

FERTILITY AND THE AVAILABILITY OF CHILD-CARE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN UNDER THREE IN VISEGRAD COUNTRIES: A *REVIEW*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The experience of the period of state-socialism has left the societies of Eastern Europe with the legacy of (often) poorly functioning, low quality day-care for children under the age of three. This legacy together with the so-called phenomenon of “anti-feminism” that spread all over this part of Europe after the 1989 was one of the important sources of reluctance towards publicly provided care services, especially nurseries. As it has already been more than 20 years after the fall of communism, it is a valid question, whether this trend has remained to influence the attitudes and choices of the population.

Compared to other European countries, Eastern Block countries had a relatively high total fertility rate at the end of the 1980s. Over the span of a few years Eastern Block countries with the highest rates of total fertility in Europe in the 1980s became areas with the lowest rates of total fertility in the world. The decline in fertility was partly caused by growing mean age at first birth. Thus, recently, some of these countries experienced a slight growth in fertility due to births realized later in people’s lives. Despite the slight growth in fertility, total fertility rates remain low in the region compared to many western and northern European countries. Naturally, when the severe drop in fertility happened in Eastern Block countries in the 1990s, many researchers started to ask the question - how to explain the fertility decline? And more broadly - what are the factors leading to different fertility outcomes among European countries?

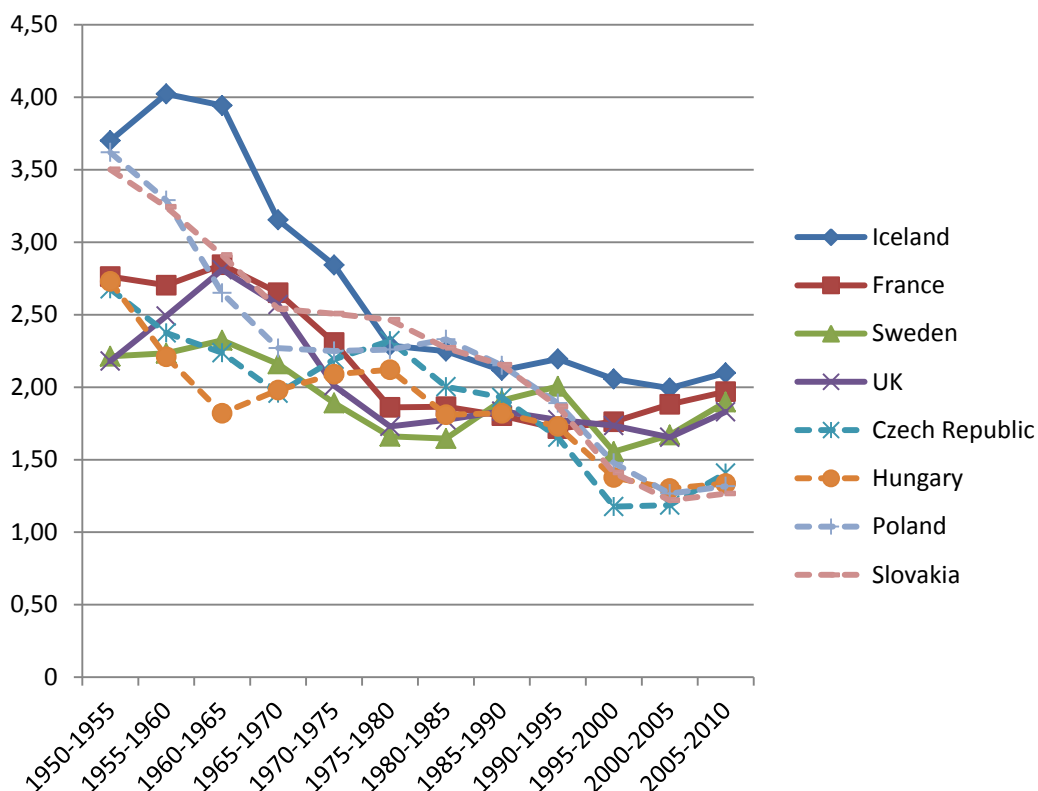
The goal of this paper is to gather and critically assess the existing literature on the possible impact of daycare for children under 3 on fertility in Visegrad countries. First, after we briefly characterise trends in fertility of the Visegrad countries, we describe the situation with day care for the smallest children in the Visegrad countries. Second, as the main part of the paper, we are presenting findings of studies that show empirical evidence or apply useful theoretical approaches to study relations between daycare services and fertility. This includes studies that directly or indirectly relate to the relationship between procreation decisions and state policy on childcare. The paper concludes with several suggestions with regard to the gaps in research, especially with regard to the impact of childcare as a singled-out effect of this policy measure on fertility.

2. FALLING FERTILITY RATES IN THE COUNTRIES OF CENTRAL AND EAST EUROPE

The quick drop in the fertility rate in the former Eastern Block countries during the 1990s has tended to be explained mainly from two perspectives. One of the two explanations stresses the *positive aspects of the social transformations* in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which have brought to young people study, leisure and job opportunities which can compete with (early and multiple-child) parenting, as the availability of quality contraceptives increased together with individualist orientations and the value of individualism and self-expression. In contrast, the other explanation focuses on the *negative aspects of the social transformation* including growth of unemployment, insecurity in the labor market, reductions in social transfers and family services, shift

of income poverty to families with children, an increase in the cost of living, and growing income and property differentiation, which may prevent the establishment or enlargement of a family. The first explanation is a “story” of diffusion and internalisation of values of individualism and self-expression and of growing opportunities “competing with parenthood”. The other explanation is a “story” of external economic and institutional barriers to parenthood (Hašková 2009). The two explanations are not mutually exclusive but rather complement one another (Sobotka 2004). Current changes in fertility in the countries of the former Eastern Block may be a result of a sudden discontinuity in the lives of people after the dissolution of the Eastern Block, which event at the same time speeded up and intensified the effects of long-term changes in values (Philipov 2003).

Figure 1: Total fertility rate in V-4 countries as compared to selected West European countries 1950-2010.

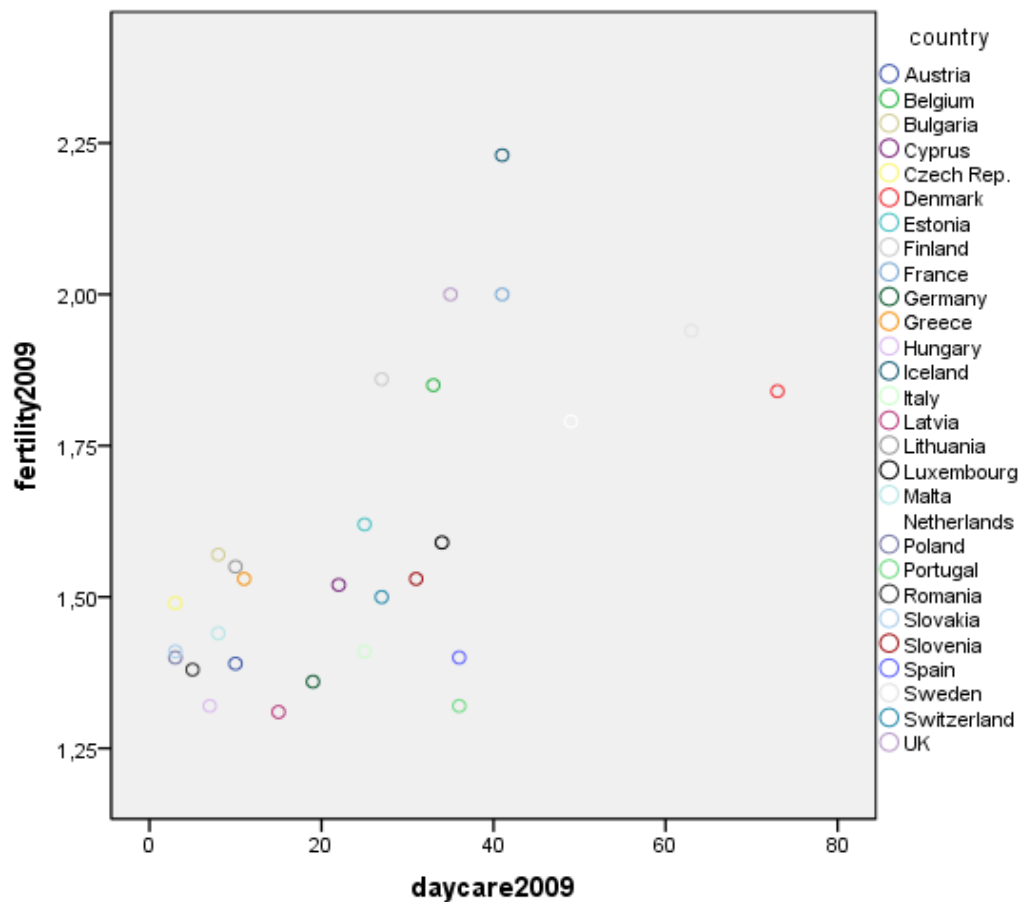


Source: United Nations Population Statistics

The second explanation that focuses on the barriers to parenthood is more interesting for us right now because it includes studies that focus on testing of the impact of the lack of childcare services on fertility. The following graph (Figure 2) shows statistically significant correlation between total fertility rate and percentage of children under the age of three in daycare among European countries. Of course, Visegrad countries belong among countries with very low fertility as well as very low percentage of children in daycare.¹

¹ Although most Visegrad countries maintain rather high percentage of preschool children from the age of three in kindergartens, there is no high and statistically significant correlation between fertility and percentage

Figure 2: Correlation between total fertility rates and share of children <3 in daycare in European countries in 2009 (Pearson's correlation coefficient = 0.65)



Source: Eurostat

3. THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDCARE CENTRES FOR CHILDREN UNDER THREE IN VISEGRAD COUNTRIES: RECENT TENDENCIES.

Czech Republic. The Czech Republic faced the sharpest decline with the availability of day-care for small children (under three). From 14% in 1989 the enrolment rate dropped down to 1% in 2000 (OECD 2000). Since 2000, the number of nurseries has further declined despite the fact that childbirth rate has slightly increased due to realization of postponed childbirths. This, though, did not mean a disinterest in running kindergartens – the constant policy of developing the network of kindergartens resulted in over 90% of enrolment of preschool children from the age of three at the end of the 1990s.

of these older children in daycare since high attendance of daycare in this age group has become common in Europe.

There were several factors that contributed to the sharp drop in the number of nurseries. Besides the political milieu, antifeminism and postponement of childbearing, one of them was their legacy of being ranked as healthcare facilities. As such, contrary to kindergartens, they had no right to receive subsidies from the Ministry of Education. Moreover, more than a quarter of nurseries were established by factories and cooperative farms that stopped their operation or at least very quickly reduced their employee welfare programs, such as provision of childcare facilities, after 1989. Responsibility for running nurseries was given to municipalities. Since **municipalities have not received any subsidies for maintaining nurseries and have not been obliged to establish them**, nurseries survived mostly in the biggest and the richest towns only. Extension of parental allowance for full-time parents that could be collected only if the child did not attend daycare also contributed to the sharp drop in the number of nurseries. There are some other possibilities (than a public nursery schools) to place a child under three in a form of external care. Besides 54 existing nurseries (15-75 places per a nursery), children from the age of two are allowed to attend **kindergartens** if there are places available. In many municipalities finding a place for one's child is not an easy matter even at the age of three, as the demand for places in kindergartens exceeds the supply, and the demand is growing. While in 2002 less than 4.000 applications for kindergarten places were declined, in 2009 it was already 30.000 applications. Although parents are allowed to send applications to more than one kindergarten, the increase in the declined applications is huge on the national level.² Yet, there are some kindergartens that accept children younger than three in some regions. Consequently, although less than 1% of children under three attended nurseries in 2002, another almost 10% of children under three attended kindergartens (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006: 190). In the school year 2005/2006 more than a quarter of two years old children were registered in kindergartens although it is not clear if they attended them. Some kindergartens allow parents to register their child in September but if the child turns three only in November, the registered child is allowed to attend the kindergarten only from the age of three. Anyway, the numbers show that the demand for daycare for children under the age of three greatly surpasses the supply of nursery places.

Moreover, **a subject (a person or an agency) can be registered as a licensed provider of regular childcare for children under the age of three.**³ Their exact number is not known but monitoring company collected information on the number of these subjects in the Czech Republic in 2008 and the result was: 50 subjects in Prague, 18 subjects in the region around Prague and 30 subjects in all the other regions in the Czech Republic (Nešporová et al. 2008). Nešporová et al. (2008) tried to contact the subjects listed in the list produced by the monitoring company in order to make interviews about their services and found out that some of the registered subjects had the license for regular childcare for children under the age of 3 but did not provide childcare anymore. However,

² See *Organizace vzdělávací soustavy České republiky 2008/2009*. European Commission, EURYDICE, EAOEA, p. 80. Accessible at http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/eurybase/eurybase_full_reports/CZ_CS.pdf.

³ Moreover, a concept of children's group and neighbors assistance has been introduced. Since there are no financial incentives and guidelines to establish and maintain any of the new types of childcare services, they remain rather on the paper than real.

Nešporová et al. (2008) mentioned that they were able to find some baby-sitters who provided childcare but did not have the license to provide regular childcare for children under the age of three.

Although we do not have exact numbers on all the registered and unregistered providers of regular childcare for children under the age of 3, survey data on Czech parents show that **regular childcare for children under the age of three is marginal** in the Czech Republic. After 1989 the male-breadwinner model became widespread among Czech families with children. Almost 90% of mothers with children under the age of three stay at home or work occasionally. Conversely, in the case of fathers, there has been a slight increase in working overtime after 1989.

When it comes to changes in childcare arrangements in families with 2 working parents, after 1989 there was a significant decrease in the use of childcare services but an increase in the use of grandparents. There was also an increase in the share of two-parent families in which the working parents alternate in caring for their children, although very often they have to do so while working full-time and inflexible working hours.

Table 1: Childcare arrangements in families with 2 working parents when the youngest child was <3 (in %)

Year of childbirth	Childcare institution (nursery or kindergarten)	Working parents alternated in caring	Grandparents	Paid private childcare arrangement (or childcare provided by neighbors)	One of the parents worked from home	Total
1975-1979	68	12	15	5	0	100
1980-1989	72	9	17	1	1	100
1990-1999	58	19	21	0	1	100
2000-2010	29	32	28	7	5	100

Source: *Life course 2010* in Hašková 2011.

Poland. During the period of communism the network of childcare centres in Poland was developing very weakly and in fact the enrolment rate has hardly ever reached 50% for children under 6 or 5% for nursery attendance. The most remarkable changes for the functioning of childcare services also came after 1989, and were connected with decentralization of financial responsibility over day care centres. The latter was delegated to local authorities.⁴ Because this resulted in the direct donations from the state being cut, it meant liquidation for many of the centres if their economic calculation

⁴ *Ustawa z dnia 7 września 1991 r. o systemie oświaty* (Act of 7th September 1991 on the Education System), Dz. U. (Official Journal of Law) 1991 Vol. 95, position 425).

showed deficit. Then, almost all nurseries and two thirds of the company-owned kindergartens were closed. The sharpest decline in the nurseries' attendance was directly connected with that fact. While in the 1980s every twentieth child under three attended the nurseries, in the 1990s, it was every fiftieth.

One of the reasons for such a sharp withdrawal from the responsibility for maintaining childcare centres was the fact that the state completely cut their financing: **in Poland, municipalities are not obliged to maintain such services for children under 3**. As the central state gave up their financing, municipalities in Poland rarely run nurseries and afternoon services.

Recently, a new law was adopted in February 2011 that established the forms of childcare centres for children under three: nurseries, "children's clubs", and "daily carers" (or "nannies").⁵ The regulation does not guarantee any permanent financial state support. Instead, the Ministry established the Programme *Maluch* [Toddler]. The programme gives the opportunity to apply for financial support for the municipalities that would like to establish one of the forms of childcare listed in the new law: nanny, "a toddler's club", and a nursery. Though it is still too early for stating whether this programme was a success or failure, the first data gathered by the regional offices (not published yet) show the lack of interest in applying for co-financing of new nurseries from the side of municipalities.

It is also hard to estimate the number of private nurseries. One very recent study was aimed at counting based on companies' register, phone books etc. (Piętka-Kosińska and Ruzik-Sierdzińska 2001). The result was that 52 thousand children are covered by the nurseries, including the smallest form known as "the toddler's club". Together, this gives a low rate of overall coverage – only 3.3%. **One interesting result of this study was that 44% of both public and private nurseries have waiting lists, which signals high level of demand for these institutions.**

In general, according to the survey commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy in 2006, childcare is done within the family – including grandparents and other family members.

Table 2: Distribution of forms of care over the small child.

Form of care	% of respondents
Father/partner	51%
Family outside the household	30.9%
Another family member within the household	20%
Nanny	7.1%;
Crèche or kindergarten	4.2%

Source: (MPIPS 2007)

⁵ Ustawa z dnia 4 lutego 2011 o opiece nad dziećmi w wieku do lat 3 [Law of 4th February 2011 on care for children under 3], Journal of Laws 2011, no 45, item 235.

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

As most of the engaged scholars – Bass, Darvas, Szomor, Korintus, and Blaskó et al. – argue that neither **the amendment of the legislation, which obliged all municipalities with more than 10 000 inhabitants to establish and maintain childcare services and increased normative, did attain the supposed 10% rise in the number of such facilities** (Bass, Darvas, and Szomor 2007; Blaskó et al. 2009). Korintus even claims that 90% of concerned municipalities did not fulfil the task⁶. According to the latest statistics in 2010 35 782 children attended nurseries. Statistical data show that due to the limited number of facilities, nurseries admit by 20% more children to the functioning nurseries (ibid.). Korintus adds that as a side-effect it tends to decrease the quality of the childcare services.

Searching for the reasons of intense diminution of childcare facilities Papházi found that **financing of nurseries is the key-determinant as better-off municipalities showed more willingness to maintain these facilities**. He presumed that the rate of unemployment in the municipality could have also negative effect, however its negative effect was not statistically significant (Paphazi 2008). The fact of under-financing of such services is emphasized by Korintus and Blaskó et al. Under the current regulations approximately 40% of expenses linked to the nurseries' day-to-day functioning and maintenance are financed by the state (Blaskó et al. 2009, p.33), while the remaining 60% has to be covered by the municipality. In state-funded institutions, what constitutes 90% of nurseries in Hungary, the services are free of charge. Parents pay only for meals and additional services provided.

Blaskó et al. (2009) mention four alternative types of day-care services – family day-care-service, integrated nursery-kindergarten, domestic childcare, alternative day-care service, from which the family day-care-service is the most popular after nurseries. The service is provided by one adult person, who takes responsibility over max. 7 children at his/her home. Such facilities are much more flexible and reacting to the local needs of the parents. The number of children using these services is dynamically rising – in 2005 it was 706, while in 2008 their number was around 1600 children (Blaskó et al. 2009, p.34). The state finances 30% of the expenses of such services. Similarly to nurseries territorial discrepancy is observable. The vast majority of the family day-care-services are in Central Hungary (ibid.).

4. STUDIES ON RELATIONS BETWEEN FERTILITY AND CHILDCARE FACILITIES IN VISEGRAD COUNTRIES: THEORETICAL APPROACHES AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES

Barbara Hobson and Livia Oláh (2006) analyzed women's agency and fertility decisions in the context of policies for reconciling employment with parenthood in 12 European states, including the Czech Republic and Hungary. They considered which individuals and families in the 1990s were delaying or

⁶ Korintus 2006, p. 6, Statistical data retrieved from Hungarian Central Statistical Office

denying children. They used household level data (Luxembourg Income Study) and found the clearest birthstriking effects in societies where there were weak reconciliation policies for motherhood and employment and few protections for families with uncertain economic futures. Czech Republic and Hungary were included among these countries. Although they did not test impact of daycare services on fertility directly, their results show that **lowest or none birthstriking effect could be identified only in the dual earner countries that allow mothers to combine work and care very early after childbirth** in contrast to all other types of countries (general family support countries, market-oriented countries and post-socialist countries according to modified Korpi's (2000) typology) imply that countries with high level of daycare services are better off when it comes to fertility. In their study, birthstriking is a concept that is linked to what Sen (2006) refers to as **capabilities and agency freedom**. For Sen, capabilities involve an individual's real freedom to choose. In Hobson's and Oláh's (2006) particular case, this involves women's decisions around childbearing that exist within specific institutional settings that support or circumscribe the possibilities to combine employment with having a family. In other words, their goal was to **identify birthstriking countries in which significant numbers of women lack agency freedom to form families**. They showed how differences in the policy configurations in welfare regimes can mitigate the costs of children through policies that support mothers' employment, such as daycare services.

It can be argued that neglecting the necessity of effective work-life balance policies (including daycare services for children below the age of three) increases the proportion of childless and one-child families directly and also indirectly. The **hypothesis of the low fertility trap** presumes that if fertility drops in society and remains low for a certain period of time, social mechanisms appear which lead to further reduction in fertility unless pressure is exerted to counterbalance these mechanisms. This hypothesis stands on three arguments: a) a demographic one which stresses the fact that a smaller number of potential mothers mean fewer childbirths in the future; b) a sociological one which builds on the assumption that low fertility will formulate a "culture of low fertility" and c) an argument building on the work by Easterline (1976; 1980) who links reproductive behaviour with a combination of economic aspirations and expected income of young people. This argument presumes that while the aspirations of the young cohorts have now a growing tendency, their expected income falls in consequence of an ageing population caused by the low fertility rate (Lutz, Skirbekk, Testa 2006). Goldstein, Lutz and Testa (2003) already raised the possibility of the formation of a culture of low fertility in countries where permanent childlessness (or having one child) is not a highly marginal model of private life. The argument is that generations who grow up and mature in countries with a high rate of permanently childless people (or families with one child) will be more likely to prefer and choose these models of private life as compared to preceding generations. Such a development finds support especially in the reality of reproductive behaviour, plans and preferences in the former West Germany. There the number of permanent childless women is one of the highest in Europe; there is the highest percentage of young childless people who do not want any children in the future, and at the same time there is a great proportion of those who are not sure whether they want to be a parent in the future. Although the currently high percentage of permanently childless women in former West Germany is usually explained by institutional and structural reasons (high cost of motherhood concerning the work-life balance as formed by the former gender conservative family policy) (Kreyenfeld 2004), there is also evidence of value changes – a significant increase in the preference for permanent childlessness over parenthood

(among young generations) – reacting to the social reality in which permanent childlessness has become a part of a lifestyle of a significant portion (of the older generations) of population. If the low fertility trap hypothesis and the culture of low fertility hypothesis are right, it can be argued that **implementation of highly effective work-life balance policies is likely to have positive impact on fertility mainly in those countries that have just a short experience of low fertility, such as the Visegrad countries.**

Building on their analysis from 2008 Szelewa and Polakowski (2008; 2007) noted some interesting observations with regard to fertility trends in particular childcare policy models. While Poland had one of the highest birth-rate in the region at the beginning of the 1990s, it ended up with the lowest score in 2005. In other words, *the implicitly familialistic* policy type could contribute in the first place to the most serious downfall in the demographic growth. Similar situation takes place in the countries with the explicitly familialistic childcare policy type (supporting cash benefits but neglecting childcare services). When it comes to the female/male economic activity ratio the first country observed quite significant drop in the first years of the transformation. The ratio shifted from 0.83 in the beginning of the 1990s to 0.73 in the mid-1990s. It was accompanied by a steep decrease of the fertility rate, one of most significant for the region. Slovakia repeated somehow the story of the Czech Republic: a dramatic drop of activity rate followed by some fluctuations of less significant degree. When it comes to the fertility rate, its level was one of highest in the region in the beginning of the transition. It has followed the trend for the countries pursuing *explicit familialism* type of policy, but the fertility rate was comparatively higher for the first half of the period, and then it also reached low level at the end of the 1990s. As compared with the groups, it can be said that the situation of the countries within the *explicit familialism* childcare policy type is closest to the situation of Poland.

The group pursuing the *optional familialistic* type of childcare policy consists of two countries: Hungary and Lithuania. When it comes to the fertility rate, it also located in the middle of distribution among Central European countries when the transition started. The next years marked the decline in the number of births, but it should be noted this decline was not as steep as in other countries. The story of the fertility in Lithuania resembles the one of Hungary. In the early 1990s it was rather high, then it declined quite fast. From the mid-1990s. the decline became more moderate, with some fluctuations. In sum, this group of countries could be characterised by more ambiguous and less revolutionary changes concerning female employment activity and demographic processes.

The two countries classified under the *female mobilising* cluster (emphasis on childcare services, not on support in cash) had different experience with the employment and demographic processes. The characteristic feature for these countries is the biggest *rise* in the female participation ratio as compared with other countries. Interestingly, since the mid-1990s these two countries also noted a considerable increase in fertility rates. In contrast to the countries with familialistic childcare policy types (like for example, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia or Poland), Latvia and Estonia managed to overcome the declining trends in childbirth that became obvious already in the middle of the past decade. Most recently, Estonia and Latvia are the countries with the fast growing both: female participation ratio and birth-rates.

Livia Oláh (2011) in her recent publication combined gender equity theory with risk aversion theory to argue that the time policies of early childhood education and care are important for fertility in recent European societies, including Visegrad countries. According to **risk aversion theory**, changes on the ever more flexible and globalized labor market led to increase in uncertainty on the labour market. Young people, men as well as women, seek to minimize the risk of economic uncertainty by postponing and reducing family plans and instead, they invest in their human capital. Childbearing is thus greatly affected by policies that either support or constrain the combination of parenthood and gainful employment. Livia Oláh (2011) argues that as the gap of gender equity in the educational system and the labor market versus that in the family widened, increasing numbers of women have become aware of the risks of having more than a very limited number of children. She also argues that **unless family policy measures are perceived as effective in reducing the insecurity linked to motherhood, fertility falls to low levels**. She points to the fact that all over Europe, self-realization has become an accepted goal for all individuals, irrespective of gender. Fertility rates have remained well above the critical level of 1.5 births per woman in a number of countries, but not in others, though. This suggests the importance of the particular social context and policy measures.

Since part-time work and availability of daycare are usually perceived as pro-family measures, based on aggregated data Livia Oláh (2011) tested the relation between fertility and percentage of women working part-time and between fertility and percentage of children younger than three in daycare. She shows that **correlation between total fertility rate and percentage of women working part-time in European countries is rather low while correlation between total fertility rate and percentage of under-three-year-old children in childcare in European countries is very strong**. Thus, availability of daycare services is more important for fertility than availability of part-time work. Moreover, based on aggregated data Livia Oláh (2011) argues that **access to high-quality daycare services that allow mothers to work not only facilitate childbearing but increases also preferences to have children**.

5. RESEARCH ON CHILDCARE AND FERTILITY: EXISTING RESEARCH COUNTRY BY COUNTRY.

Czech Republic. In the Czech Republic, there was a lively debate between Rychtaříková (e.g. Rychtaříková 2000) and Rabušic (e.g. Rabušic 2000) about the impact of welfare provisions on fertility. While Rychtaříková believes that welfare provisions matter and argues that the decline in welfare provisions contributed to the post-1989 fertility decline in the Czech Republic, Rabušic argues that they did not have any significant effect. While Rabušic uses public opinion data to show that the decline in childbirth was caused by shifts in values, Rychtaříková uses the argument that welfare provisions proved to impact on fertility in Czech society already in the 1970s. She argues that the propopulation measures of the early 1970s proved to increase completed fertility of several cohorts of women. Also Kocourková (2007) and Čermáková (2005) argue that decline in childcare services could contribute to the post-1989 decline in fertility in the country. Similarly Kuchařová (2010) argues that availability of childcare services is necessary condition for higher female employment rates and one of conditions – however, not the singled one – for higher fertility.

Hana Hašková (2009) applied McDonald's **gender equity theory** to explain postponing, delaying, giving up and denying childbearing in Czech society. Peter McDonald introduced gender equity theory in relation to fertility in order to explain the long-term differentiation of fertility in developed European countries by the degree of the **conflict between a relatively high level of gender equity in individual-oriented institutions (such as education system and labour market) and a persistently low degree of gender equity in family-oriented institutions and the family (including the division of household work and the type of welfare provisions)**. The implication is that higher level of gender equity in family-oriented institutions is necessary to avoid very low fertility in developed European countries (see McDonald 200a,b; 2002). She combined labour market and social policy indicators and attitudinal data from the international ISSP survey on family and gender roles and applied cluster analysis and simple correlations in order to show that the Czech Republic currently ranks among the low fertility countries, not just according to the total fertility rate, but also according to the degree to which it is oriented towards full-time mothering and according to the degree of conflict between work and family life, which exists in both, the population's attitudes and the institutional setting that circumscribes compatibility of work and care. Cluster analysis showed three clusters. The first cluster included work-oriented countries, where fertility is high and female and mother's labor market participation is high and supported both at the attitudinal level and welfare provisions. The second cluster included countries with large conflict between female labor market participation and mothering because in these countries (including the Czech Republic), female labor market participation is perceived necessary but mothers' work is perceived to be detrimental to the family. Fertility is low in these countries. The third cluster included countries that display somewhat lower conflict between female labor market participation and motherhood at the attitudinal level since being a housewife as well as a working mother of preschool children is accepted in these countries. Labor market conditions and welfare provisions then differentiated among countries in the last cluster when it comes to fertility. The situation in the Czech Republic that is coming closer to a male breadwinner model of a family due to the decline in childcare services and increase in incentives for mothers to stay at home for the first 3-4 years of their children's lives, has implications for distribution of childlessness according to socio-economic status and gender. Analysis of Czech census and sample survey data show that **highly educated women remain the most and increasingly more childless and low educated men remain the most and increasingly more single and without children**. The thing is that high educated women and low educated men fit the least to the idea of the male breadwinner – female carer family. Hašková shows on survey data that work situation matters in decision-making on starting a family in young generations of Czechs more than in older generations of Czechs. Moreover, the importance of one's own or partner's work situation in decision-making on starting a family is not distributed equally among population with different levels of education. While education of men does not play an important role, the higher the education of childless women is, the more she stresses that work seriously interferes with her childbearing plans. It can be assumed that accessible quality childcare services could reduce conflict between work and care in childbearing plans of these women because higher educated women are more inclined to shorter career interruptions and using childcare facilities which are missing in the country.

There are numerous studies on attitudes of Czech population to different welfare provisions. Some researchers use these studies to argue that Czech women prefer long-term interruption of their labor market participation (e.g. Valentová 2006). Others study how preferences are structurally and

culturally embedded and point on the danger of short-sighted interpretations of preferences (e.g. Křížková et al. 2008).

Kuchařová et al. argues that despite women's considerable professional aspirations, they prefer to take care for their children by themselves at the time before their children start going to school. Complementarily, nurseries and kindergartens are considered best for children at the age of 2-3 by 5% of women only, for children at the age of 3-4 by 35% of women only and for older children by 67% of women (Kuchařová 2010: 27).

However, Sirovátka and Bartáková (2008) showed opinion inconsistency in Czech population. While Czechs highly appreciate egalitarian model of the family on general level, in which both, man as well as woman participate in the labor market and in childcare, when it comes to real strategies and preferences and concrete daily problems that are structurally and institutionally determined Czechs rather stick to gender traditional model of the family. They argue that this opinion inconsistency is a result of institutional settings lagging behind value orientations.

As mentioned above, some surveys indicate that Czechs think that children should stay at home for the first three years and that the state should not support daycare for children under three. For example, one survey carried out by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs together with Masaryk University showed that among residents between 20 and 30 years of age, 65% thought that it was better for the state to give financial support so that the mother could stay at home as long as possible to take care of the children than for the state to provide high-quality childcare services (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2009). In 2010, 84% of parents of children under six agreed with the statement that the mother should provide daylong care to a child under three (more than one half indicated "I strongly agree") while only 50% agreed with the statement that a nursery or kindergarten could be beneficial for a child under three (Dudová and Hašková 2011).

However, the results of these and other surveys also show that almost all Czech women state that women should contribute to the household income (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006; Hašková 2009). Moreover, the Czech Republic is among those countries where people are least likely to agree with the statement that it can be just as satisfactory for a woman to stay at home as to be employed. **Compared to other countries in Europe, the Czech Republic demonstrates the greatest conflict between the demand for both partners' employment and the opinion that women's gainful employment is to the family's detriment.** On the one hand, women see their remunerative work as an economic necessity and also as one of the necessary sources of their personal satisfaction and self-fulfillment. At the same time, in their opinion paid labor also brings lower rates of satisfaction to the family and the child (Hašková 2009; Saxonberg, Hašková and Mudrak 2012). Thus, even if nurseries are not popular in the Czech Republic, they seem to be necessary for economic reasons and as a source of women's personal satisfaction (Saxonberg, Hašková and Mudrak 2012).

Moreover, as mentioned by the above mentioned authors, **men reject nurseries statistically significantly more often than women, and men also insist significantly more often than women that the mother should provide daylong care to a child under three. The women who bear the burden of caring for small children (and especially higher educated women) do not have such clear**

cut opinions about daylong maternal care to a child under three (Saxonberg, Hašková and Mudrák 2012).

Poland. The research on fertility trends in Poland has long been dominated by the studies using descriptive statistics for studying the trends in fertility, especially with regard to the observed sharp demographic decline that took place in Poland in early 1990s. The studies that link childcare attendance and fertility have been rare and mostly conducted in the Institute of Statistics and Demography, Warsaw School of Economics.

One of the first post-1989 studies were issued by the Institute of Labour and Social Issues (Graniewska, Balcerzak-Paradowska, and Staniszevska 1991). The primary goal of this research was to map the motivations for using childcare leave (extended maternity leave turned to „parental leave“ in 1996), as possibly related to socio-economic background of women (men), but also according to their views on childcare or the number of children within the household. The researchers' aim was also to generally get some more knowledge on the problems of female employment and pro-creation decisions as (possibly) related to career and professional life. The authors used data from the survey among 1630 female workers. The sample comprised 137 women 94 on childcare (extended maternity) leave, 6 those who returned to work after the leave and 37 of those who did not use it, 249 children altogether. Female workers were mostly “blue-collars”, under 30, and married.

Main results showed highest fertility among women who used childcare leave and came back to work. Though their preferred model of family included two children, more than 50% women did not plan to have another child. Those who resigned from having the desired number of children would change their opinion if: husband earned more (28%), they better housing conditions (28%), childcare leave benefit was higher (21%), their own earnings were higher (8%). **Therefore, at least in 1990 the availability of nurseries did not represent an important factor for procreation decisions,** at least among the women that were part of this particular research project.

More recent data suggest shift in the role of the nurseries as alternatives for childcare leave or permanent economic inactivity. One of the most comprehensive surveys that was conducted so far in Poland was the LFS module “Professional, Educational and Family Activities” (2005). The sample comprised 8 534 respondents living in 3840 households – but 4384 filled in the questionnaire (79%). Based on this research and combining it with several other, smaller surveys, the demographers and economists from the Institute of Statistics and Demography at Warsaw School of Economics produced a series of papers that based on the result of this research used descriptive statistics, as well as statistical modelling (probit and tobit models, logistic regression models), however, they focused more on the issues of employment and economic activity.

An edited volume that was the main publication based on the survey results (Kotowska, Sztanderska, and Wóycicka 2007) included the chapters devoted to the question of childcare (Matysiak 2007a, 2007b). The analysis linked different socio-economic features of women and men and the choices with regard to the form of care (internal or external). Unsurprisingly, greater propensity to use external forms of care was associated with higher levels of education, higher income and the living in bigger cities.

With regard to procreation decisions the study noted discrepancy between the desired number of children and the number of children within the family (plans included). Those who were unsure declared that the following policies would make them consider the decision: kindergartens/afternoon services (about 60%), lower costs of education/more accessible nurseries (and of better quality) 55%, flexible working hours/work at home option, lower childcare costs, 50%, More assistance from family members 45%. Generally though: 41% preferred cash benefits, 7% - services. The possible use of the nurseries was not singled out in the study, however in comparison to 1990 the possible impact of the availability of childcare on procreation decisions turned out to be important.

Kotowska et al. (2008) argue that in general state's withdrawal from providing services might have an impact on fertility – the study title is “Fertility decline as a response to profound societal and labour market changes”. Basing on the results of the abovementioned LFS survey, the authors regarded “the costs of raising children” and “an uncertain future for children” as the most relevant determinants for limiting the number of children. In short, the authors found the policy preferences in Poland corresponding to policy measures the suggested by McDonald (2002b) and Gauthier (2005).

In a qualitative study (48 interviews) Monika Mlynarska (2011) demonstrated the salience of employment as the prerequisite for the decision about having the first child. In general, the interviewed women were concerned about the financial situation of their future children. The access to the nurseries was not emphasized, however, the women were also concerned about providing opportunities for the child's development.

Hungary. Gábos and Tóth (2000) base their study on fertility in **the economic understanding of childbearing that defines fertility as the result of the rational decision-making of parents measuring the costs and benefits of childbearing.** The efficacy of childbearing is linked to the value of a child, but it can be viewed as an investment as well to ensure the parents security in their economically inactive periods.⁷ Direct costs constitute of financial expenses and costs measured in time and work. Among indirect cost are the opportunity costs as the consequence of the mother's time spent on childcare instead of her production in the labour market (Gábos and Tóth 2000). Gábos and Tóth identify that social and material security of parents is highly relevant factor when deciding on childbearing. The lack of material security discourages couples to start a family resulting in delaying childbearing (ibid.). Similarly, Szikra and Szelewa emphasize that families with only one breadwinner tend to delay childbearing for the reasons of lack of finances (Szikra and Szelewa 2010 p. 108). In case of higher income household the effect is ambiguous. On the one hand, higher income of the household is considered to have stimulating effect on fertility. On the other hand, the economic activity of the woman has negative impact. The higher education level and the higher income of women result in disincentives to childbearing as the costs of absence from employment increase. Gábos and Tóth claim that in such cases, the man's income and various social norms and values are determining the final decision.

⁷ For further details on the theories of fertility and childbearing see Leibenstein in (Gábos 2005)

Family benefits intended to decrease direct and indirect costs of childbearing have statistically significant, positive effect on fertility. Gábos on the basis of his macro time-series analysis concluded that one-per cent increase in cash benefits imply a permanent effect of 0.21 - 0.31 increase in fertility in the researched period of 1950-2003 (Gábos 2005, p.150). In relation to these estimation Bálint and Köllő point out the limits of the research and warn to consider the possibility to attain the same effects, but by other types or modes of benefits (Bálint and Köllő 2008, p.54). Kapitány examines specifically the effect of Gyed (insurance based maternity leave) and similarly finds positive impact of the benefit on the childbearing by contrasting the fertility rates and estimated fertility rates of certain age cohorts. He identifies a low increase in fertility rates approaching 10% (Kapitány 2008, p.74). Gábos and Tóth (2000) argue that one of the most determining factors of childbearing is the (loss of) income of women. Therefore they conclude that those measures increase the most the fertility rates which are directed at decreasing the mother's costs of absence from employment. According to a more recent study of Gabos, Gal, and Kedzi (2009) a 1-per-cent increase in child-related benefits would increase total fertility by 0.2 per cent, while the same increase in pensions would decrease fertility by 0.2 per cent. The effect increases by birth order, and is more meaningful for child-related benefits.

In contrast to researches on cash benefits, investigation of the effects of in kind benefits including the childcare provisions has been limited in the Hungarian academic literature on fertility so far. However several indirect impacts of childcare provisions are observable. According to Bálint and Köllő's analysis in-kind benefits have positive impact on the re-employment of women, which under the conditions of access to child-care services contribute to decrease the conflict between employment and family life. Availability of childcare facilities provides choices for parents on how they want to care of their child. Szikra and Szelewa in their article object that this choice is highly dependent on the social status and the family income (Szikra and Szelewa 2010). Bálint and Köllő (2008) similarly point out that the chances of mothers with secondary education and higher education are twice higher to get re-employed. Thus the positive effect of nurseries is the highest for these groups of women, while the choices of the lower-educated women are much more limited, which later can be reflected in fertility rates.

A well-known argument is that the parents' prefer to stay at home and raise their child, however Bass and Darvas as well as Korintus warns, that until availability of nurseries is not ensured, this argument can be highly distorted. There are only limited data concretely on the childcare arrangements of families. Bass and Darvas refer to researches conducted in 1980s showing that 90% of under-educated mother, 87% of mothers with secondary education and 77% of graduated mothers prefer to raise their child at home. The rate of choosing child-care facilities is higher among higher educated mothers (17%). Bass and Darvas presume that due to the mothers' declining prospects of re-employment, now this phenomenon is even more strengthened and valid. The results of a public opinion poll conducted in 2003 prove that mothers prefer to spend the given 3 years on childcare at home and do not hurry to return to employment (only 10% does till the child reaches 1,5 years) or to start part-time jobs (Bass, Darvas, and Szomor 2007, p.15).

6. CONCLUSIONS

- There are important differences between the V-4 countries that should be considered while designing the research question about the possible impact of daycare for smallest children on procreation decisions. These differences appear mostly with the institutional solutions supporting childcare. All these countries do not provide adequate availability of public childcare centres for the children under three. However, within this group Hungary has the highest enrollment rate for children under three, while the Czech Republic – the lowest. At the same time, in Hungary and in the Czech Republic the provision of cash support is substantially more developed than in Poland, where the overall state support for childcare (either in cash or in the form of services) is poor. While low fertility is still the *common* trend for this group of countries, it calls for a special consideration when forming the research hypotheses.
- The studies on trends in fertility are not rare in all of these countries, while there are differences with regard to the number of analyses that directly link nurseries to fertility. In all of these countries the emphasis is placed on the relation between cash benefits and fertility. The existing research on fertility in Poland mostly focuses on the socio-economic characteristics of the population. If the questions on fertility are included in the surveys, they are not specific enough, often refer only generally to the task of external care, not single out the effect of using nurseries. Therefore, there is a clear gap in the literature on the impact of childcare for children under 3 on fertility that would use a systematic methodological approach and individual level data.
- In all of these countries alternative forms of childcare were introduced, though there are problems with implementation of these new programs. The research methodology would need to take that into account, as this might influence the statistics on the access to daycare. There are also differences in access to data. Poland seems most problematic due to the recent reform of the system of daycare for children under three. The Czech Republic has data on the number of nurseries available on the regional level. However, the number of children attending nurseries is not available on the regional level. Moreover, the fact that most Czech children under the age of three who attend daycare do not attend nurseries but kindergartens have to be considered.
- Due to the above mentioned problems, survey data on the use of childcare services for children under the age of three and fertility or un/fulfilled fertility plans at the individual level seem to be more adequate than data from national registers of nurseries and childbirths in order to study the relations between fertility and childcare services in these countries.

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