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### **Mateřská dovolená, nebo rodičovský čas?**

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# Maternity Leave, or Parental Time?

Seven Czech Mothers on Their Experience with Working and Raising Children in Different EU Countries

by Kateřina Jonášová, Pavla Frýdlová, Lucie Svobodová



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# Prologue

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## Czech Mothers' Misery

How to harmonise family and work? How to build a career without losing the chance of a family? In the Czech Republic this dilemma is more poignant than in other EU countries. Its model, where a woman's right to a long maternity leave is not supplemented by her right to preschool childcare or to an alternative work arrangement, is outdated in the European context. The lack of preschool facilities prevents thousands of women from returning to work and fathers from participating more in care. Seven Czech mothers with long-term experience from other EU countries, namely Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Germany, Norway and Sweden, shared stories about their encounters with different types of preschool facilities, with returning back to work and with various patterns of maternity and parental leave, which in those countries is not considered vacation, rather a time designated to both parents.

For most women in the Czech Republic becoming a mother means entering a vicious circle. The time a Czech woman spends at home with her child is the longest of all countries in Europe. And it is unique even worldwide. Statistics show that most Czech mothers of one child stay at home for three years, which has a very deep impact on both their professional and personal lives (let alone the alternative where two children in a row keep the woman at home for up to eight years). *"Not only general population but even child psychologists in the Czech Republic agree that women should be kept on long-term maternity leaves although psychologists and economists from all over the world point out that investing in preschool education would easily pay back. Long and repeating maternity leaves influence women's position on labour market more than anything else. But even the current conservative government, consisting solely of men, supports the opinion that women belong to kitchen,"* says Štěpán Jurajda, a labour economy expert and executive director of the Centre for Economic Research and Graduate Education (CERGE), 2011. In the Czech Republic the difference between the employment rate of women with and women without children is exceptionally high compared to other EU countries. Women in the Czech Republic simply must make their choice: either working full time or having children. Putting professional career "on hold" reflects in a widening gap between female and male income:

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Stories of Czech mothers from abroad also appeared in Pavla Frýdlová's documentary

movie called *Mateřská v cizině* (Maternity Leave Abroad), to be watched on Czech

Television website:

[www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10373802325-materska-v-cizine/21156323091-materska-v-cizine/](http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/ivysilani/10373802325-materska-v-cizine/21156323091-materska-v-cizine/)

the 26 per cent difference puts Czechs on the second to last position in the EU (average is 18 per cent). Also, the related issue of lower female pensions brings 22 per cent of women over 65 under poverty risk.

The aforementioned countries know it all: work-life-balance friendly legislation, wide offer of childcare facilities, open-minded and liberal employers, supporting society. They know that targeted promotion of effective work-life balance leads to a higher birth rate and to people enjoying their parenthood. Can the Czech Republic do the same?

Without exaggeration we can say that the price Czech women pay for their motherhood is too high and that it is a complex issue of many mutually linked factors. There is a lot to change, especially in the way Czech society in general thinks of motherhood and parenthood. The government should concentrate on providing preschool facilities and on motivating employers to support women-mothers by not only allowing them to plan the timing of their return to work but also by letting them decide on their working arrangement. If interested, female employees should be allowed to integrate into the working process before the end of the usual two-year parental leave. Society should stop discouraging women from taking such steps. And last but not least, mothers should not be the only caregivers: it should be common for both parents to step in. In all of these aspects the Czech mothers' experience from Scandinavia, Germany, France and the Netherlands provide great inspiration and should be seen as guidelines for not only the administration but also for the society, including mothers themselves. The inner energy that lurks in every parent must be used for common benefit, not wasted in insecurity and frustration. Instead of seclusion, maternal or parental leave should provide respected and creative time for the parents. Experience from abroad shows that this is worth the effort.

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*Kateřina Jonášová, journalist, publisher with two children (6 and 8 years), co-founder of one of the first babysitting groups in the Czech Republic*

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# Chapter 1

## The Happiest Children in Europe Are from Denmark

*Mirka Bendix-Beranová*

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*For Czech women-mothers it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a job to match their experience and education (in CR more women than men completed secondary or tertiary education). Although for three years the employer is obliged by law to hold a job for a woman taking care of a child, they are free to dismiss her on the first day after her return, which they often do. This is further exacerbated by the Czech system of preschool education, which is not quite functional and fails to meet the parents' needs both in terms of its quantity and quality. For inspiration let's take a look at the Danish model which respects the needs of children and parents.*

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**Mirka Bendix-Beranová** had just graduated from secondary school for teachers when she moved to Copenhagen to live with her Danish husband. A year later, after becoming fluent in Danish, she started working at a local kindergarten, later also attended by her daughter Tereza. Gradually, the Bendixes started assisting Danish tourist in the Czech Republic and alternated living in Copenhagen with stays in Špindlerův Mlýn in CR where the grandmother helped with babysitting. When the time came for Tereza to start going to school, the Bendixes decided to move back to the Czech Republic. Four years ago their son Tobias was born and despite Mirka's ambition to go back to her business as soon as possible, her only official option was to receive the four-year variant of parental leave. Only a year ago her son started going to the local kindergarten and she received a first-hand experience of the difference between the Czech and the Danish approach to preschool children and their parents.

### **Courageous kindergartens in Denmark**

"In the mid-1990s I met my future husband from Denmark. After that we lived partly in the Czech Republic and partly in Denmark, and from 1996 we spent five years in a row in Copenhagen. At first, due to the language barrier it was hard to find a job but after a year, when I learned Danish and my qualification from my Czech school for teachers was officially recognized, I started working at a local kindergarten. I learned a lot, as the work there is completely different from what I knew from the Czech Republic. I was shocked by what kids are allowed by their teachers, even dangerous things... On the other hand I saw that when children feel free and trusted they behave accordingly. The Danish system is more sophisticated, more individual, less structured, but I find it nice to see the children happy.

Tereza, who is 13 now, was born two years later. I worked until my 8<sup>th</sup> month as women here go to maternity leave four weeks before delivery. Just as other Danish women and men I was entitled to maternity leave which starts for mothers four weeks before the birth and ends fourteen weeks after it, fathers can take two weeks off anytime during this period. This period is followed by a parental leave of 52 weeks per family. During that time both the mother and the father can take any number of days off and take turns in looking after the child. Parental leave is paid by the employer and usually amounts to 60-80 per cent of the salary. There are many options and employers are very flexible."

### **From six months a child is guaranteed a place at kindergarten**

"Most Danish women spend 6-12 months on parental leave. From six months their children are guaranteed a place in a childcare institution, be it in a crèche or in one of the wide-spread and popular micro-crèche, where a stay-at-home mother takes care of two or three other children. They are provided by local municipality and supervised by a professional nurse with about five mothers below her who meet once a week. The nurse visits the crèche, maintains contact with the parents who can therefore be sure they leave their children with a person capable of taking care. The mothers (because usually they are women) do not need any special education but they can attend specialized courses and lectures. For the last five weeks of their parental leave mothers can start working part-time, which will prolong their paternal leave by ten weeks and they can gradually re-enter the working process. They catch up with what they missed, I think it is great. Plus they have time to get their children used to the kindergarten

or crèche. These facilities are partly covered by the government, partly by parents – it is about 12 per cent of the average salary (approximately 5,000 Danish crowns).”

### **Grandmothers for fun, fathers for care**

“The system of ‘grandma, the babysitter’ does not exist in Denmark. Here women remain active and working for a long time. Plus, babysitting grandmas are not necessary as every child is guaranteed a place in childcare facility and therefore fun is the grandmas’ sole ‘responsibility’. Nowadays, it is quite common for both parents to have jobs, whether for financial reasons or because women want to stay in the labour process and thus remain productive. The current situation is a result of long discussions, trying different models and of the second wave of emancipation in the late 1960s.”

“Even a short glimpse at a Danish playground or kindergartens at the end of the day reveals that compared to their Czech counterparts, Danish dads are much more involved in raising their children. It is also quite common for fathers to go to parental leave, mostly because of the mother’s better job or because she does not want to stay long on maternity leave. And fathers like it: they are grateful for a chance to enjoy their baby while still so small and it helps families work better. It is also quite common to see male tutors in kindergartens. As my brother in law worked as a nurse I can confirm that the profession is popular with men and quite prestigious.”

### **Back to the (Czech) reality**

“In connection with work we had to partly relocate to the Czech Republic. Lack of crèche here was supplemented by the babysitting grandma. In Denmark from two and a half years she was replaced by kindergarten. When Tereza turned seven we decided to move to the Czech Republic because we found the two schooling systems hard to combine. Four years ago, our son Tobias was born and with him I experience the Czech maternity leave. Being a business woman my ambition was to soon return to work, however, to my surprise I was granted a four-year parental leave. The official tables say that I do not have any other option.”

“In a small town we didn’t have any major trouble finding a kindergarten. However, I had to fight with the teachers’ attitudes. I think it has to do with the Czech notion of seeing the child as an object of either parental care or

collective schooling, nothing in-between. Some people also say that it is shame to place a child in institutions too early. In Denmark, children are placed in institutions somewhere between eight months and a year. And to me it seems that the younger, the less difficult it is for them. One study even says that Danish children are the happiest in Europe. No wonder: happy and satisfied parents, who are able to work and be productive, have happy children. On the other hand, a mother forced to spend four years sitting at home is bound to pass her frustration to her child.”

## **DENMARK**

**Women resident in Denmark (women who have resided in Denmark for at least six weeks) are entitled to free maternity care.**

**A daily benefit is payable for maternity, adoption or paternity.**

**Maternity benefit may be paid to the mother from four weeks before the expected date of birth and continues after the birth for 46 weeks, of which the last 32 weeks may be shared between the parents. If one parent returns to part-time work, the leave can be extended proportionally. Parents can choose an extended leave of 40 or 46 weeks but the benefit is frozen to the amount paid for 32 weeks. This notwithstanding, fathers have the right to claim daily benefit for two weeks during the 14-week period following the birth.**

**Similarly, adoptive parents are entitled to daily benefit for 46 weeks from the date on which the child arrives in the household.**

**Working parents may postpone taking part of their leave. Postponed leave must be taken before the child is nine years old.**

**For employees maternity cash benefit is calculated on the basis of their hourly wage with a maximum of € 504 per week or € 14 per hour, and on the number of hours of work. The maximum maternity cash benefit for the self-employed is the same as mentioned above. The state contributes by 50 per cent of the salary. Based on the conditions stipulated in the working agreement during the maternity or parental leave the employer provides full or partial salary to the parent.**

Fathers amount to 6.4 per cent of parents on parental leave.

Source: European Commission; Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Your social security rights, 2012.



## Chapter 2

### A Miracle in Norway: Paternal Leave

*Barbora Šindelářová*

*Although the Czech system by law offers an option to integrate fathers into childcare, only a negligible proportion of men, around one per cent, opt for it. This is mostly due to the fathers' poor motivation and to Czech conservative society. Stereotypically, we expect men to be the breadwinners instead of caring fathers. Those who decide to stay at home are often perceived as submissive "weirdoes". At the same time women unwilling to stay at home with children for too long are seen by the society as "careerists" or "bad mothers".*

The psychologist **Barbora Šindelářová** has lived in Norway for six years with her spouse and a small daughter. Similarly to many Norwegian couples they never married which does not in any way influence all the benefits that Norwegian parents have: they are considered a family. Lars like most Norwegian men took advantage of the three-month parental leave and you can see this on his relationship with his daughter. Karolína obviously does not hang on her mother. Despite that, Barbora prolonged her maternity leave by six months during which she only received social benefits. When we met she was about to return to work and was just deciding on her working arrangement. This should not pose any problem: the whole time she kept in touch with her employer who was interested in what she was doing, when she would like to return etc. Norwegian employers respect the experience of women with children and try to adjust the working rhythm to their personal priorities.



## **Parental leave used by ninety per cent of men**

“For me the biggest difference between the Czech Republic and Norway is in work life-balance and in gender equality. In Norway the equality of women with men is traditional; they were the first in Europe and in the world. The high level of mutual respect between genders is also thanks to the number of female politicians on all levels. Here children attend kindergartens from one year and mothers go back to work. By law fathers go on a three-month parental leave and receive family benefits. If they do not collect it, the allowance forfeits. This system has been in place since 1977, however, its real boom came in the 1990s when fathers started staying with their children at home. Nowadays, 90 per cent of men pursue this option. This is confirmed in surveys from Norway and Sweden: fathers who choose parental leave want to spend more time with their children even in later years.

Kindergartens started to appear in the 1970s and they have become part of the schooling system. They are government funded or private; parents' contributions amount to 10-15 per cent of one salary. The number of children is different to that in CR. One teacher looks after three to four kids, one-year-olds are in separate groups. Parental leave lasts for one year, you may pursue either 46 weeks with 100 per cent of your earnings, or 56 weeks with 80 per cent. Most women return to work after one year.”

## **Employers respect mothers**

“After maternity leave women may choose their working arrangement. By law they must be able to decide themselves, even if only on a part-time. I spent one year on maternity leave, half a year on social benefits and soon I will return to work after half a year. Still I can choose the terms. Throughout the year my employer kept in touch, showed interest in what I was doing and when I was planning to return. Employers respect experience of women with children, discrimination of mothers with small children is out of question. They are allowed flexitime, changed working hours or part-time employment. Employers know that such approach will pay back.”

## **Birth rate is on rise**

“In Norway you never hear people say that a woman who puts her year-old child to a kindergarten is a ‘raven mother’. On the contrary: if she does

not go to work, she might hear that she shouldn't forget about her career. Thanks to the Norwegian pro-family system, the birth rate has been rising every year.”

## **NORWAY**

**All residents are entitled to free maternity services and hospital care. Entitlement is not subject to a qualifying period.**

**When a child is about to be born, insured parents who have been in paid employment for six out of the ten months preceding the commencement of the period of paid leave are entitled to daily cash benefits. Resident non-active mothers are entitled to a Maternity grant.**

**Parental benefit is equal to sickness cash benefits and is paid for 47 weeks. If the new mother so desires, she may opt for a longer period of paid leave of 57 weeks, but at a lower rate of benefit. Three weeks of the benefit period must be used by the mother before the birth. The mother must take at least six weeks leave immediately after giving birth. If the mother resumes work before the period of paid maternity leave has elapsed, the father is entitled to daily cash benefits for the remaining period. Twelve weeks of the total daily cash benefit period are reserved for the father. To receive this benefit, the father must stay at home to take care of the child. In the case of multiple births, the parents are entitled to full daily cash benefits for five additional weeks for each additional child.**

**The amount of Cash Pregnancy Benefit is equal to that of cash sickness benefit. Should the Parental Benefit for the full period be lower than the Maternity Grant, the Parental Benefit will be topped up with the difference. The Maternity grant is paid as a lump sum of € 4,528.**

**Parents who adopt a child under the age of 15 are entitled to daily cash benefits for 44 weeks. An adoption grant is payable at the same rate as a Maternity grant.**

**Special part-time scheme is available for employees who give birth or adopt children are able to draw partial parental/adoption benefits combined with reduced work hours.**

The four-week quota for fathers has been introduced in 1993. In 2009 the quota was prolonged from six to ten weeks. In 2008 the fathers' quota was used by 90 per cent of fathers. In 2008 the reserved leave of 10 weeks was taken by 16.5 per cent of fathers.

Source: European commission; Employment, social affairs and social inclusion; Your rights in the field of social security, 2012



## Chapter 3

### Sweden: Country Based on Individuals

*Lucie Svobodová*

*Cross-European researches (e.g. "Working Time and Work-Life Balance in European Companies" by A. Riedmann, 2006) confirmed that for more than half of Czech mothers their maternity leave means the end of their current career. It has been proved that gender wage difference and lower professional self-esteem go hand in hand with long career gaps due to maternity and parental leaves of Czech women. During this time, in addition to being socially and professionally isolated, women-mothers also suffer from secondary discrimination by their employers. Usually, Czech companies are not interested in a "non-lucrative" employee represented by a mother with a child about to leave for, or recover from, a long professional gap. Such notion is not allowed in the Swedish model.*

**Lucie Svobodová** grew up in Sweden after her parents emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1969. After 1989 she served as a Deputy Chief of Protocol at the Office of President, later as the CEO in the Czech Centre in Paris and Czech Centre in Stockholm. Both children were born during her missions abroad. Her husband is a freelance professional photographer. Achieving work-life balance is for her the most difficult task of equal persons and the government should be more supportive. She couldn't praise the Swedish model enough. After returning to the Czech Republic she was appalled by a bad situation of the Czech preschool infrastructure and by a hostile attitude towards working mothers with small children. She was in shock when after applying in a Prague kindergarten she was told by the director that her four-year old son was 53<sup>rd</sup> above the limit. To many Czech parents this story sounds rather familiar.

### **In Sweden I dared to work and breastfeed at the same time**

“I won the audition for a CEO of the Czech Centre in Stockholm and two weeks later I found out I was pregnant. I didn’t want to give up neither the job nor the baby, so I decided to manage. And because I went to Sweden, a country I knew very well, I was sure that it will be possible and no one will give me evil looks for returning to work after three or four weeks. I lived in Sweden since I was five, my parents emigrated in 1969. My mother and my husband helped me a lot to combine the baby and work: until my baby was seven months they kept bringing her to my work for breastfeeding. Fortunately, being a freelancer photographer my husband could stay at home. Plus it was made possible by the Swedish preschool system, which my younger son joined at year and a half.

Childcare in Sweden started to evolve in the 1930s, the first acts were adopted in the 1940s and were based on the premise that mother must be able to care for her and her child by herself. In order to allow mothers to go to work, first day-care centres were established. The main reforms came in 1968 and in the early 1970s when the emancipation movement grew in vehemence and the government started interfering more in setting up preschool facilities. Nowadays, it is common for children to enter preschool care at a year and a half. Elementary schools start at the age of seven. Preschool facilities are communal, state-run or private and they must all follow the common curriculum from 1998 when it was established that preschool childcare is a formative institute rather than a children drop-off. The Swedish model works well; I see it on my own child. From the very beginning my son loved his kindergarten. Sometimes on a long rainy Sunday he would even put on his boots and demand to go to the kindergarten!”

### **Shared Parental Leave**

“Together Swedish parents are entitled to 480 days of parental leave to be used in the first eight years of the child’s life, out of which 60 cannot be transferred from one parent to the other. In Swedish society parents really share their care. After half a year the man takes over after the woman. In Stockholm you see many men, fathers and grandfathers, with prams. They meet in cafés and discuss their ‘baby issues’. This is part of the everyday life in Sweden and I am sure it is very good. Only after several consecutive days with a child a man realizes what it comprises to take care after a household and a child. Legislation and even politicians are formed by the

fact that women and men can equally share both work and family process. Once a Czech politician came to state visit to Sweden and the official dinner had to be cancelled because a high-ranking politician had to babysit his three children that night. In the Czech Republic this is unheard of but in Sweden they consider it normal for even a high-ranked man to finish his job at five, pick up children from the kindergarten and play with them.”

### **State Focused on Availability of Childcare**

“I can compare because I always returned to the Czech Republic with a small child. First, my older son was nine months old, and now the younger is four years. In the first case, despite being in Paris, my Czech employer was rather negative towards me having child and work. This is where I first heard the expression ‘raven-mother’ which left me speechless. The year was 2000, and it came from a woman who with two adult children knew what I had been going through. In Prague, judging from the first glance on playgrounds women still seem to be the principal caregivers; men might get involved but not to the extent I would like to see. And another blow came when I applied in the local kindergarten and found out that my child is 53<sup>rd</sup> above the limit: the director was unable to provide and good solution for neither me nor the other 52 parents in a situation where private schools are not subsidized and the fees are rather high. In Sweden since 1999 private kindergartens have been subsidized by the state and therefore the fees are *de facto* everywhere the same. There are three levels of fees according to your income regardless of whether you apply for a local, state or private kindergarten. Although private kindergartens are also required to follow the Act on Education and, of course, fulfil the curriculum, this doesn’t influence the fee. You have a choice and that’s important. In Sweden 80 per cent of mothers and 90 per cent of fathers go to work.”

### **Open to the Parents**

“Swedish society is based on the notion that the state is not based on a family but on an individual. After all, what is a family in today’s world? There are so many varieties and models. While partners split and the family changes, you always need to be sure that you can go on working as you wish and to the fullest. You cannot prefer one over the other. Swedish are very advanced in this respect, their idea of a family is rather open. The society is trying to accommodate parents’ needs and it pays off: birth-rate has been booming over the last 10 years.”

## Men Run Childcare Policy in the Czech Republic

“I know that by letting go of the chance of spending his first phase with my child I gave up a lot. I didn’t want to lose my interesting job and the chance of career development. It wasn’t easy but I do not think one should be forced to sacrifice their lives to their children. My child is everything to me; at the same time I put so much time and energy into my education, long years to my profession and I do not see any reason to put it off without being certain that I can ever come back. Even Sweden allows mothers to stay at home longer, this is used mostly by mothers with well-off spouse, Christian-democrats promote this model; however, the response is minimal. The atmosphere of equal opportunities is also enhanced by the number of female politicians. Their proportion on any level never drops under 50 per cent. The low number of female politicians in CR in 2011 is a clear evidence of the country’s poor development over the last 20 years. This is reflected in childcare policy. It is directed by men.”

## SWEDEN

**All resident women are entitled to healthcare related to pregnancy and childbirth.**

**A pregnant employee is entitled to pregnancy cash benefit if she is in a physically demanding job that she cannot continue to perform due to pregnancy and her employer is not able to transfer her to less demanding work.**

**Parent’s cash benefit is paid to a parent on the birth or adoption of a child. Parent’s cash benefit for the birth of a child is paid for a total period of 480 days, extended in the case of multiple births by 180 days per additional child. The benefit does not necessarily have to be taken over a continuous period; it can be spread over several periods in the child’s first 8 years or until he/she has completed his/her first year of school.**

**Parents who care for the child together are each entitled to half the total period of parent’s cash benefit. Either parent can renounce their entitlement to parental benefit in favour of the other, except for a period**

**of 60 days. Both parents can take parent’s cash benefit at the same time in order to take part in a prenatal or perinatal education programme.**

**In addition, a father is entitled to 10 extra days of benefit in connection with the birth or adoption of a child.**

**Temporary parent’s cash benefit is paid if the child is ill and a parent has to suspend work to take care of the child.**

**The aim of the Swedish family policy is “equalizing the living conditions of families with and without children, promoting the chance of both parents to combine their work outside their family with their family obligations and a special support to disadvantaged families”.**

**Swedish companies are obliged to enable all their employees-parents, both men and women, including managers, part-time jobs and flexible working arrangements.**

*Source: European Commission; Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Your social security rights, 2012.*



## Chapter 4

# Finnish Discussion: No Extremes

*Viola Parente-Čapková*

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*In northern Europe Finland stands out due to its open discussion on education of children, parenthood and ability to let go of stereotypes and long-established processes. Now, after tens of years when parents' careers were promoted, discussion on parents' needs and feelings has started. In parenthood and child-raising we are still on the other side of the barricade: instead of collective education we now support the notion of children being their parents', or rather the mothers', issue.*

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In the 1990s **Viola Parente-Čapková** worked as a professor of Finnish literature at Charles University in Prague from where she set off to the home land of her favourite literature. Now she works as a teacher at the Finnish literature department at the University of Turku. She lives there with her Italian husband and a daughter and is finishing her dissertation thesis. Her daughter was one when she returned to work after maternity, parental and other leaves. It was her husband who stayed at home with their daughter and because Viola works at the University she was able to combine her career and family.

### **Parents of small children and part-time employment**

"In the past 10 years we saw an intense debate about the issue of preschool childcare in the media, it has been the subject of many sociological researches; it raised big emotions and divided public opinion. An interesting study by Mia Hakovirta and Milla Salin from 2006 says that compared to Sweden, Germany, Spain, Great Britain and USA, Finnish women more often think that a mother of a preschool child should stay at home. This shows how different the situation is even among Nordic countries, of course due to different historical development and culture. It must be noted that Finland has a long tradition of gender equality, and feminist debates were more or less unrestricted; the predictive value of such studies is therefore quite different from their counterparts from post-communist countries where free discussion on this topic was banned until the 1990s. Part-time employment for parents (both the mother and the father) of small children is currently the hottest topic; in this respect guardians (in Finnish *huoltaja* - no gender) are often mentioned. The system in Finland has always been quite flexible. From the financial point of view, staying at home with a child, at least partially, has gotten rather difficult due to the economic downturn from 2008."

### **New fathers**

"In Finland, thanks to the encouraging system, fathers' participation on raising children is rather high. Younger and mid-aged fathers take it as a fact that they have to participate in the process. They even want to be part of it and understand what they could miss by not being in the child's world from the very beginning. In the on-going and lively debate the older generation is called 'the generation of no fathers', as the fathers who fought in World War II either died or, due to deep mental or physical aftermaths, suffered from severe diseases and a high percentage also from alcoholism. Many older Finnish men remember their fathers to be either not present or unable to participate in the care of their families, to provide a role-model for their sons or at least to communicate. Therefore, it is Finnish men who initiate the call for radical change."

### **Quality state-run kindergartens**

"From the late 1960s and early 1970s the strong position of feminism and equal opportunities in the Nordic countries opened the door for quality state (public) kindergartens, which soon settled in. Finnish feminism back then was clearly dominated by 'feminism of equality': women were fighting

for equal opportunities and institutional childcare was perceived as the best solution. After the beginning of 1990s when Finland was struck by economic downturn and unemployment, the situation changed; women were, as usual, the first to lose their jobs and therefore more often stayed at home with children. From about the second half of the 1990s the generation of children born in the early 1970s enters the scene and some of its female representatives talk about their childhood spent in institutions, about parents who never had time for them because they were busy with working and building new better world. Some publicly claimed that staying at home with children brings them as much fulfilment as working, which after the past period to many sounded like contra revolution.

Finland has public kindergarten called *päiväkoti*, or “a daily home”. This is a very fitting name, as the aim of the system is to create a second home for the children, not an institution serving to merely ‘drop-off’ children before their parents come to pick them up. The majority of the kindergarten is public; they have always been in demand, as they are controlled by a quality functional system and employ highly professional staff. Each kindergarten employs guardians and teachers, both male and female. In order to become a teacher in kindergarten you have to have at least a bachelor degree. We tried two kindergartens and were very happy in both cases. People in general trust the system and they know why.”

### **Popular mini-kindergartens**

“Another popular institution are the so called ‘mini-kindergartens’ (in Finnish *perhehoito*, in English ‘family care’), i.e. in-home kindergartens for maximum four children run by one person whose qualification does not need to equal the one of a kindergarten teacher or tutor but who nevertheless owns a certificate for this type of work. These kindergartens are often run by mothers with one or two children who take up one or two more for baby-sitting. This is a very likable form of childcare, built, even more than a public kindergarten, on the personality of the caregiver. In practice, however, the provider of a mini-kindergarten does not need to be alone with the children: they can participate in events organized by the municipality or the Lutheran Church. By the way, activities for children above three are organized by the Church 1-2 times per week. A similar principle gave rise to ‘park aunties’ who look after groups of children in selected parks during a couple of hours in the afternoon.

All childcare is subsidized by the state, or by the social welfare office called KELA. Similarly to parental benefits, these subsidies are also tailor-made based on the parents’ income. Recently, the state has announced that it will have to cut the subsidies, which triggered a fierce response.

Compulsory education starts at the age of seven, which is counted based on calendar not school year. To make the transition between kindergarten and school as smooth and easy as possible, children attend preschool classes. This is where by game they learn to read and write and similarly to kindergarten a great emphasis is put on developing social skills, cooperation and ability to deal with different feelings brought about by one’s position in a group. My daughter, who turned seven in January, is now attending such preschool class. I have to say I was surprised by the level of cooperation between the class and my daughter’s future school. Together with her classmates they went to see the school several times, participated in several classes and were assigned a ‘godfather/godmother’, kids from second grade who showed them round the school.”

### **Parents participate in preparing education process**

“Kindergartens always try to meet parents’ needs and cooperate with them: once or twice a year parents are invited for a private conversation with one of the teachers supervising their child in the given year. These interviews are always very thorough and we were always pleasantly surprised by their quality. The kindergarten also works in close cooperation with the children clinic providing regular check-ups on the child up to the age of six. The teachers also keep stressing that they are there for us and, from our experience, almost all of them see their work more as a mission. In Finland working in a kindergarten is a prestigious job precisely because it requires high education. The teachers are also in most cases very calm, everything is discussed with the child, the child’s personality is respected.”

### **What do parents need?**

“Once in a while in the media you can hear voices calling for care for children of under three to be at home. Only the most daring ones would in this context mention ‘mothers’; mostly they talk about ‘parents’. But even the more generic or vaguely formulated opinions sometimes use what the Finnish call ‘discourse of mother-blaming’, to which Finnish women are very sensitive. Compared to the situation in the Czech Republic as I remember it, people here easily accept the fact that a child enters

institutional care at around one year of age, of course also partially thanks to the high standard of care where people do not need to feel guilty for putting their children into a poor quality institution. Here, parents' feelings matter: according to all researches, people who can realize their potential at work are calmer, more stable and more patient with kids compared to those who feel they are missing on something; staying at home makes them frustrated. At the same time some stay-at-home mothers and fathers say that they find parenthood fulfilling and feel offended by those who see childcare as something inferior. They promote soft values against hard values, such as money or career."

### **No violence**

"To provide one more comparison: the fact that a child starts attending a kindergarten at the age of one is quite normal, as opposed to any physical violence. This is absolutely illegal, and based on the 1984 Act no one would ever do such a thing in public due to the zero public tolerance in this respect."

## **FINLAND**

**All residents are eligible to maternity or paternity benefits. In addition, non-resident employed or self-employed persons working in Finland for at least four months are immediately covered.**

**Maternity allowance is paid to the mother for the first 105 days. Parental allowance is paid for the next 158 working days to either the mother or the father, if he chooses to remain at home to look after the child, but not to both at the same time. Adoptive parents are also entitled to parental allowance if the child adopted is under the age of seven.**

**After the birth, the father can apply for paternity allowance and paternity leave for a maximum of 18 working days, to be taken in four lots during the period while maternity and parental allowance are paid.**

**Maternity and parental allowances are paid at the same rate as per diem sickness benefit. For the first 56 weekdays of the maternal leave, the maternity allowance is 90 per cent of earned income up to € 51,510 (annual) and 32.5 per cent of income exceeding this level. For the first**

**30 weekdays, the parental allowance and paternity allowance is 75 per cent of earned income up to € 51,510 (annual) and 32.5 per cent of income exceeding this level.**

**Medical checks at maternity and child healthcare centres during and after pregnancy are free of charge.**

*Source: European Commission; Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Your social security rights, 2012.*



## Chapter 5

# Parental Time in Germany

*Zuzana Jürgens*

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*Despite people waiting in lines in order to get their children to kindergartens, the Czech Republic proves unable to look for inspiration right across the border, to Germany. There, Angela Merkel Cabinet pledged to provide by 2013 place in a kindergarten for every child over one year of age. And this promise can already be seen: towns build new kindergartens, hire new staff. In the Czech Republic the responsibility for childcare is solely on the mothers, who cannot even help each other. Instead of providing an open space, the state binds the mothers with regulations concerning childcare facilities, corporate childcare are as scarce as hen's teeth and the common German model of "Tagesmutter", the daily mothers, is nowhere to be seen.*

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**Zuzana Jürgens**, the director of Czech Centre in Munich has lived in Germany for 10 years. Originally, she came for a PhD scholarship to Konstanz, after that the Jürgens moved to work at a university in Berlin. In the meantime their daughter Theresa, who is now seven, was born. In 2009 Zuzana Jürgens became the head of the Czech Centre in Munich and her family soon followed her there. In view of the different systems of care in different Lands, she has many different experiences to compare: from private establishments across the so called Kinderladen, to community kindergartens. She also closely follows all discussions and on-going changes concerning equality of women in society and equal participation of parents on child's upbringing.

### **Different lands - different offer of preschool facilities**

"Theresa was born in Konstanz. When she was a year and three quarters we moved to Berlin and just before she turned five we moved to Munich. Since she was born we went through all phases of the German preschool education. When she was born I was working on my PhD thesis and with my husband at the university we had to quickly solve the issue of our daughter's care. It is impossible to finish PhD thesis while caring for a small child. Preschool care was different in each of the three Lands we lived in; they only have to stay within the Federal framework. It was virtually impossible to get a place in a crèche in Konstanz but eventually we found a place in a parents' initiative for children under three. This was an afternoon facility open 1-3 times per week. We had to pay a fee, which was very low, plus we received a subsidy from the municipality.

After moving to Berlin we started looking for an all-day care facility for our daughter. We went to see kindergartens run by the municipality, by the Church, parents' initiatives and in the end we placed her in a Kinderladen. The name derives from the place in which the facility is run, a former store, and translates as 'children store'. There were 15 children of various ages, at the most. Theresa was one of the youngest, the oldest were in preschool age, both boys and girls, which we liked, since Theresa is an only child and was thus able to experience the structure of sibling relationships. The fee in Berlin is based on the parents' earnings and since I was not working at that time, we paid between 50 and 80 Euro, including lunches. That is affordable for everyone."

### **Parents' initiatives**

"Once we started looking, I was surprised by the vast offer: there are kindergartens run by the municipality, by the state, by Churches, both Catholic and Protestant. And then you have private facilities, which we also know from the Czech Republic. And then there are also non-profit facilities run by non-profit organizations or parents themselves. The first was set up as a part of the second wave of feminism in 1968. Through these organizations parents can influence more the education process of their children. But back then, such organizations were primarily set up as a counterpart to authoritarian facilities, which is now a little neglected. Still the parents' involvement in daily business of such kindergartens is still quite high. The costs are comparable to those of a municipal kindergarten; the difference is in the structure. Parents were expected to be involved in



some way or the other. In the beginning we had to cook once a week, we washed the towels and dirty laundry and did the cleaning. Sometimes we would be asked to babysit, when, for instance, the tutors were attending a course or training. It is quite different from the municipal kindergarten Theresa attends now: there the parental involvement is minimal. Parents' initiatives organize meetings with parents once in six weeks, where they discuss the activities in the kindergarten, their plans and wishes for the future. Our municipal kindergarten keeps us informed but not to such an extent."

### **Childcare: a major topic**

"Ten years ago I found myself in a very intense debate about increasing the number of places in kindergartens and about raising the state's involvement. Preschool education systems in France and, of course, Scandinavia were seen as the examples to follow. The debate was and still is everywhere, in newspapers, there were even newspaper supplements devoted to this topic. Over the ten years new rules on the system of preschool education were put in place. On the one hand this is due to the aforementioned public discussion, on the other to the increased number of women in politics. A big role is also played by growing female involvement in working process. Women do not want to stay at home because they see that it is possible to combine work and family. Part-time employment is quite usual in Germany. In 2007 and 2008 two acts which provided the framework for work-life balance were passed. It was not a coincidence that they were proposed by the then Minister for Family Ursula von der Leyen, the mother of seven and a successful doctor. These acts aim to widen the offer of childcare infrastructure, to intensify the involvement of fathers in childcare and to prevent female financial dependency on men."

### **'Elternzeit' (parental time): redefined maternity leave in Germany**

"I have no personal experience with the new acts; however, under the then conditions I was able to choose whether I wanted to receive maternity leave for one year or, slightly lower, for two. Since 2007, for 12-14 months women receive over 60 per cent of earned income, depending on the father's involvement in the care (for at least two months). Also the leave is no longer called *-Urlaub* ('holiday', *translator's note*), now they call it *Elternzeit*, i.e. time for parent. This means that fathers can take at least two months of *Elternzeit* and receive as much as mothers. It took a little

while but eventually, after the act was adopted, you could see the rising number of men with children during working hours. Among my friends, who are mostly university educated people, I don't know a single couple who wouldn't use this opportunity, often for more than two months. In order to breastfeed, the mom must stay with the child for the first seven months but then the dad takes over. To me it seems they are happy to do so and find it hard to go back to work afterwards. It improves the quality of their relationship with the child.

Parental benefits are available for 14 months, after that the family must find a different solution. Some parents decide to stay at home for the first three years, others go for a different option: kindergarten, preschool facility, or the so called 'Tagesmutter', mothers who for a fee take up four to five other children in addition to their own. Discussions often mention how important it is for a child to have a person they can relate to, not necessarily their own mother. This role can be played by a kindergarten teacher, if the number of kids allows that. The child needs to have someone who responds to their immediate needs. That is what Czech people seem to worry about: if the child does not spend the first three years with their mothers, it will distort their mental development. I cannot confirm that, though; Theresa and other kids who start earlier with preschool education do not look frustrated, quite the contrary. They're happy and content."

### **A place in a kindergarten for every child**

"I already described the first Act by Ursula von der Leyen concerning parental benefits and fathers' involvement. The second concerns preschool facilities. According to this bold plan, from 2013 every child of minimum one year of age will be guaranteed a place in a kindergarten. In addition (and this is also a matter of the past six years), the last year in kindergarten is compulsory and in some Lands it is even for free.

It is quite usual for mothers to work part-time after returning to their jobs. This is a great advantage, even though critics say that part-time employments deprive women of their chance to grow professionally. Parental leave is provided maximum until the child's third year, which allows both parents to work part-time and share care of their child. Another measure of state support for families with small children is that within certain limit and providing both parents actually work, the costs of a day-care are tax-deductible, which also applies to a nanny or an au-pair."

## Effort can be seen

“It is still not easy to find a place in a kindergarten close to where you live. The difference is, though, that you can see the effort on the part of the federal, regional and municipal. And because they know that the number of kindergartens will have to increase and hence new teachers will be necessary, there is a major recruiting campaign going on now in Munich. New teachers first need to get education. I think it is really courageous to offer legal entitlement to a place in a kindergarten from 2013. The central, regional and municipal governments are investing big money into it. I consider this a result of society-wide debates and of a traditionally strong female movement in Germany. This is also underlined by psychological studies revealing that children do not need to spend their first years at home with their mothers, that there are other options. Moreover, female employment is also rather beneficial for the society as a whole: to make women stay at home means very often to put to waste sometimes even a very well educated workforce. And there is also the aspect of low birth rate: educated parents have either none or one child.

I am happy that I was able to spend Theresa’s first years in Germany. It opened my eyes. In the Czech Republic it would be difficult to escape the model that requires a woman to spend the first three years of her child’s life at home.”

## GERMANY

All women entitled to sickness insurance benefits in kind are also entitled to benefits in kind during pregnancy and after delivery. Maternity benefits in kind include attendance by a doctor and assistance from a midwife, medicines, home help, domestic nursing care, etc.

Women who are affiliated to the statutory sickness insurance receive a maternity benefit of € 13 per day during maternity leave and for the day of confinement. Female employees who are not themselves affiliated to statutory sickness insurance receive in total a maternity benefit of maximum € 210, paid by the Federal State.

The maternity benefit will be paid six weeks before the delivery and eight weeks afterwards. The amount is dependent upon wage or salary

and will not exceed € 13 per day. The difference between this allowance and wage or salary will be paid by the employer.

Source: European Commission; Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Your social security rights, 2012.



## Chapter 6

# French Tradition: Kindergarten for Every Child

### Zuzana Loubet del Bayle

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*In 1990 there were about 1043 public crèches in the Czech Republic, in 2000 there were about 67 and by 2007 their number dropped to only 49. In connection with the increasing birth-rate due the 1970s baby-boomers, most parents of preschool children face lack of childcare facilities. This problem will slowly spread into primary schools. In school year 2011/12 in Prague over 8,000 children was not accepted. The number of preschool children in Prague has been growing and municipality expects this trend to continue for next 2-3 years. This experience is shared by local authorities all over the CR. About 50,000 children who needed or wanted to start going to kindergarten could not be accepted in September 2012. The current trend here is quite the contrary to the one in more developed countries, such as France, where kindergartens are part of the schooling system.*

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**Zuzana Loubet del Bayle** has lived in France for 10 years. Although Zuzana wanted to start teaching immediately after graduating history and international relations in Paris the temporary ban on the employment of foreign nationals from new EU countries forced her to wait few years. In the meantime she passed the teacher's exams for teaching history and geography and got married. She started teaching at a grammar school only after a year of maternity leave. In addition to a half-time employment at the grammar school she also teaches at the Czech School without Borders in Paris open on Saturdays to children from mixed Czech-French families. In regards to the low availability in crèches in Paris she was ready to start looking for other, of course more expensive options for her then one-year-old daughter Eliška. Although she already knew all the information about other possibilities she finally managed to arrange crèche and this type of collective facility left her with the best impression.

### French women want everything

"In France, the employment rate of women with children under three years of age is high. This is quite recent; by the 1960s it was almost unthinkable for a woman to work. The main milestone came with the cultural revolution in 1968 and related emancipation effort. Since then, women have been trying to achieve an ideal work-life balance and to manage all at once. A fairly large number of women in France work on part- or half-time. The easiest situation is in public administration where the employer is not allowed to refuse such arrangement. Look at me: I teach half-time, nine hours instead of 18."

### Kindergarten as Part of Education

"On the contrary, facilities for children under three can boast long tradition which began in the end of the 19th century and today form a part of the schooling system. There is a big difference between a Czech and a French kindergarten. Czech children go to kindergarten to play, in France they prepare for school, gain concrete abilities, knowledge in accordance with the curriculum. Kindergarten teachers proudly say that they are not mere caregivers: they are teachers with specialized education. A kindergarten teacher is also qualified for the first degree of primary school and can end up in either institution regardless of their preference. Most kindergartens are state-run, but there are also different types: I have seen kindergartens for children between two and six where the education is said to be a little more free-spirited.

Kindergartens are free of charge, hence they are attended by most children and a place must be found for every child. Concerning finance, parents pay for lunches. Kindergartens are open from 8.30 to 16.30, so they are open to all, and parents always try to bring their children as soon as possible. My daughter will start attending before she turns three. You do not have to wait for the birthday, if a child turns three by the end of the calendar year, they can enrol in September. Children start with the different phases of education not based on their abilities but on their date of birth. Parents are even pushed to let them skip a year. Only scarcely is the enrolment actually postponed by a year. The trend is to start as soon as possible. Maternity leave here lasts 16 weeks, it starts about one month before the delivery and finishes about three months after it. After that most women take normal leaves, so they return to work when the child is about four months old. Plus until the child's third year both the mother and the father

can use an unpaid parental leave. Low-income families can rely on financial aid but it is rather tough for them. The employer is obliged to reserve a job for women, though not necessarily the one she had before. Some people choose the 16-month option but if a woman goes for the 3-year one, she most likely wants to stay at home as a housewife. Most women do not take parental leaves at all.”

### **Trendy crèches**

“Crèches are trendy. Which is ironic, since there are not many of them. The situation is particularly bad in Paris; for example in District 15 where many young people live, only one quarter of children get a place. Children start in crèche when they are 3-4 months old; my daughter started at one year and was the oldest. The nurses in crèche must have special education. Children are divided into rooms of ten with two nurses caring after each. The fee is based on the parents’ income; maximum fee is set to €35 per day. The facility is open from 7.30 to 18.45; however, a child can spend at most 10 hours. This applies to municipal crèche, which was our primary choice from the beginning. We had to subscribe to a list in the municipal house when I was six months pregnant. I was almost sure we wouldn’t get the place, as I intended to work only half-time. Surprisingly enough, we got in, although I was already looking for alternative childcare used by most parents. Crèches are only available for one third of children.”

### **Other alternatives**

“There are two types of nannies: the first babysit two to three children at their place in addition to their own, maybe slightly older children. They are mostly foreigners. They must be registered, and thus controlled, at the municipal house, to prove that they are qualified and appropriately equipped for such job. The other nannies, including au-pairs, come to babysit at the family’s house and do not need any special education. This is a rather expensive service and is often shared by two families.

Nowadays, most parents opt for crèche in order to keep their child in the company of other children. Psychologists say that the older the child, the more difficult the separation. It took my daughter approximately two weeks to adapt, first she came for an hour, then for two and gradually she adapted. Since this was in the beginning of September and I just started in my new job, my husband took some days off and went through the adaptation process with her. After a while my daughter got used to crèche

and liked going there. And in summer, when we were about to leave for holiday, she was sadly walking around the crèche, trying to get in. I think she’s happy there.”

### **Two extremes**

“French mothers are different: most Czech women would never think about whether to breastfeed or not. In France, gynaecologists ask pregnant women whether they want to breastfeed or not. Most French women feel that for short four months it is not worth the effort, the pain. I think they are spoiled. It is common to deliver under epidural anaesthesia, so that it is a pleasant and convenient experience. To us, French mothers are ‘raven mothers’: they seem to want children but not the related problems. It was hard for me to find a compromise between the Czech system, in which women spend three years at home, and the French; they are both extreme. The year of leave I chose in the end was a compromise between the two approaches.”

### **Career does not end with children**

“As far as fathers’ participation in childcare is concerned, it is much higher in France. They are entitled to 11 days of paternity leave. All-in-all they get more involved in household, gender roles are not so strictly defined. This may also contribute to the growing birth-rate in past 20 years in France, currently it is at about two children per woman and the population is getting younger. It is not only thanks to immigrants, because in second generation they adapt to the local demographic model, but also because having children is no longer the end of the woman’s career. But the biggest difference is that the woman can choose without being condemned by the society.”

## **FRANCE**

**Maternity insurance covers all costs linked to the pregnancy and confinement and provides cash benefits during the mother’s pre- and post-natal leave, the mother’s or father’s adoption leave and the father’s paternity leave.**

**Cash benefits are granted if you have ceased all employment. The mother is obliged to take at least eight weeks of leave, and she is entitled to 16**

weeks and, as of the third child, to 26 weeks. In the case of adoption, the leave can be shared between the father and the mother.

The period of paternity leave is set at 11 consecutive days or 18 consecutive days in the event of a multiple birth. The period of adoption leave is set at ten weeks or 22 weeks in the event of multiple adoption.

The daily allowance amounts to average daily earnings for the preceding three months, subject to the social security ceiling. The amount of the daily allowance shall not be below a certain minimum. Agricultural and non-agricultural self-employed workers may also claim cash benefits in respect of maternity or paternity. These are fixed-rate allowances or daily allowances.

Source: European Commission; *Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Your social security rights, 2012.*



## Chapter 7

# Part-Time Jobs in the Netherlands

*Hana Schenk*

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*In connection with the economic downturn many countries started promoting part-time jobs; unlike the Czech Republic: it does not pay off for the employer to offer part-time or job sharing (the size of a company in the Czech Republic is based on the actual number of employers but on the number of full time equivalents - FTEs). The Czech Republic has one of the lowest proportions of part-time employment. According to figures published by Eurostat, while in the EU-27 on average 1/3 of women and every twelfth man work part-time, in the Czech Republic it is 8 per cent women and every 50<sup>th</sup> man. This figure is the highest in the Netherlands, where three quarters of women work part-time. New EU member states are on the opposite end of the scale. In Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, Sweden and Great Britain about two fifths of women work shorter hours. Part-time employment is seen as one of the ways for parents to harmonize their work with family and childcare.*

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**Hana Schenk** has lived in the Netherlands for 16 years. She moved here with her husband once she graduated from English and Czech at Masaryk University in Brno. Immediately after her arrival she was able to find a job in the Czech Centre in The Hague. Seven years later, after her son was born she started working part-time. Today she has two children, nine-year old Daniel and five-year old Esther and rich experience with the Dutch system of parental and maternity leave. Although the Schenk family lives between The Hague and Rotterdam, 20-minute commute by train four times per week (she now works 32 hours per week) is not a problem for the director of the Czech Centre.

### **Only 16 weeks of maternity leave**

“In the Netherlands it is quite common for higher-educated women to work part time. This is to help them return to work after their very short maternity leave. My children were both born in the Netherlands, so I had a chance to go through the whole system of maternity and parental leaves. Maternity leave is rather short here: only 16 weeks. During the leave the mother receives an equal to her earnings. This is paid by the social security office from the taxes paid by the employer. The paid maternity leave is divided into 4-6 weeks before the delivery and the rest after. You are also by law entitled to further three months of leave but not many women use this. This is partly from financial reasons but also out of fear of the employer’s reaction.”

### **Quickly back to work and quickly to school**

“After maternity leave a mother is entitled by law to work part-time, which is used by three quarters of Dutch women. That makes coming back to work much more pleasant. My children started attending crèche (the Dutch call it kindergarten) at three months and stay until four years. This is when Dutch kids can enter primary school. Compulsory education starts at the age of five but there is a gap in facilities for children from four to five. In this difficult situation many parents put their children into primary schools.”

### **Strict schooling system**

“During the first two years children learn mostly by playing. During this period you are entitled to take your children out of school for one day per week even outside of holidays. Later this is not possible, schools are very strict, which sometimes causes trouble to my family: The Dutch do not celebrate Christmas Eve and children go to school even on the 24<sup>th</sup>. If we decide to spend Christmas in the Czech Republic, we cannot take them out of school. Children start kindergarten in three months. They are divided into groups based on their age. For the youngest there are two tutors per group of nine, the older aged 2-4 have two tutors per group of 15 children. Children are fed and for the smallest ones you can even bring breast milk and it will be given to the baby at the designated time. The staff must be qualified, kindergarten must be registered and undergo controls on hygiene and system of education.”

### **Enough places in kindergartens**

“You may have to ask in time for a place in a kindergarten but in most cases

you get in. I have never heard of a woman who wouldn’t be able to return to work because she wouldn’t get a place in a kindergarten. Kindergartens are also rather expensive but the fee consists of three parts: the amount paid by the parents, and subsidy paid by the employer and the state, which is given back to the parents in the form of tax deduction. Parents also receive child allowances; and although not so high, they help.

My daughter went to kindergarten when she was four months old. When we found out she had joint dislocation I thought I would have to stay at home with her. However, my husband assured me that it is normal even for a child with such handicap to go to kindergarten where they provide equally good care. My child had to be bandaged for half a year and the tutors were taking great care. Today everything is alright and I do not feel she suffered any psychological damage. She was surrounded by smiling children and nice tutors, so she never felt handicapped in any way. When I told my friends in the Czech Republic they couldn’t believe their ears: they thought it was extraordinary for me to work with such a small and sick child. In the Netherlands this is normal, without any other option you cannot worry too much.”

### **No Grandmas to Babysit**

“Employed parents here rely on grandmothers a lot; grandmas in the Netherlands like to babysit but maximum one day per week. My contract is for 32 hours per week: with two children this is quite something. Sometimes I use paid baby-sitting, mostly for evenings to cover for my meetings. To employ a 24-hour au-pair is expensive, though, and unless you are a manager, lawyer etc., you cannot afford it. I sent my children to kindergarten and also used the aforementioned unpaid leave.”

“After maternity leave, both mothers and fathers may go on parental leave amounting to 24 times your working week, i.e. if you work four days per week you are entitled to 104 days of parental leave. This leave can be withdrawn at once, or once in one or two weeks before your child turns eight, after that you can no longer claim it. Although it is unpaid, employers have recently started to compensate this leave to parents, since they see it as part of their CSR.”

### **Popular part-time employment**

“Part-time employment is extremely popular in the Netherlands. It is used by mothers but also by other employers. There is no easy explanation to

it; maybe this is due to historical development: women started to look for opportunities at work and during the emancipation movement in the late 1960s the number of educated women who saw their fulfilment at work grew. And we also shouldn't forget the Dutch business attitude: they know it pays off to let women work, be it just for part-time, and have them back at work as soon as possible after their maternity leaves."

## THE NETHERLANDS

**Persons insured under the Health Insurance Act are entitled, amongst other things, to maternity care. If the woman is employed in the Netherlands and is insured in her own right, she is entitled during pregnancy to maternity cash benefit (Zwangerschapsuitkering or WAZO, Wet Arbeid en Zorg).**

**Maternity leave is granted for a period of 16 weeks. Prior to confinement, a leave between six and four weeks is compulsory; ten to twelve weeks remain for leave after confinement.**

**During pregnancy, women receive maternity benefit equal to their full daily earnings. During her 16-week maternity leave, she is entitled to receive benefit equal to 100 percent of her salary from the institution to which her employer is affiliated. The maximum daily wage considered is € 188.85.**

**The woman is entitled to free obstetric services and to reimbursement of post-natal care costs if covered by the Dutch health insurance scheme (Zorgverzekeringswet).**

*Source: European Commission; Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities; Your social security rights, 2012.*

## Chapter 8

### Facts and Figures

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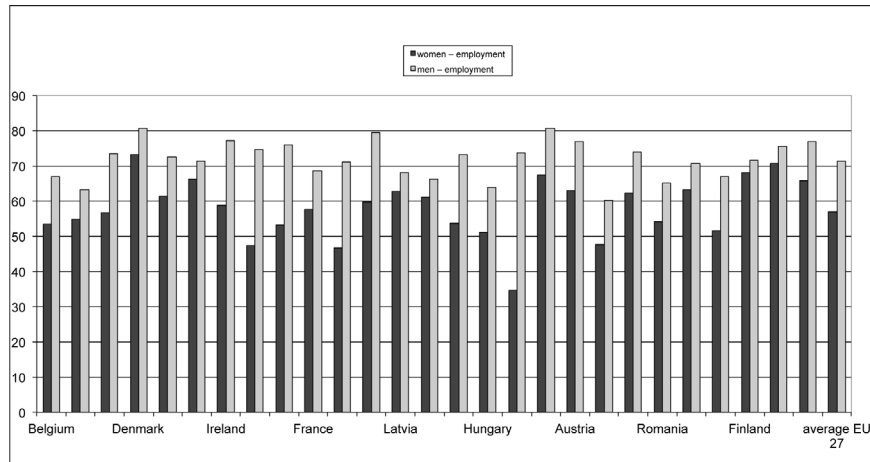
#### WORK AND/VERSUS FAMILY

According to Eurostat figures from 2010 the Czech Republic belongs to countries with lowest share of part-time employment. Employment rate in the Czech Republic is close to European average. We are approaching a striking difference between employment rate of women with and without children. The average employment rate in the EU-27 is 72 per cent among men and 57 per cent among women. In CZ it is almost 74 per cent and 57 per cent respectively. Czech women usually work full-time.

The Netherlands shows the largest share of part-time employment among women. New EU member states are on the opposite end of the scale. In Bulgaria, less than three per cent of women and less than two per cent of men work part-time. Only Slovakia and Hungary are below the Czech figures. In Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, Sweden and Great Britain about two fifths of women work shorter hours. In almost all of these countries female employment is higher than in the Czech Republic.

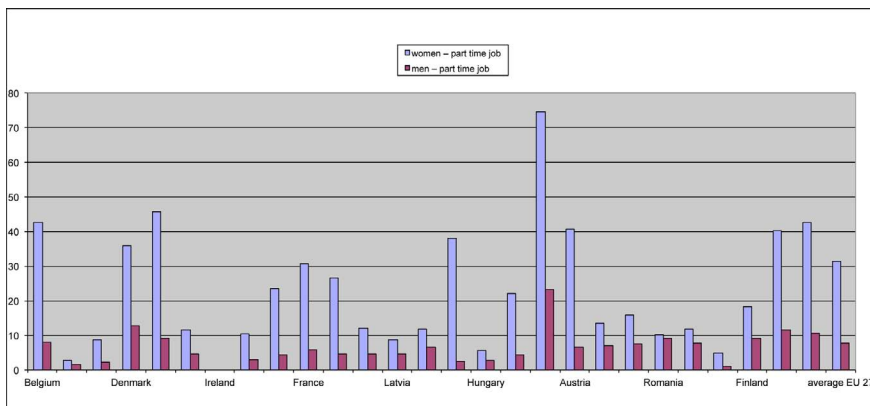
The down-side to part-time employment is lower income; in case of long-term use also lower pension insurance contributions.

## Male and female employment rate in EU



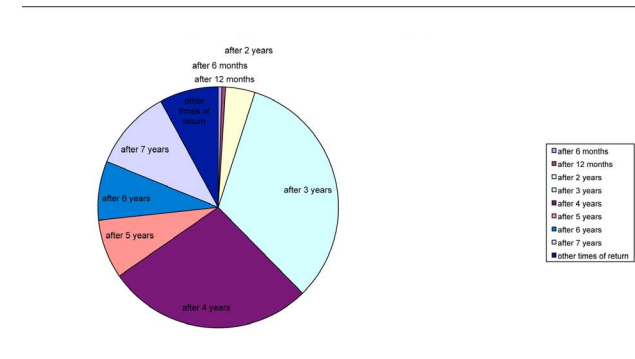
Source: Eurostat, 2010

## Male and female part-time employment (in per cent)



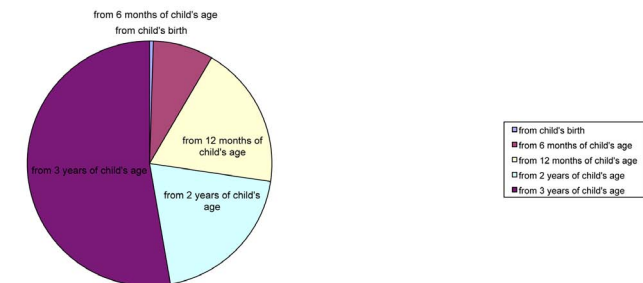
Source: Eurostat, 2010

## When do Czech women see as appropriate to return to full-time employment (in per cent)



Source: Síť mateřských Centre, 2010

## How many Czech women would welcome the chance to work part-time (in per cent)



Source: Síť mateřských center, 2010

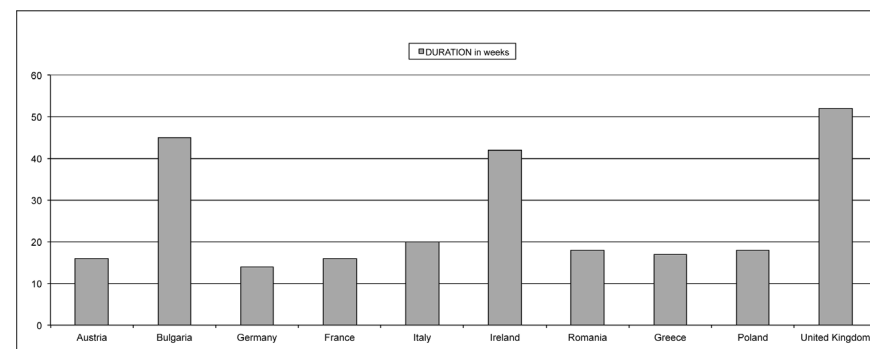


A 2010 survey conducted by Síť mateřských center (Maternity Centre Network) showed that almost one third of the surveyed women would like to work under alternative work arrangement, from home, on flexible working hours or on job-share after their child's one year. Eight per cent of these women can imagine such arrangement even after the first half year. The older the child, the larger the number of women interested in similar arrangement: from two years more than 1/5 of women is interested, from three years of the child's age over half of the respondents. One third of women think that the ideal time to return to work is after the child is three years old. For one fifth of women this is after child reaches two. However, 28 per cent of women postpone their return to work till after four years. The questionnaire survey was conducted in March and April 2010 across the Czech Republic. It comprised 760 respondents.



## Mothers in the EU

### MATERNITY LEAVE IN SELECTED EU COUNTRIES - OVERVIEW



Source European Commission, 2011

In autumn 2010 the European Parliament decided that women in EU should be entitled to maternity leave equal to their full wage. The MEPs also passed a proposal to introduce minimum two-week paid paternity leave. However, the new rules can be implemented only if approved by EU member states and so far the reality shows that the approval might not be easy to obtain. MEPs also decided that maternity leave in the EU should last minimum 20 weeks, as opposed to today's 14 weeks. In the Czech Republic mothers' lost earnings are compensated by maternity aid, one of the benefits in the health insurance system. They receive 70 per cent of their tax base.

### Childcare infrastructure

In connection with the increasing birth-rate due to the 1970s baby-boomers, most parents of preschool children face lack of childcare facilities. While in the Czech Republic there were 1,000 crèches in 1990, by 2007 the number dropped to mere 49. It is estimated that 50,000 children who needed or wanted to start going to kindergarten could not be accepted in September 2012. This problem will slowly spread into primary schools where it will continue to grow.

## **Czech mothers face discrimination**

Discrimination in labour market, whether at work or while looking for job, is perceived by 54 per cent of mothers of children under 10. After maternity leave 54 per cent of mothers would like to use flexible working hours or combine working from home with the office (43 per cent). Half-time employment would be welcome by 43 per cent of mothers. Unfortunately, this is not matched by the offer: after maternity and parental leave only 23 per cent of respondents were allowed flexi-time, and only 10 per cent were able to sometimes take home-office.

The most frequent obstacles faced by women are: questions on the number of children and babysitting options during job interviews (63 per cent), refusing job candidates due to (potential) parenthood (43 per cent), being refused other than full-time job after maternity or parental leave (35 per cent).

Mothers feel strong need to achieve work-life balance; they are interested in alternative job arrangements, mostly during parental leave, and in childcare facilities. They would also like to work during parental leave (63 per cent). They are mostly motivated by finance (78 per cent) and by the need to broaden their engagement beyond family (50 per cent). Up to 60 per cent of respondents are interested in childcare provided by (or cooperating with) their employer. In total, 53 per cent of mothers did not work during parental leave due to lack of babysitting facilities.

*The above-mentioned figures are the result of a survey among 605 respondents conducted by Ipsos-Tambor on behalf of Gender Studies.*



