



The EU Mutual Learning Programme in Gender Equality

Instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work

Germany, 04-05 October 2018

Comments Paper – Czech Republic



The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.



This publication is supported by the European Union Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (2014-2020).

This programme is implemented by the European Commission and shall contribute to the further development of an area where equality and the rights of persons, as enshrined in the Treaty, the Charter and international human rights conventions, are promoted and protected.

For more information see: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/grants1/programmes-2014-2020/rec/index_en.htm

Fostering paternal involvement in childcare in the Czech Republic

Hana Hašková

Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences

1. Country context

In the Czech Republic (CR) the system of financial support for families with preschool-age children has traditionally consisted of a combination of insurance-based benefits (mainly monetary assistance during maternity leave – MAM) and non-insurance-based benefits (mainly the parental allowance). In 2018 a benefit called Postnatal Paternal Care (PPC) was also introduced. MAM and PPC provide income that is based on the mother's or father's previous employment income. Payment of the MAM and the PPC is provided on the condition that the recipient has been a payer in the health-insurance system (usually either as an employee or a self-employed person). The entitlement to the parental allowance is not conditioned by the fact whether the recipient has been a payer in the health-insurance system or not. The monthly amount of the parental allowance, unlike the MAM and the PPC, depends on the length of the period over which it is paid. It can be received by a parent for the youngest child in the family until the maximum sum of 220 000 CZK has been paid out (approx. 8 462 Euro) but usually not later than the child has reached four years of age.

1.1. Monetary assistance during maternity leave (MAM)

MAM is usually paid to the mother over a period surrounding the birth of a child for a period of 28 weeks (37 weeks in the case of twins/multiplets). The amount of the MAM is equal to 70% of the mother's daily wage base (essentially 70% of the mother's gross wage), but reductions and caps are applied to higher-income categories. The mother must cease performing any employment activity to be eligible for the benefit for a six-week period after a child's birth. After that mothers can be gainfully active while receiving MAM, but they cannot perform the same job that they were employed in for the same employer. It is also possible for fathers to collect the MAM, but only from the seventh week after a child's birth, and with the written consent of the mother that the father will be caring for the child. MAM can be also collected by an adoptive or foster parent.

1.2. The parental allowance

In the mid-1990s, the period for collecting the parental allowance was enlarged from the previous three years so that it provided a low income to a parent who cared full time for a child under the age of four. Having been amended repeatedly in the new millennium, it is now a benefit that is paid for the youngest child in the family to a parent until the child reaches the age of four the latest (ten years in case of a child with long-term health disadvantage) until a total sum of 220 000 CZK has been paid out. It is provided as a monthly payment that cannot be greater than 70% of the daily wage base (essentially 70% of the gross wage) of one of the parents. Unlike it was in the past, it is paid regardless of whether or not the parents are economically active during the period they collect the benefit. Moreover, while in the past parents could not use childcare services while collecting the benefit, currently the use of such

services is not restricted for children from the age of two. For children under the age of two, however, it still applies that they cannot attend a childcare facility for more than 46 hours a month while their parents receive the benefit. The parental allowance is usually provided right after the MAM. If no one in a family receive the MAM, the parental allowance may be paid from the time of childbirth. Mothers usually collect the whole parental allowance. In 2017, men were only 1,8 % of persons who collected the parental allowance. Once every three months parents can change the pace at which they are paid the total sum of 220 000 CZK so that they receive it more quickly over a shorter period or slowly over a longer period. In the case of multiple births the total amount of the parental allowance and the maximum monthly payment are multiplied by 1.5. Since 2018, the shortest and fastest term over which the sum of 220 000 CZK can be paid is six months, which is more than three times faster than it was before the last amendment. Most families, however, collect the benefit over a longer period, usually until about the time the child reaches the age of three. A reason often given has been the absence of childcare services and thus the need to stay at home (Nešporová 2015). Recipients of the parental allowance who have no previous wage can receive a maximum of 7 600 CZK a month. The parental allowance can also be collected by an adoptive or foster parent.

Recent changes to the parental allowance a) helps to prevent families from experiencing a steep decrease in income while they are caring for their young children, and b) decreases some of the barriers that prevent fathers from participating in caring for young children. Moreover, informed parents can more flexibly adapt how they receive the benefit to better suit their needs. However, effective measures designed to increase the long-term participation of fathers in caring for young children have not yet been introduced in the CR.

1.3. The postnatal paternal care benefit (PPC)

In 2018, the CR introduced a seven-day benefit paid to fathers of newborn children – called the Postnatal Paternal Care. Fathers are entitled to it during the six weeks after the birth of a child. Fathers cannot interrupt and restart the seven-day period; they have to take the benefit in a row. Like the MAM, the PPC is intended to replace lost income. Its amount is equal to 70% of the father's daily wage base (essentially 70% of the gross wage), but reductions and caps are applied to higher-income categories. This benefit is open also to adoptive and foster parents.

1.4. Maternity and parental leaves

Employed mothers are entitled to 28 weeks of maternity leave (37 weeks in the case of twins/ multiples) around the birth. Mothers have the right to return to their previous work position under the terms of this leave.¹ In addition, employed parents are entitled to parental leave up to a child's third birthday. Under the terms of parental leave, employed mothers and fathers have the right to return to a work position with their previous employer that corresponds to their work contract. Adoptive and foster parents are also entitled to maternity and parental leaves.

While on maternity leave, mothers usually receive MAM. While on parental leave, mothers or fathers typically receive the parental allowance. However, the leaves and benefits are represented by different pieces of legislation and e.g the entitlement to

¹ It works similarly in the case of fathers.

the parental allowance is not conditioned by the fact whether the recipient has been employed or not.

1.5. Early childhood education and care (ECEC)

The CR has long been the target of criticism from the European Commission for inadequate ECEC services. This refers primarily to services for children under the age of three.² An amendment to the Education Act in 2017 introduced a change: As of 2017, preschool education for five-year-olds is compulsory and children who turn four before September 1 are entitled to a priority admission to a kindergarten.³ From 2018, this entitlement is extended to children who turn three before September 1. From 2020, this entitlement was to be extended further to two-year-old children. According to a public opinion poll from 2017, 69% of the population over the age of 14 agreed with introducing compulsory preschool education, and 66% of the population agreed with two-year-olds being entitled to a place in kindergarten (Tuček 2017). However, the provision entitling two-year-olds to a place in kindergarten was cancelled in 2018 before it could come into effect in 2022.⁴ Opponents of two-year-olds being placed in kindergartens argued that two-year-olds need to be cared for by their mothers and that kindergartens would not be prepared to care for children of this age.⁵

In 2014 legislation was introduced allowing the existence of what are called children's groups in response to the shortage of childcare facilities. Children's groups are non-profit facilities for children between the ages of one year and six. Unlike kindergartens they are not educational facilities, and it is much easier to establish them. Moreover, a pilot test of what is called a micro-nursery has been under way since 2016. This kind of non-profit facility provides care for a maximum of four children between the ages of six months and four years. The operation of children's groups and micro-nurseries has to date been supported by the European Social Fund.

1.6. Part-time employment while caring for a small child

The CR is one of the countries in Europe that has the smallest share of part-time employment. In families with preschool-age children 18% of employed women and 1% of employed men work part-time (Kuchařová et al. 2017) although employers are obliged to comply with the request of employees with a child under the age of 15 to change their working hours, as long as there are no operational reasons preventing this. There is a lack of interest among fathers in part-time work. It is owing to a) the social perception that men are the main income providers, b) one of the biggest gender pay gaps among the EU states, c) no legislative instruments to actively foster paternal involvement in family work, and d) a shortage of ECEC services, that altogether prevent mothers from an earlier return to the labour market and fathers from participating more in family work. Mothers of preschool-age children would like to make use of part-time employment during the period when they are transitioning back into the labour market but they often cite low wages, worse working conditions, opposition from their employer, and the nature of their job as barriers preventing this (e.g. Formánková, Dudová, Vohlídalová 2011; Kuchařová et al. 2017).

² See e.g. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2017-european-semester-country-report-czech-en_1.pdf

³ See amendments to the Education Act at <https://www.zakonyprolidi.cz/cs/2004-561/zneni-20170901#cast2>

⁴ See Parliamentary Paper No. 61 at <http://www.psp.cz/sqw/historie.sqw?o=8&t=61&snzp=1>

⁵ See e.g. petition against the provision entitling two-year-olds to a place in kindergarten at <https://e-petice.cz/petitions/pani-ministryne-dvoulete-deti-do-skolky-nepatri-.html>

2. Policy debate

In 2017, the then government of the CR adopted a Family Policy Concept. It outlines the direction family policy should take over the next five years.⁶ It explicitly addresses also the goal to foster paternal involvement in childcare. It suggests introducing a three-month 'rotation bonus' that would foster parents, until a child reaches the age of three, to alternate in caring for their child for a period of at least three months. The 'rotation bonus' is intended to encourage the greater involvement of fathers in caring by ensuring an additional and sufficient income for parents who alternate with each other in caring for their child. However, a bill proposing the 'rotation bonus' has not yet been submitted for legislative debate. It is, however, a measure that could enjoy public support. A survey of parents of preschool-age children from 2015 revealed that 41% of respondents had a strong interest in targeted support for increasing men's involvement in childcare – which in the survey was referred to as a paid 'motivational paternity leave', which would motivate fathers to care full time for their child – and another 40% would be interested under certain (mainly financial and employment-related) conditions (Kuchařová, Peychlová 2016).

Given that in the summer of 2018 the former head of the Department of Family Policy and Ageing Policy at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, who was responsible for drawing up the Family Policy Concept, was named minister of labour and social affairs, it is likely she will attempt to push through some of the provisions in the Family Policy Concept.

Discussion is currently under way to increase the total sum of the parental allowance from 220 000 CZK to 260 000 CZK, and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs is again proposing the elimination of restrictions on how much time children up to the age of two can spend in a childcare facility while parents are collecting the parental allowance.

To address the issue of part-time work the Family Policy Concept from 2017 proposes a) decreasing the amount of the payments into the social insurance system of those employers who offer part-time employment or job sharing to persons caring for a child or children up to the age of six and b) grounding the practice of job-sharing in legislation.

On the issue of childcare for preschool-age children the 2017 Family Policy Concept among other things proposes: a) introducing legislation to establish micro-nurseries; and b) arranging the provision of funding for children's groups and micro-nurseries from national funds once the support for them provided by the European Social Fund ceases. Both issues are currently addressed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in a proposed amendment of the Children's Groups Act. The Family Policy Concept also contains other proposals relating, e.g. to changing the caps that apply to MAM. Also under discussion is currently the possibility of changing the naming of maternity and parental leaves.

⁶ The Family Policy Concept is available at <https://www.mpsv.cz/cs/14474>.

3. Transferability aspects and recommendations

To foster long-term paternal involvement in childcare in the CR, it is essential to introduce instruments to actively foster men's participation in family work. This should be accompanied by discussion of the possible changes to the current complex system of the parental allowance and the MAM and PPC towards fostering a gender-equal distribution of family responsibilities. The German model has shown that the individual and non-transferable right to several months of sufficiently paid parental leave and the sufficiently high bonuses for families in which both parents share in caring for their children are effective at increasing men's involvement in childcare. In this sense, it can serve as an example of a good practice to follow. However, the specific German model of 'bonus months', which requires that both parents decrease their employment to part time, seems at present rather far away for the CR, where part-time employment is not common, and it is connected to worse working conditions.

Several factors would facilitate the transferability of instruments to foster long-term paternal involvement in family work: Firstly, they would need to be accompanied by an entitlement to childcare place for younger than three-year-old children. It would be also helpful to guarantee a child a place in childcare based on the child's birthday, not his/her age at the beginning of the school year. Given the aforementioned political discussions, and considering the promise of long-term funding for children's groups and micro-nurseries from national funds, the following path seems like a plausible one: Reopen the political discussion on guaranteeing two-year-old (and younger) children a place in childcare services and for this purpose allow other types of services that meet the legislative requirements for providing childcare to offer space to two-year-old (and younger) children instead of restricting this childcare to kindergartens.

Secondly, like in Germany, the Czech tax splitting system rewards income inequality within married couples. Moreover, the gender pay gap is in the CR one of the highest in the EU.⁷ Ceasing such tax splitting system and introducing effective provisions to lower the gender pay gap would facilitate paternal involvement in childcare.

Thirdly, it is necessary to introduce provisions designed to weaken gender stereotypes relating to care (media campaigns; mutual learning programmes; sharing examples of good practices, etc.). Despite the growing number of studies that show the positive effects of paternal involvement in family work, and studies that reject the idea that full-time stay-at-home mothers provide the best childcare (e.g. Saxonberg, Hašková 2012), political debates in the country reveal that stereotypes considering mothers to be the sole best providers of childcare are still widespread.

4. Conclusion

The CR is one of the countries in Europe that has the biggest gender pay gap and one with the least availability of childcare services for children under the age of three (OECD Family Database 2018). The employment gap between women with a child below the age of six and women (aged 20-49) without children is approximately four times bigger in the CR than the average gap in the EU (ibid.). The absence of legislative instruments to actively foster paternal involvement in family work, the lack of ECEC services and a high gender pay gap together contribute to preventing

⁷ Eurostat at https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics

mothers from returning to the labour market sooner and men from participating more in family work. Interest in more intensive paternal involvement in childcare is growing though (Kuchařová et al. 2017). Moreover, the most recent changes to the parental allowance have helped to reduce some barriers to men's participation in caring, and the current Family Policy Concept proposes introducing a 'rotation bonus' as a tool to foster long-term paternal involvement in childcare. Increasing the availability of childcare places is also important. The CR needs to introduce instruments to actively foster men's participation in family work though. This should be accompanied by discussion of possible changes to the current system of financial support for families with small children. The German model has shown that the individual and non-transferable right to several months of sufficiently paid parental leave and the sufficiently high bonuses for families in which both parents share in caring for their children are effective at increasing men's involvement in childcare. The instruments designed to lower the gender pay gap and to weaken gender stereotypes relating to care, a turn away from the tax splitting system that rewards income inequality within married couples, and extension of the entitlement to a place in childcare for children under the age of three would also contribute to a greater gender balance in paid employment and care in the CR.

5. References

Formánková, L., Dudová, R., Vohlídalová, M. (2011) *Bariéry a možnosti využití flexibilních forem práce v ČR z komparativní perspektivy*. Available at https://www.mpsv.cz/files/clanky/13789/flexi_prace.pdf.

Kuchařová, V., Psychlová, K. (2016) *Výzkum zájmu rodičů o motivační otcovskou dovolenou*. Prague: VÚPSV.

Kuchařová et al. (2017) *Zpráva o rodině*. Prague: VÚPSV.

Nešporová, O. 2015. Flexibilní režim čerpání rodičovského příspěvku a sladování rodičovství s placenou prací. *Fórum sociální politiky* 6: 8-18.

OECD Family Database (2018) Available at <http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>

Saxonberg, S., Hašková, H. (eds.) (2012) *The Development of Czech Childcare Policies*. Prague: SLON.

Tuček, M. (2017) *Postoje obyvatel České republiky k novele zákona o českém školství, platbám za vysoké školy a státním maturitám – září 2017*. Praha: CVVM.