new forms of kindergartens, and development and support of existing preschool facilities) (OECD 2012). The project “Socio-economic activation of women at local and regional level” co-financed by the European Union under the European Agricultural Social included new changes in parental leave (June 2013), which support equal sharing in childcare (UNECE 2014).

Figure 17. Childcare facilities in Poland, 2001-2012



Source: generated by the authors based on data of Polish National Statistics Office (2012)

The above efforts are reflected in the fact that the rate of children below three years of age attending nurseries has increased from 2% in 2005 to 3,79% in 2012. An especially sharp increase could be experienced between 2010 and 2011, when the number of facilities (Figure 17) almost

19 The age of compulsory pre-school attendance was reduced from 6 years to 5 years in 2009 in line with the purpose of gradual lowering compulsory school attendance to the age of 6 years.

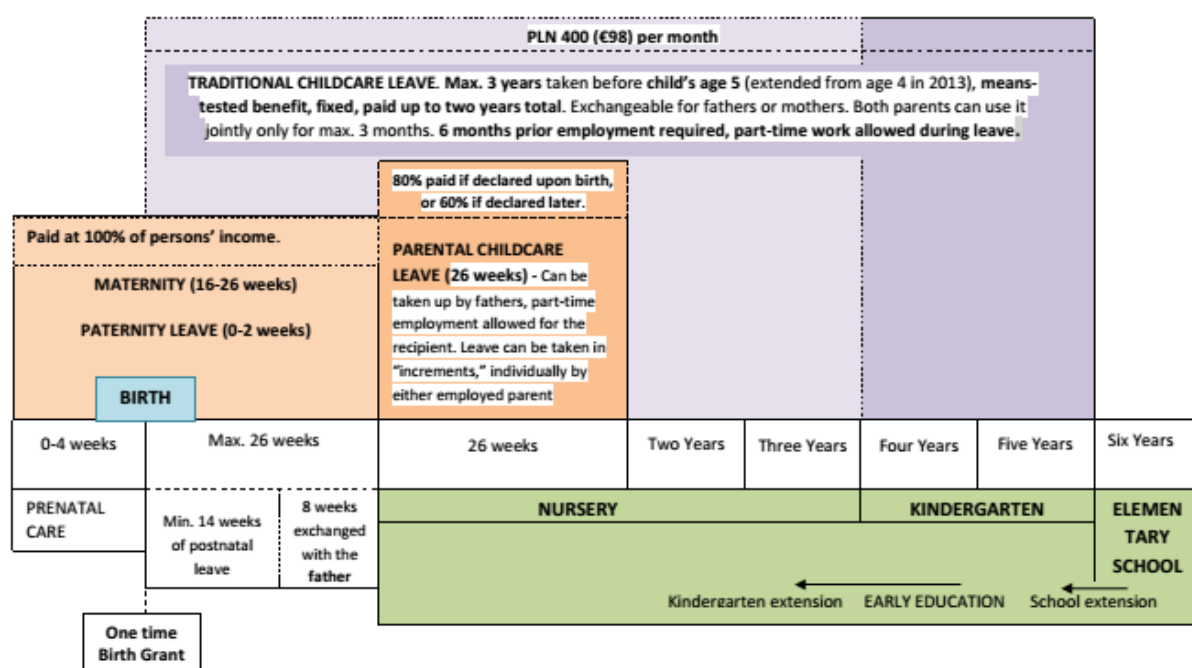
20 These funds are allocated on the basis of the open calls.

doubled, followed by an increase with one-third in 2012. Statistics indicate 30 registered day carers and 9050 nannies (though the “unofficial” employment of nannies is still more widespread).

Despite notable increase the number of places in public institutions supply of nursery places has remained insufficient and also one of the lowest in the EU Member States. According to the Polish National Statistics Office (GUS 2012) 20.174 two year olds were placed in nursery in the school year of 2010/2011, an astonishingly low number if compared with 192.588 children placed in kindergartens in the same year (Michon, Kotowska 2012).

Parents are granted free access for five hours a day – the rest of the time they have to pay for. Private facilities are increasingly popular among the emerging middle-class (Inglot et al 2013) but they usually ask for high fees so do not provide a solution for poorer families. Parents are charged for the stay and meals in the nursery, the amount of which is determined by the nursery in the case of private facilities, and by the municipality in the case of public nurseries. There is a wide gap between facilities available in the urban and rural areas. In case of kindergarten twice as many children attend in the urban than in the rural areas and we can suppose that the ratio is even higher in the case of nurseries.

Figure 18. Summarizing figure on major changes of leaves and child care services in Poland, 2000-2013



Parents' work and care strategies reflect the reality of scarce access to services, and the relatively high maternal employment rate (Figure 2). As quoted by Michon and Kotowska (2012) a recent survey (Diagnoza Społeczna in 2011) asked parents about preferable reconciliation strategies. The most popular solution was longer leaves (women: 26%, men: 20%) and flexible working time (6% for women, 23% for men). Better opportunities for outside home care for young children (up to 7 years) were found as crucial for work/care strategies by only 16 per cent of respondents (ibid). Although maternal care and traditional gender roles are of central importance in both countries, there is considerable difference between Polish and Hungarian attitudes, as shown by Glass and Fodor (2007). While in Hungary 79 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that “[A]lthough

work is important, for most women home and children are more important”, in Poland this rate was 58 per cent in the mid-2000s (Glass, Fodor 2007).

Below we provide a summarizing figure on the most relevant changes of child care leaves and services in Poland since 2000. The figure shows the available options to parents according to the recent legislations. The arrows show the gradual lowering of the age of children in compulsory educational institutions (either kindergarten or schools).

6.2. Child care services for children under 3 years of age in the Czech Republic

The legal framework governing childcare services in the Czech Republic has undergone considerable changes in the past two years. Until 2012 crèches had been falling under the competence of Ministry of Health setting the standards of services. A new amendment to the related legislation has cancelled the healthcare concept of nurseries and prescribed the termination of functioning of nurseries as healthcare facilities to the end of December 2013 (Act No. 372/2011 on Health Services). However, the new regulation has failed to set the new framework of running public nurseries.

Private nurseries, on the other hand, are regulated by the Trade Act, as “normal” businesses. A new bill on “children’s groups” intends introduce a novel form of childcare service following the pattern of German Kinder Gruppe. This issue has been under discussion in the Parliament recently (Palonciová et al 2013). According to the proposed draft companies would be entitled to set up such facilities. In comparison to the establishment of private facilities, the draft offers easier conditions for companies as well as tax reliefs. It is also supposed by the government that EU Funds will be available for this purpose (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 16 June 2013). Kindergarten recognized as educational institutions fall under the Education Act (Act No. 561/2004 of Coll.) and some of them allow the attendance of children between two and three years of age.

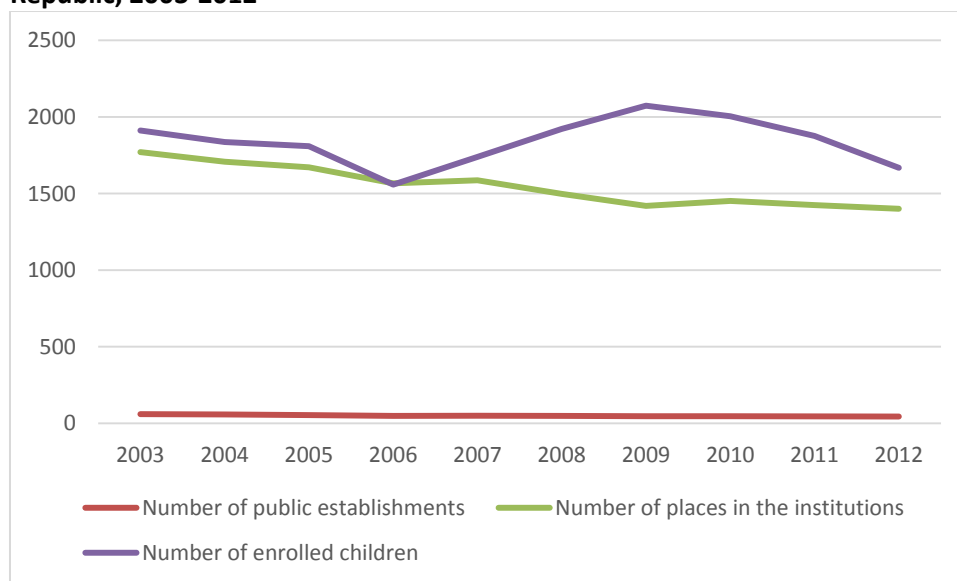
All in all there is very limited access to childcare services for small children in the Czech Republic. Even after relaxation of the rules of parental benefits, the legislation clearly sets the second birthday of children as the lowest age when they may start attending formal institutions. Smaller children attended public nurseries only five days a month until 2012, and 46 hours/month since then, which is not only disadvantageous from the perspective of children’s accustoming to institutional environment but the irregular attendance and constant change of children makes the care-work difficult for nursery teachers (Kuchářová 2007). This is reflected by the practice that children are typically enrolled from the age of two (Palonciová et al 2013). Most of nurseries apply their own set of admission criteria – usually requiring permanent residence in the municipality, at least one employed parent and sometimes the length/extent of attendance is also taken into account (Kuchářová 2007).

The wide network of nurseries developed during the socialist times has nearly disappeared in the early 1990s (Table 6). 44 public nurseries have existed with 1401 places, while 1668 children attended nurseries in the year of 2012. This number includes children irregularly attending nurseries 5 days a month (UZIS 2013). Funding and maintenance of nurseries is not prescribed by law and they are not eligible for public financing. Municipalities can decide to set up and run nurseries. However, this only happens in some of the cities. Most of the villages argue that due to the low number of small children they cannot afford to sustain nurseries (Kuchářová 2007).

Private nurseries are managed either as non-profit or as for-profit organizations. In case of for-profits the price of the services tends to be higher limiting low-income families in accessing them. Services

of non-state providers are rare. Data on network of non-state services are, however, very limited (Paloncyová et al 2013). Kindergarten may also admit children from the age of 2. The main practical pre-condition is that the child is potty-trained (Křižková, 2005). The rate of two years old children attending kindergarten is exceeding 25% in their age cohort, and in 2009 is almost reached 30% (Own calculations based on data provided in Annual Statistical Report of the Ministry of Education, 2005-2012 and Eurostat data on population by age). This shows that given the extreme shortage of nursery places, *kindergarten started to satisfy the demand for child-care services* for under-three-year olds.

Figure 19. Number of nurseries, places in nurseries and number of enrolled children in the Czech Republic, 2003-2012



Source: Czech Health Statistics Yearbook 1993-2011, Periodic Infosheet of the Institute of Health Information and Statistics of the Czech Republic 2001-2012

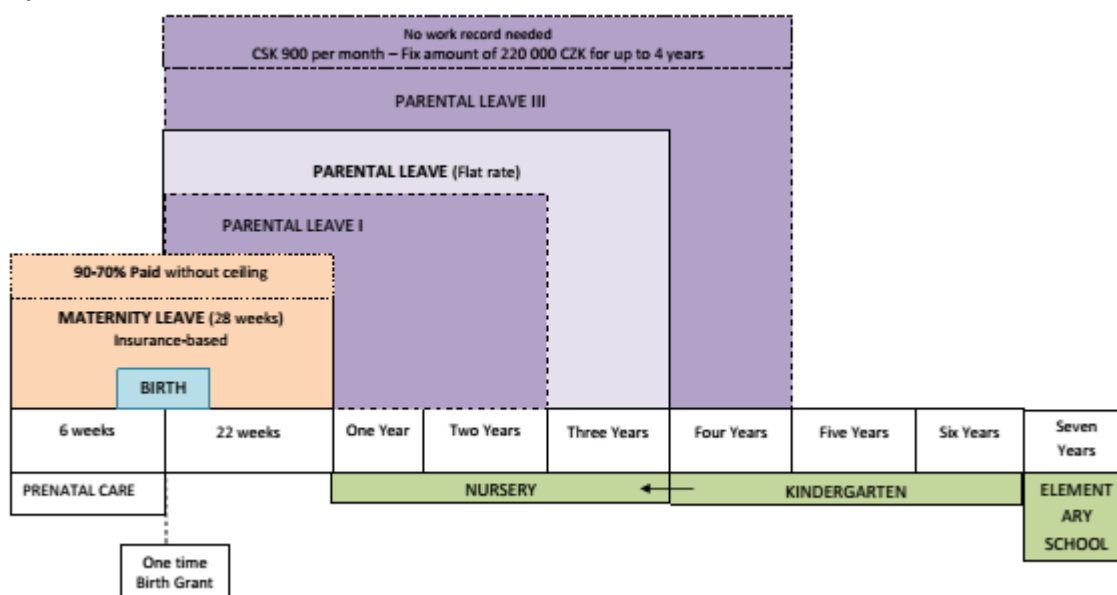
The new legislation providing a shorter option of parental leaves increased demand for childcare services. This demand, however, has not been followed by an increased number of such facilities thus there is a *great tension* between opportunities provided by the legislation and the actual possibilities of parents to choose. The only effort by the government has been the legal provision of setting up alternative forms of childcare services while no resources have been directed to setting up and running nurseries and other facilities for small children. In fact, there has been no intension of changing the focus on home-based individual (maternal) care of children (Paloncyová et al 2013).

While several *EU-funded programs* have been directed towards the equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, vast majority of them have provided trainings empowering parents and especially women to re-enter the labour market (Operational Programme Development of Human Resources – Final Report 2010) with no financing devoted to child care services. An evaluation report from 2010 highlights projects intended to create company-led mini-nurseries as one of the most effective projects within the given priority of the OP (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic 2010)). However, there is no data underpinning this statement and there is no public information available on the EU-financing of such services. An EU-funded childcare project can also be mentioned here – the so called “Trojlístek” program that started in 2012 in the town of Brno. The idea is a service to “rent a granny” looking after the kids few days week. The target group include families with children under 15 years of age. There is minimum rate of wage the family is required to pay for the “granny”, who is responsible only for the kids (Paloncyová et al 2013).

Another initiative from Prague set up a so called “Baby Office” providing offices to rent for parents who run enterprises, and also help them through training and coaching, while, in the same building a day-care service is run (Ibid).

Below we provide a summarizing figure on the most relevant changes of child care leaves and services in the Czech Republic since 2000. The figure shows the available options Czech parents of children below 6 years of age have. The arrows point out the increasing trend to enrol children below 3 years of age into kindergarten in the lack of nursery places.

Figure 20. Summarizing figure on major changes of leaves and child care services in the Czech Republic, 2000-2013



6.3. Child care services for children under 3 years of age Slovakia

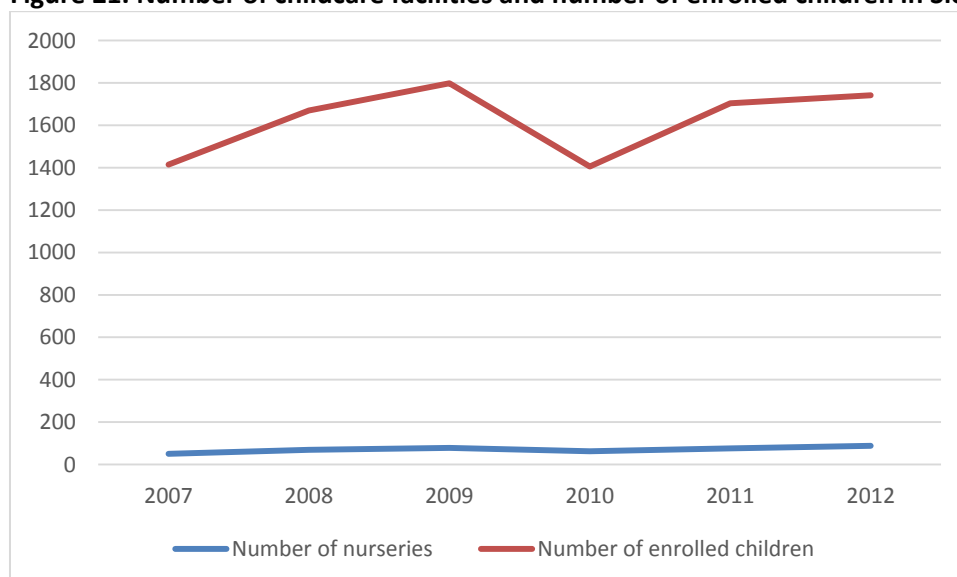
Similarly to the Czech Republic an *ex lex* situation has developed in Slovakia recently as nurseries ceased to fall under the application of the Act on Healthcare (and thus taken out of the administration of the Ministry of Health) already in 1993, but responsibility has not been shifted to any other ministry (Gerbery 2010). Establishment of childcare services has remained the prime competence of local governments but there has been no legislation setting the quality requirements and standards of such services. Neither is state support available. The general terms of establishment of *private facilities* is prescribed by the Trade License Act (Act No. 455/1991 of Coll.). This is in sharp contrast with the relatively developed network of kindergarten and the detailed legislation of them. Since the adoption of the 2008 Education Act (Act No. 245/2008 of Coll.) kindergartens have been recognized as educational institution. Their services are offered for children from the age between three and six. However, just like in the Czech Republic, children at the age of two are often admitted. This is even promoted by a financing regulation which states that children between two and three years of age are “counted as two” (Government Decree No. 630/2008 of Coll.). The compulsory admission of 5 years old children tends to counter this trend as kindergarten often face capacity problems.

Childcare services are nearly absent from political and public discourse in Slovakia (Gerbery 2011). Despite the introduction of childcare allowance – which aimed at activating the private sector to serve demands for childcare services – there has been no development in the number of facilities

and there seems to be no intention by the state to increase the supply of such services. Similarly to the Czech Republic there is a sharp divide between the legislation promoting flexibility (through a childcare allowance functioning as a “voucher”) and the *de facto* possibilities of parents.

This situation is reflected in the statistics: Data on nurseries is very scarce and unreliable. Municipal level data collection had asked for the number of childcare facilities and the number of children attending the facilities in the period from 2007 to 2012. However, no details have been provided on the maintainer of the institution, the number of staff etc.

Figure 21. Number of childcare facilities and number of enrolled children in Slovakia, 2007-2012



Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, Regional Statistics, 2007-2012

According to OECD Family Database 3% of children under three years of age attended childcare institution in 2008 (OECD Family database 2014). Comparing the two datasets we can observe that the data provided by the Slovak Statistical Office are much lower, which implies its incompleteness.

Not a completely trustful source of information, but many private and public nurseries advertise their services on the internet: thematic sites for mothers and families have grouped some useful information.²¹ The most extensive list registers 142 nurseries, private kindergarten in the country as of 2013.²² Vast majority of such facilities are to be found in cities (only three are located in villages).

It is worth looking at statistics on kindergarten when looking for child care for under-three-year old children in Slovakia. 12% of children between two and three years of age have attended (public and private) kindergarten in 2012 (Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education 2013). In early 2000s their rate reached even 20%, but there has been a decrease by the end of the decade. While the number of public kindergarten has decreased, the number of private kindergarten has been slowly rising (Ibid). High demand for child care services is indicated by the fact that 7500 applications had been refused by the public kindergarten in the year of 2012. The issue concerns primarily the capital – 46% of the refused application had been registered in Bratislava region (Annual Report 2013). This problem is often “tackled” by increasing the number of children per group – with the average of 19.5 children per group in 2010 (Holubová 2011). In a contrast to Hungary and also to

21 www.najmama.sk; www.azet.sk; www.eduworld.sk

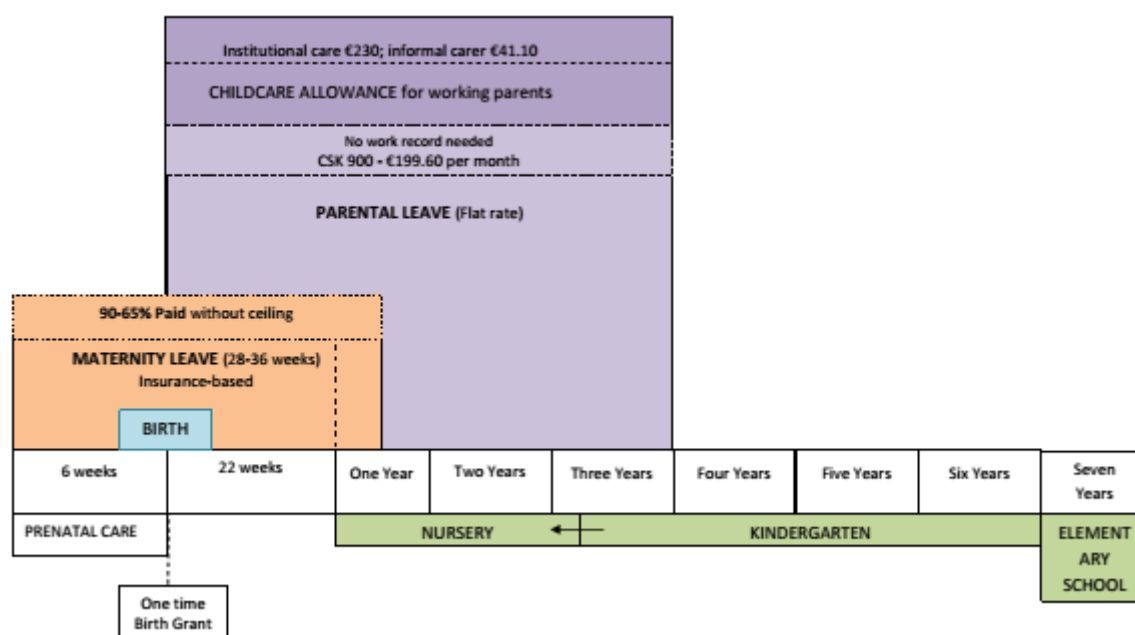
22 http://detskejasle.org/Hlavn%C3%A1_str%C3%A1nka

Poland, it is much easier to establish private nurseries in Slovakia (given the lack of quality standards and regulation) than kindergarten, where regulation has remained quite strict.

There have been attempts to integrate disadvantaged children in the child care system recently in Slovakia. For example, the compulsory and free kindergarten attendance has served this purpose. At the same time, no such efforts have been made in this respect for smaller children.

Below we provide a summarizing figure on the most relevant changes of child care leaves and services in Slovakia since 2000. The figure presents the available options Slovak parents have with children below 6 years of age, and points out the similar trend to the Czech Republic to enrol children below 3 years of age to kindergarten in the lack of nursery places.

Figure 22. Summarizing figure on major changes of leaves and child care services in Slovakia, 2000-2013



6.4. Child care services for children under 3 years of age Hungary

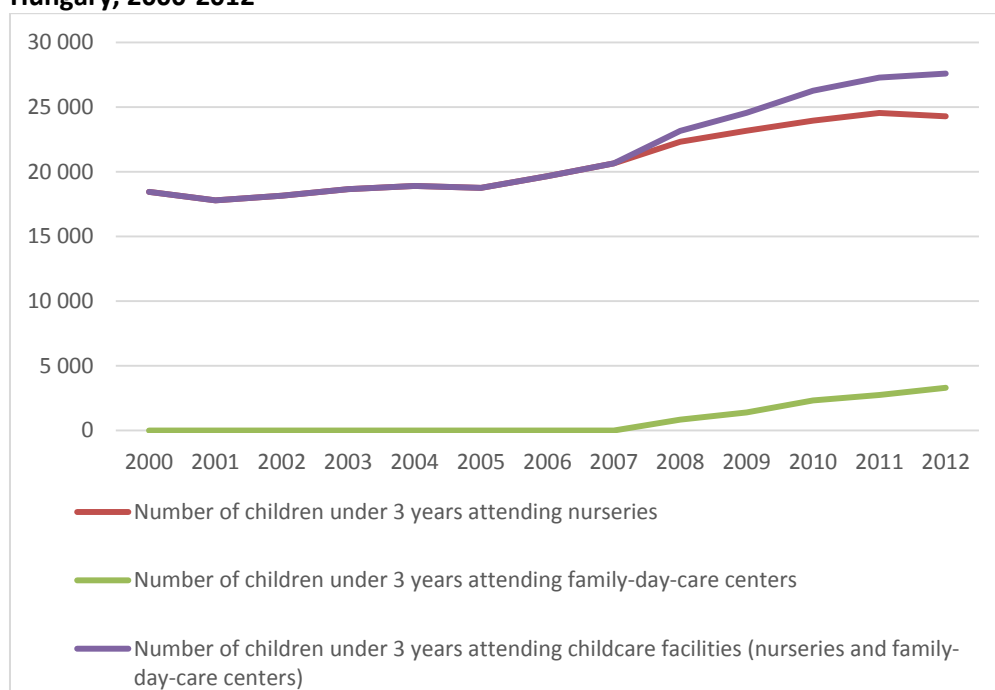
Childcare services for small children are most widespread in Hungary among the four Visegrád-countries. While child care services are in general regulated in the Act on the Protection of Children (31/1997), *nurseries* and “*family day-care centres*” as well as their tasks are defined in the act on Social Services (Act No. 3 of 1993 of Coll.) and currently supervised by the Ministry of Human Resources. While nurseries have a history of more than hundred years in Hungary (Szikra 2011), family day-care centers are new forms of childcare, established in 2002 to enhance supply of more flexible, family-like child-care services (Government Decree No. 259 of 2002). The centers function as “mini-nurseries” intended for children from the age of 20 weeks to 14 years. A trained professional person may take care of a maximum of five children in such a centre, and the number of children can be raised to seven if an assistant is also present.

Municipalities with more than 10 000 inhabitants have become obliged to ensure nursery services (Inglo et al 2011b). Alongside with the attempt to decrease the length of universal parental leave from three to two years in 2008, a new legislation fostered the creation of so-called “kindergarten-nurseries” (óvoda-bölcsőde) (Act No. 31 of 2008). This practically meant the creation of an extra “mini” group within the kindergarten for children between the ages of two and three. Requirements

for staff and space have been defined by the law. Another form of child-care services is the so called “family childcare” (családi gyermekfelügyelet), where a parent is entitled to take care of three children in his/her home if he/she holds an official certificate of expertise.

Among all these services nurseries have remained the most popular not only because their historical roots but also due to the financing circumstances. The state covers app. half of the cost of running nurseries via a normative (per capita) payment. The other half of the costs is covered by municipalities and by parents. While earlier parents were to pay a compensation of cost of meals, a recent legislation (2011) allows nurseries to ask for a care-fee (gondozási díj) from parents (reference). Most municipalities have introduced the fee but there is wide variation to what extent. Families with three or more children, as well as poor families or families with disabled children have remained exempt from paying the fee. Family-day-care centres can, at the same time, ask for higher fees, and the compensation provided by the state is lower than in the case of nurseries. These services are intended to serve increasing demand of middle-class parents.

Figure 23. Number of children younger than age 3 enrolled to nurseries and family childcare in Hungary, 2000-2012

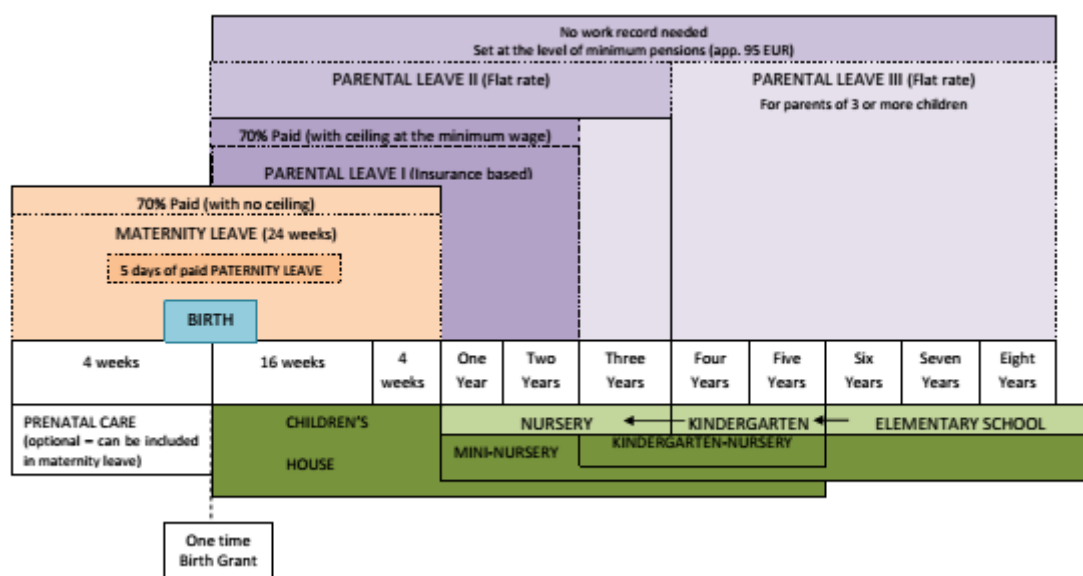


Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO), STADAT

These changes are reflected in the increasing number of children enrolled both in nurseries and in family-day-care centres. *Figure 23* shows the constant but moderate increase in the share of 0-3 years old children in nurseries since the mid-2000, and a steep growth of children enrolled in family-day-care centres since 2007. While around 18 thousand children were enrolled in such services in 2005, their number increased to 27 thousand by 2012. If we include children above three years of age placed in nurseries and family-day-care centres, they account for a total of 43,680 children in child care facilities in 2012 (HCSO 2013). Although the bulk of funding coming from the Regional Development Fund was spent on the development of kindergarten, nurseries could also get access to them and thus the above increase has been reached partly with the help of EU-funding (Scharle and Samu 2013).

Legislative changes reflect the intension of the current government to increase supply of services through higher fees asked from better-off parents and a parallel attempt (present since the mid-1990s) to allow poorer children to receive early education and care. However, partly due to administrative obstacles (including lack of information), poor and especially Roma children are still underrepresented in nurseries and family day-care centres (Blaskó and Gábos 2013). Despite the legal possibility, parents of children with disabilities and long-term illnesses find it still very difficult to place their children in nurseries or day-care-centres due to the lack of trained staff and satisfactory physical circumstances. Figure 24 presents the available options parents of children below the age of 8 have. It shows the “layered” pattern of long childcare leaves as well as the trend to lower compulsory school age and to introduce joint facilities for children below and above 3 years of age.

Figure 24. Summarizing figure on major changes of leaves and child care services in Hungary, 2000-2013



Conclusions: A shift towards more flexibility of child care arrangements in the Visegrád-countries?

Searching for the causes of falling birth rates and the barriers to harmonize family and work in the Visegrád countries we investigated whether there has been a move towards more flexible care policies for parents with children under the age of 3. We argue that reforms of family policies that would allow for more flexibility and choice for parents of small children would help overcome obstacles of maternal employment and would contribute to the welfare of families with children. We have suggested, that increased possibilities for labour market participation and choice of care by mothers might as well contribute to the reversal of falling birth-rates as well.

Our study was severely limited by the lack of standardized sources on child care policies in Eastern Europe. The scarcity of data on institutional care is especially striking. Our most important finding is that although the basic structure of child care services and benefits have remained relatively stable in all the four countries (emphasis on paid leaves rather than services), we also traced significant volatility and thus unpredictability of the family policy systems in all the four countries during the 2000s. Both in Poland and in the Czech Republic sudden and quite radical reforms were quickly reversed. Often the original radical reforms have been implemented later. For example, in Poland the

Table 8. Summary of main changes in maternity, parental and paternal leaves and child care services in the Visegrád countries, 2000-2014

	POLAND	CZECH REPUBLIC	SLOVAKIA	HUNGARY
Flexible length and amount of maternity and parental leaves	<p>Maternity leave increased from 16 to 26 weeks on 100% replacement. Long maternity leave options: 52 weeks, 80% or 60% (if first 26 weeks taken on 100%).</p> <p>Parental leave: Means tested. 24 month, increased to 36 for 2 and more children + single parent (2004). Multiply option model (2004): Leave can be divided into four periods.</p>	<p>Amount of maternity leave made more equal between low- and high-income mothers (2005). Length remains 28 weeks.</p> <p>Multi option parental leave (2008): 2 or 3 or 4 years with decreasing amount per month. Job protection guaranteed for 3 years. Altogether 220 000 CZK (€8,593) for the whole period (2013).</p>	<p>Maternity leave 28 weeks on 90% replacement. Cut to 55% (2003). Length increased to 34 weeks (2010). Replacement increased to 65% (2012).</p> <p>Flat-rate 3-year-long parental leave. Can be utilized until child's 5th birthday (2011).</p> <p>Child-care allowance (2008): "voucher" system. Option between parental leave OR child care allowance.</p>	<p>Maternity leave remained 24 weeks on 70% replacement.</p> <p>Parental leaves: 2-years insurance based (GYED), 70% replacement with ceiling; 3-years universal, flat rate (GYES); 8 years for 3+ children (GYET). Failed attempt to decrease GYES 2009). Grandparents eligible for GYES (2002).</p>
Increased fathers' involvement	<p>2 weeks paternity leave after 14 weeks (in the first 12 months). Parental leave can be shared between parents (even parallel 2004) until the child's 4th birthday (2008). 8% of fathers utilized leaves (uncertain data).</p>	<p>Fathers entitled to take the maternity leave after 7 weeks. "Switching" of the leave between parents.</p> <p>Parental leave available for fathers. 2% of leave-takers are fathers.</p>	<p>1month simultaneous leave for both parents (2003). Stopped in 2005. 2% of fathers take parental leave.</p>	<p>Paternity leave remains 5 days, 100% replacement. 25% of fathers utilize paternity leave.</p>
Incentives to employment	<p>Part-time after 14 weeks.</p>	<p>No limit since 2004 for parental leave.</p>	<p>Limited (time and amount) until 2005. No limitation 2005-2009. Prohibited for leave-takers 2009-2011. Prohibition lifted (2011).</p>	<p>Full-time employment after 1st birthday of child allowed in 2006 in case of GYES. Reduced to 30 hours/week in 2011. No employment allowed while on GYED. Employment possible on GYED (2014). GYED "extra" (2014): Eligibility for the older and the new-born baby parallel to each other.</p>
Increased availability and/or flexibility of child care services	<p>More flexible regulation since 2011. Nannies social insurance co-financed. Increased financing of nurseries and kindergarten. Rate of nursery attendance increased from 2% (2005) to 3,79% (2012).</p>	<p>No regulation on financing and running public nurseries as of 2013. Limited access to nurseries. 0-2 year olds 46 hours/month (2012). App. 4% of children under 3 attend childcare facilities (OECD, 2010).</p>	<p>No regulation on financing and running public nurseries as of 2013. Prohibition of nursery attendance for children whose parents are on leave until 2008. 'Voucher': higher for institutional care than for natural persons. App. 3% of children in nurseries.</p>	<p>Compulsory to run nurseries in cities (2005). Family-child-care centres (2002). Increased parental fees (2011). App. 13% of children in nurseries (gradual increase).</p>

length of maternity leave was increased from 16 to 26 weeks in 2000, reversed by 2002, and then increased gradually to 26 weeks by 2010. In the Czech Republic the replacement rate was cut from 70 to 60% in 2010 and then taken back to 70% in 2011.

At the same time, (as shown in the summarizing *Table 8*) there have been important shifts towards the increased flexibility of the leave systems as well as child-care services. Such changes, however, often happened only on the level of legislation with limited implementation and thus a lack of plausible positive development in the actual outcomes. The clearest example to this is the widespread reforms introduced in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia, where the intended effects of the proposed changes (flexibility of choosing different tracks of leaves in the former and a quasi 'voucher' system in the latter) have been blocked by the scarcity of child-care services for children under the age of three.

A striking feature of Slovakian and Czech care-policies in comparison with Hungary and also Poland is the complete lack of regulations concerning public child-care institutions for small children. Quality assurance measures are not present in the case of private facilities either as these are treated as normal businesses with regular safety requirements. However, such lack of administrative barriers does not provide enough incentives for the flourishing of child-care services as only a small fraction of parents can afford to pay for them. Subsequent governments have failed to initiate funding for nurseries or child care institution for the under-3-year old children in these countries.

Since the mid-2000s the Polish development has become less hectic and more carefully planned. Recent reform steps have provided a positive example of a gradual shift in the direction of "optional familism", and thus increased choice of parents to care for small children. However, despite massive development, nursery attendance has remained rather low (below 4 per cent in 2013). Fathers' involvement is still minor, however, with a slow but steady increase in this country, which has become a leader in this respect among the Visegrád-countries. Hungary displays the most stable, or, in other words, 'frozen' system of family policies with the highest (and slowly increasing) share of children below 3 years of age attending child-care services (around 13 per cent). This country has been the least open to experiment with new solutions concerning care for small children.

Policy recommendations

1. Family policies in the Visegrád-countries are volatile and often changing. This is especially the case in Slovakia and the Czech Republic but has also been present in Poland and Hungary. Parents and children need reliable social provisions and services; they should be able to plan the reconciliation of child-bearing and employment. Demographic change is to be expected only if there is a stability of the system that parents can count on.
2. There is no consensual direction of changes in most countries thus reforms often point into contradictory directions. An often returning pattern is the fluctuating regulation concerning employment while on leave. This is not only confusing parents but also means a waste of resources. Reform processes are always costly and they will not provide the intended outcomes if they are soon reversed or a parallel change in another direction are initiated.
3. Policy-making should be intended to a consensus between political parties on the aims of family policies so that they would not be redone after elections. At the same time, policy outcomes

should be regularly monitored and legislation and implementation gradually adjusted in case of mismatch between aims and outcomes.

4. Maternal employment could only be raised in case there are available, affordable and flexible child-care options at hand. There is growing demand for child-care services that is not met. There are EU-lead investment in nurseries/vouchers in some countries but it is questionable whether these programs will be sustained on the long run.

5. Stable and ongoing state financing of nurseries (currently completely lacking in the Czech Republic and Slovakia) would be inevitable. This does not exclude the possibility to ask for fees from better-off parents.

6. The very low level of involvement of fathers in care-work and other non-paid work at home compared to the old EU member states is an important obstacle to maternal employment and increased fertility rates. Without increased gender equality within and outside of families it will be very difficult to achieve substantial change in employment and fertility rates. Non-transferable paternity leaves should be introduced for at least one month in all the four countries, as it is recommended by the European Union's Barcelona targets.

7. There is some intention to integrate children with disadvantaged background (rural areas, poverty etc.) in Hungary and Poland but these initiatives are not yet widespread. Commitment to provide high quality ECEC for poor children has been lacking in case of subsequent Czech and Slovak governments. Data on child-care services for children living with disabilities is nearly absent in all the Visegrád-countries which makes it impossible to assess the level of integration of this disadvantaged group into child care services despite the fact that for them it would be crucial to receive care and education as early as possible. Targeted development of ECEC services in the poorest regions and to children with disabilities would be needed. This is all the more important as this would be the only way to prevent their future deficiencies in kindergarten, schools and later on the labour market, and such services could prevent the multiply and long-term disadvantage of their parents (especially mothers) on the labour market.

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