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# Exchange of good practices on gender equality

The role of men in  
gender equality  
Finland, 28-29 October 2014

Comments Paper –  
the Czech Republic

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*This publication is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).*

*This programme is implemented by the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in these fields.*

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# The Role of Men in Gender Equality in the Czech Republic

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## 1. The socio-cultural context

The topic of gender equality was not considered a priority for politics after the Velvet Revolution. In the past 25 years the Czech Republic has belonged mostly to countries which are gender conservative (Hašková 2003). According to the Gender Equality Index the Czech Republic ranks 44.4, which is below average within the EU (54,0). Our state is positively assessed from the point of view of the equality of men and women in health care, but it has below average results in the field of economic equality and equal participation of men and women in decision-making and power positions.

In the Czech Republic there is still a difference in the remuneration of men and women, with the gender pay gap at around 21%. Care for small children is almost exclusively provided by women, fathers make up less than 2% of parental allowance beneficiaries (Zaostřeno 2013). The model of the man as the main breadwinner is still deeply rooted in the Czech Republic (Maříková ed. 2012) and it is supported by settings of relevant family policies and the politics of care as well as by the way the labour market works, where horizontal and vertical segregation still persists.

After 1989 research on men and masculinities has paid attention only to some topics, e.g. men in top management (Dudová, Křížková and Fischlová, 2006), men outside the stereotypic dual gender sphere as fathers on parental leave (Maříková and Radimská 2003, Nešporová 2005, Šmídová 2008a) and men in environmental protection (Šmídová 2002), or there were publications on normative masculinity before 1989 (Oates-Indruchová 2006, Vodochodský, 2007). Only rarely has a social survey focused on marginal masculinities and men on the margins of society. Specifically, only men as abused persons have been assessed (Buriánek et al. 2006) and men in prisons (Nedbálková 2003). However, in the Czech Republic, there is a lack of continuous and systematic academic research not only on marginalised men, but also on men on the opposite side of the social spectrum (Šmídová, 2008b). This situation is due to the conceptualisation of gender issues first of all as women's issues and also due to the existence of a negligible number of NGOs targeting men and masculinities from the gender perspective and the perspective of critical male studies.

Data on the male population are not systematically monitored. The persistent lack of statistical data in strategic areas of gender issues results in inadequate monitoring of the current situation.

## 2. Promoting equal opportunities in the state policy agenda

The Czech Republic, since joining the EU, has begun to deal with issues of equal opportunities for men and women in society. In 1998 the Czech Government adopted the first national plan for gender equality in Resolution No. 236, i.e. *Governmental Priorities and Procedures in Promoting Equal Opportunities for Men and Women*. Since this time, the document has been reviewed annually with respect to the evaluation of activities of all government departments in a given year. The Government lays out its *Measures and procedures for equalising opportunities for men and women* each year for all ministries.

Excessive optimism as well as lack of solutions to some gender topics (such as inequalities in remuneration, unequal representation of men and women in leading and managing positions, in science, etc.) in governmental documents assessing the implementation of the *Priorities* in the so-called *Summary Report on the Implementation of Priorities* were then criticised in the *Alternative Report*. Even there it was not highlighted that there is a need to increase participation of men in gender equality issues and there were no solutions to gender equality from the male perspective (see, e.g., health issues, involvement of men in care, etc.).

In 2011, the Government adopted the *Starting Points for Equal Opportunities Strategy for Men and Women 2011 – 2015*, where is for the first time so-called horizontal topics were included that run through each strategic fields and the claim that men should actively participate in the promotion of equal opportunities for men and women and a discussion should be opened on so-called men's issues, which is still lacking in the CR. The topic of men's participation in gender equality is further elaborated in a proposal in the *Governmental Strategy for the equality of women and men 2014 – 2020*, which is awaiting approval. Issues relating to the male population identified in it include:

1. The low level of men identifying with the gender equality agenda.
2. The low involvement of men in care for children and other family members.
3. The insufficient participation of men on the lower levels of the educational system.
4. The low level of attention paid to specific issues of men's health (e.g. low life expectancy, higher percentage of suicides, higher risk of addiction to alcohol and drugs, etc.).

With the adoption of the *Resolution of the Government Council for equal opportunities for men and women* (May 2012), the *Working Group on men and equality of men and women* was established, which is an advisory and working body of this Council. Priority themes of this group include: male violence (domestic and public), social conditions of fatherhood, and men in the educational system and men's health. A *Report on the social conditions of fatherhood* has now been drawn up that includes a set of recommendations on key areas, both general and specific in nature (directed at certain ministries). On a general level this means mainly the focus on international cooperation in a given field, the implementation of an awareness campaign for employers, social workers, judges and family advisors so they are able to approach parental issues without prejudices, etc. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (MLSA) proposed supporting: A) The implementation of an option for paternal leave for at least one week immediately after the birth of a

child, including the option to receive an allowance; B) The enforcement of a so-called parental quota as a nontransferable part of parental leave at least for 1 month and shortening the length of time the parental allowance is received by the respective sum if the other parent decides not to take this option.

## 2.1. Segregation and inequalities in the educational system

Analyses of inequalities in education have long neglected the gender aspect, as these inequalities have been observed from the point of view of the reproduction of class inequalities (e.g. Matějů et al. 2006, Simonová and Katriňák 2008, Matějů et al. 2010, etc.). From a gender perspective, discrimination is observed at the time of entry into the educational system and progress through the system (Jarkovská and Lišková 2008, Smetáčková et al. 2005, Smetáčková 2009, Šmídová 2008b). The gendered nature of educational institutions is criticised, both in terms of the gender segregation of fields and levels of study, as well as in terms of the importance of the interaction that occurs during the processes of teaching and ascribing value and significance to the performance of male and female students. While the disadvantaging of girls in the educational system and consequently in the labour market is highlighted from a feminist perspective, worse school achievement of boys at school is very often highlighted from a conservative perspective. According to this type of arguments marking at school done by female teachers has a detrimental effect on boys, who are classified worse than girls who show the same abilities (Matějů and Simonová 2013). This approach, criticising the feminisation of the basic school system, takes a negative stance towards feminism and gender equality. Boys are seen as victims of female teachers, and the prevalence of women in education leads to the deformation and destruction of the traditional way of being male.

In the Czech educational system, the rule is that the younger children are, the higher the number of female teachers working at the given educational level, and the lower the prestige accorded to the teaching occupation and the lower remuneration for work as a teacher. There were no male teachers in any Czech kindergartens in 2010 – 2014. At the same time, at basic schools, almost 16% of teachers were men, 40% were at the secondary level and 65% at the university level (Zaostřeno na ženy a muže 2013). The insufficient participation of men at the lower level of the educational system is often explained by the low wages in the school system. From the point of view of gender stereotypes, this fact can be explained by the traditional image of the male breadwinner, who cannot afford to leave a family without financial support. From the point of view of social justice, this explanation cannot be accepted, as a single mother who is a teacher also has to take care of a family. Men often hold managerial positions amongst pedagogical staff in which women predominate.

The gender segregation of male and female teachers deepens inequalities between men and women in society, so it is necessary to fight for its elimination. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports to this end published a strategy in 2008 aimed at motivating men into a teaching career. The non-governmental organisation LOM has initiated a programme called *Men to School*.

In 2008 the share of male teachers in kindergartens was 0.1% (and they were mainly in alternative military services) and 16.5% in elementary schools, which shows that the *Men to School* programme has not reached its aim.

## 2.2. Parental leave and parental allowance in the Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic there is a twin-track of parental leave and parental allowance, as parental allowance can be provided for up to 4 years, i.e. until a child reaches age 4, while parental leave and job protection lasts for 3 years, i.e. until a child reaches the age of 3. In 2008, a three-speed parental leave came into force, making it possible to receive parental allowance for 2, 3, or 4 years. The longer the parent receives the allowance, the lower the allowance is (i.e. for 2 years the allowance sum is 11,500 CZK = 418 EUR; for 3 years the amount is 7600 CZK = 276 EUR; and for 4 years it is 3800 CZK = 138 EUR). In 2008 – 2011 a parent had to choose which allowance track they wanted in advance, without any possibility to change this decision. Since 2012 for parents entitled to parental leave, the total sum of the parental allowance is 220,000 CZK (approx. 8000 EUR) and parents can receive it over a period of to 4 years (i.e. 5116 CZK = 186 EUR; for 3 years the amount is 7096 CZK a month). The maximum allowance is still 11,500 CZK per month. The sum of the monthly parental allowance cannot exceed 70% of the average gross wage of the previous year. The sum of an allowance can change sharply every three months and with this the period of parental leave can be flexibly shortened or prolonged until the sum is used up. None of these changes to parental leave and the parental allowance addressed the issue of fathers in childcare.

### 2.1.1. Political parties on paternal leave and parental quota

Legislation proposing a week of paternal leave has already been discussed in the Senate (in 2009). A joint proposal from right-wing parties (Civil Democratic Party, Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party) was not accepted by Parliament; but it was approved by the Government at the end of 2008. Before the elections in 2009, the Green Party supported fathers' involvement in caring for infants by establishing a month of paternal leave, which should be taken by fathers immediately after a baby is born and is accompanied by state financial support. The Green Party also proposed establishing a parental quota. The Civil Democratic Party promoted one-week paternal leave at this time, during which time a father would receive 70% of his wages (i.e. a health insurance benefit). The Party declared that paternal leave could be introduced after the economic crisis passed. The idea of introducing of paternal leave, which was requested by the Orange Club in 2013, i.e. a women's branch of the Czech Social Democratic Party, was met with a negative response in the media and was not understood even by men in the same political party. Even today, now that power is in the hands of the Social Democrats, the political movement ANO and the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party, paternal leave has not been approved nor has any parental quota for leave.

### 3. The role of the state and NGOs in fathering

State support for fatherhood in the CR has so far only taken the form of co-financing for some projects, which cannot be considered a systematic approach with a long-term effect, and a proposal for partial measures (e.g. a pro-family package in 2008), which has not been implemented. State tasks **are partially fulfilled by non-governmental organisations.**

In 2006 a ten-part series was broadcast on public television called *Daddy as Mummy*, supported by the MLSA CR. In 2007 the association Nesehnutí implemented a project called *Active fatherhood and/or When fathers take care*. This led to the creation of an exhibition called *Active fatherhood*, which documented the practice of fathers providing care and described their life stories. This exhibition was met with a strong reception and is requested even today. The organization Žába na prameni initiated the projects *Women for civil society: new women* and *Men for family: new men* (2007) with the aim of informing and motivating the public to bring about a change in traditional gender roles. Although Euroface Consulting is not a NGO, its project *Father at home* (2007) also exhibited the features of a civic initiative, as it offered a free and anonymous on-line service for fathers-to-be in the form of an e-learning programme from Austria offering a qualified and user-friendly form of self-education.

In 2010 the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs supported a study called *Forms of Fatherhood*, which confirmed the interest of Czech fathers in being involved in childcare and identified the main obstacles to this involvement. This study was followed by a campaign called *Father: how to do it[How to be one]*, which highlights that active fatherhood (fathering) means not just the father's involvement in everyday childcare but also the regular participation of fathers in caring for the family and household, including an equal division of house work between men and women.

A project called *The good parent after a divorce* (2011) responds to fathers' needs and was organised by the Association of Mediators in the CR and the LOM organisation. It includes PR activities aimed at supporting alternative judicial solutions for parents and funded services for men/parents in the field of mediation and psychology

The project *Full-time Daddy*, implemented in 2012 – 2014, is intended to increase the number of men in the CR (specifically in two regions with a high unemployment rate) who are involved as primarily child-caregivers and by this to increase the number of women entering the labour market and enable them to perform their professions part or full time. The aim of the project *Fathers welcomed*, which started also in 2012, is to strengthen the reputation and competency of men in the role of primarily caregivers, with the basic aim of establishing the label 'Father welcomed' as an innovative product. This label will be given to employers and organisations supporting active fatherhood in personal strategies and policies.

The activities of associations promoting the rights of fathers such as Střídavka or the Union of Fathers are not projects as such; they are rather occasional and extreme steps in the fields of justice and the media. Their approach does not take into account gender equality and has a lot of prejudices against gender relations.



The men's organisation LOM has a unique position among other NGOs targeting fathers and fathering. Since 2006 it has been systematically elaborating know-how, initiating sociological surveys, developing cooperation with other NGOs in the CR and abroad, with academic bodies and state administration, and engaging in media and political activities (e.g. in the Government Council for Equal Opportunities of Men and Women), issuing publications (a magazine for fathers RaTATA), and, last but not least, it provides direct services for fathers and institutions.

## 4. Transferability issues

The example of Austria shows that it is possible to **shorten parental leave** (in the CR currently up to 2 years, as there is a lack of available infrastructure and quality care facilities for pre-school children), which is inspirational for our parental leave system. The Austrian reform demonstrates that even if a certain measure is implemented, specifically paternal leave in the form of 'daddy's month', is not widely used if it is not accompanied by adequate financial compensation or is used only by the relatively narrow group of fathers (families) that can afford it. In the first phase of paternal support for care for small children, it would be appropriate to implement **paid paternal leave** for 1 to 2 weeks in the CR.

In the next step a **parental quota** should be introduced like in some other countries. The question is what framework it should be introduced in. Even if [the parental quota?] is established equally for mothers and fathers, so that parents can divide the rest of the parental leave, mothers stay at home longer than fathers do. Given the relative conservatism of the Czech population, it would be appropriate to establish a quota according to the Austrian model, but to choose only one option (e.g. 18 + 3 moths of PL), but unlike in Austria, with percentage compensation (ideally 100%) tied to previous annual income. It is eligible to enable the flexible utilisation of parental leave up until a child reaches the age of 8.

A provision of **caring part-time work** should also be introduced where people performing care can be employed part time (and not just parental part-time work as it is in Austria) with the obligation that the person be employed full time if he or she asks for it (i.e. corporate social responsibility.) The right to care (not only for children, but also for seniors etc.) should however be introduced not just for women.

To follow the Finnish example, **men should be made more visibly involved in gender equality** in general and not just in topics specifically regarding men. Systematic data should be collected on the participation of men and women in care for others, housework, leisure time, work activities, etc. (i.e. the creation and development of gender statistics).

It is necessary to **improve the dialogue** between state administration, non-governmental, social and private stakeholders and employers' associations and trade unions through the discussion of gender equalities and through their participation in the elaboration of a strategy for the equality of men and women.



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