

# FAMILY POLICY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC – WHY AND WHAT\*)

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**Abstract:** The article reports on contemporary approaches and topics. It draws attention to important aspects of family policy and contributes to the discussion of their objectives in the Czech Republic. The text does not contain any data, because it is assumed that the readers will be familiar with the relevant demographic data on population development.

**Keywords:** Family policy, family, population policy, social policy, work-life balance

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In recent years family policy has begun to be seriously discussed on a broader scale in the Czech Republic and the discussion of its significance and content has spread beyond the narrower circles of the experts that specialise in this field. If family policy was at all discussed in the 1990s it was the subject of disputes over its significance, the need for it, and whether it could be implemented, but in recent years the discussions have moved to the areas of policy concepts, the degree of policy “explicitness”, the legitimacy of individual forms of intervention in the family, the issues of the very concept of the “modern” family and forms of family cohabitation, and other conceptual topics. For example, one positive development has been the effort to discuss the essential issues that form the building blocks of family policy (in particular, at the annual conference organised by the *National Centre for the Family* and by the *Committee for Health Care and Social Policy of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic*, held since 1999, a conference of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 2005 and 2006<sup>1)</sup>; and discussions on demographic development in the pages of *Demografie*). This article is intended to stimulate thoughts on issues connected with the concept of family policy and to promote discussion in which theoretical and general findings are confronted with possible practical measures.

Key points of family policy essential to its formulation are still the subject of discussion. However, without a clarification of these points it is impossible to create family policy. Primarily this involves a series of basic and interconnected issues:

- the breadth of social policy as a concept,
- the relationship of family policy to social or pro-natal policy,
- the definition of the family and other forms of cohabitation for the purpose of family policy,
- the objectives of family policy.

Family policy must be based on both general conceptual principles and on an understanding of the needs and interests of people and how they can be met by various relevant subjects. The Czech Republic’s membership in the EU adds a relatively new dimension to national family

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<sup>1)</sup> In 2005 the topic was *Family Policy Perspectives in the Czech Republic* and in 2006 the topic was *Family and Parenthood at the Turn of the Millennium – the Image and Transformation of the Family, Partnership, and Parenthood in Contemporary Society as a Challenge for Political Practice*, <http://www.mpsv.cz/clanek.php?lg=1&id=2157>

policy, even though family policy as such remains exclusively the domain of each individual state. Therefore, other important components for the formulation of family policy are:

- the legitimacy of family policy, that is, public demands and attitudes,
- the role and participation of individual subjects,
- the context of state family policy determined by membership in the EU (the principles and initiatives derived from EU legislation and documents).

### **The breadth of the concept of social policy and its relationship to pro-natal and social policy**

The consensus today with regard to the concept of family policy seems to be that it should be based on the broadest possible approach. Sociological and demographic studies in the Czech Republic and experiences from outside the country indicate that family behaviour is the outcome of the synergic effect of a complex of factors, and the way these factors complement and condition each other complicate efforts to distinguish between the main and the less important among these factors (see, e.g., *Rabušic*, 2001; *Aassve – Mazzuco – Mencarini*, 2005: 296). The crosscutting, society-wide character of family policy is declared in the **National Concept of Family Policy** elaborated in 2005 at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (*Národní*, 2005: 9) and by a number of Czech experts (*Tomeš*, 2002; *Sirovátka*, 2005; *Munková*, 2002; *Kuchařová – Tuček*, 1999). A basic argument for a broad concept is the fact that changes to the family are occurring within the overall context of modernisation and individualisation processes (cf., e.g., *Možný*, 2002: 200an.; *Sirovátka*, 2005: 20–21).

Different countries, even if they exhibit similar demographic development, need not have identical uses for family policy. Not just the decline in fertility, despite its almost universal applicability, took various courses, but also individual countries have different experiences with specific phenomena, such as divorce, the incidence of unmarried cohabitation, life expectancy, youth pregnancy, etc. Yet, the family policy of each individual country responds not just to the specifics of demographic development but also to cultural tradition, the degree of secularisation in society, or the course of modernisation processes. For example, even societies that share a similar religious orientation but have different historical experiences do not behave in the same way (cf. e.g. *Saxonberg – Sirovátka*, 2005). *L. Hantrais* (2005) cites France and Ireland as an example of how high fertility can emerge in countries with different family policies because their socio-cultural conditions differ. This is confirmed by the otherwise specific example of Sweden (*Hoem*, 2005)<sup>2</sup>.

In the history of family policy in different countries we can find approaches that range from a concept of family policy that can be practically identified with a pro-natal policy, to approaches that do not promote pro-natal policy but regard family policy as desirable and legitimate. They then either apply its explicit forms, which are based on a formal definition of their goals and principles and in which the pro-natal aspect is often obvious, or more often its implicit forms are applied, in which, on the contrary, the elements of social policy are more pronounced, but they include a more complex set of instruments that more or less directly support family or parenthood (cf., e.g., *Matějková – Palonciová*, 2004: 9). Among European countries, the need for explicit family policy is especially recognised by Germany, France, and the Netherlands, but the differences between the instruments they use are by no means minor. Slovakia and Poland have both re-conceived their family policy. From the perspective of population characteristics it is not just states with explicit family policy that exhibit positive indicators but also countries that have no concept of family policy but support the interests of children and equal opportunities (e.g. Scandinavian countries), and countries that pro-

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<sup>2</sup> The complete version of Jan M. Hoem's article *Why Does Sweden Have Such High Fertility* in Czech translation was published in *Demografie*, 2006, 48, p. 241–250.

mote liberal approaches in the majority of relevant areas and policies (e.g. the UK, the US). In the Czech Republic, since the start of the 1990s various different approaches have been emerged back to back – from the liberal approach, favouring implicit family policy, to the conservative and universalistic approaches (both asserting an explicit concept). The **Family Policy Concept** (2005) was the first explicit family policy, but implicit family policy has a long tradition in the Czech Republic, even though in different periods the forms and effects of the policy have been accompanied by various different problems (cf., e.g., *Tomeš, 2002; Nešporová, 2006*).

Different systems of family policy are connected with different welfare state systems. *O. Poláková* (2003; *Krebs et al., 2002: 272*), for example, has distinguished three types: liberal (the state has a small role and non-state subjects play a large role), social market (primary significance is given to families themselves, the state plays a strong role, and there is space for the non-state sector), and universalistic (the state plays the dominant role, minimum or no participation of non-state subjects). The last type is typical for totalitarian regimes, and it can only be fully realised in that form of regime. As *I. Možný* has demonstrated in his work, the version of this type of family policy that was applied in state socialist Czechoslovakia did not in reality lead to the fulfilment of its declared goals, but rather the reverse. The attempt of socialist ideology to replace family ties with collectivist ties actually reinforced the family. This course does not apply in all cases; ties within the family and between generations were strengthened, a high marriage rate was maintained, and the average number of children remained high, but, for example, the divorce rate increased, which was a consequence of the fact that family policy was primarily pro-natal. Here the more general question arises: how far does intervention from the state or the assertion of some “socially recognised” norms through various (state, non-state) subjects succeed in achieving its objectives? The advanced social state, which was intended to ensure the fulfilment of the basic functions of the family by substitute means, contributed to the simultaneous instability of the family and the diversification of forms of family cohabitation. In this regard it is useful to assess its effects in the support of the family in various socio-cultural environments.

*Esping-Andersen* created the “classic” classification of three basic types of social state in 2002, and it was family policy that he put at the centre of the discussion of the welfare state<sup>3</sup>). In relation to family policy he also mentions the increase in general education and access to health care, the reduction of income differences, and the elimination of social exclusion. When he describes the “new” family policy, he underscores the need to take the following phenomena into account: new family forms, such as single-parent families and two-income families; growing employment of women, including mothers with small children, and the importance of working incomes of mothers for the material security of children; the significance of the quality of childhood for personal development; the significance of eliminating or preventing poverty and the social exclusion of children; and the significance of the concept of work-life balance and equal opportunities for men and women. According to Esping-Andersen, effective family policy must be based on an interest in children, it must accommodate the needs of women (“women friendly”), and it must be conceived as a social investment. Alongside his typology of social states he also distinguishes three types of family policies:

- The northern type of family policy, corresponding to the social-democratic type of social state, is based on the strong role of the state, equal opportunities, good living conditions for children, high employment of women, work-life balance, minimising the role of the market and to a certain degree of families themselves;

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<sup>3</sup>) T. Sirovátka also draws attention, for example, to the increase in the significance of family policy and specifically the rise in family allowances in Germany during the period when the welfare state on the whole came into crisis, which resulted in changes such as the reduction of benefits for seniors and the unemployed (*Sirovátka, 2000: 49*).

- The continental type of family policy, corresponding to the conservative social state, emphasises the role of the traditional family, minimises the participation of women in the labour market, and provides less direct support for children;
- The Anglo-American (“liberal”) type of family policy, stresses market solutions and responses to the higher rate of employment of women and focuses on the tension between the family and employment and other aspects of the child-woman-family relationship<sup>4)</sup>.

The degree to which these ideal types are applied in reality is expressed in the degree to which the focus is placed on pro-natal or “pro-family” family policy. One of many analyses of the relationships between family policy and fertility trends compares the situation in Sweden and Germany, that is, essentially the pro-natal effect of the first two types of family policy cited above (and also, although marginally, the two of them as opposed to the third). It points to the advantages of the first type (Hoem, 2005), which essentially involves – though the author does not exactly put it this way – the focus of the family policy measures on the basic “family unit”, i.e. the mother-child, or the parent-child, as, for example, I. Možný describes it (2002: 205). The focus implied in Hoem’s text is on the individual-parent and the child, unlike the German focus on the traditional family.

B. Matějková and J. Palonciová (2004: 11) presented an up-to-date summary of approaches to family policy and in it enhanced Esping-Andersen’s typology with the addition of a post-socialist type. They, too, took into account the concept of equal opportunities of men and women. The authors were also unable to avoid the difficulties involved in assigning particular characteristics to selected states. From their overview and from another detailed study (Matějková – Palonciová, 2003 and 2004)<sup>5)</sup> it is evident, for example, that “national” family policies reflect the different interpretations of the (“traditional”) family, and that regardless of whether the states implement implicit or explicit family policy, the approaches they apply do not usually form entirely consistent units. This is owing to the fact that family policy is attached to other spheres and policies and is dependent on the specific cultural-historical-social context<sup>6)</sup>.

Alongside family law, the core part of family policy is always the assistance of the state (society) in reducing (not just) the financial costs to families of having children. Family policy usually concentrates on the more easily calculated direct costs (essentially consumption costs) and less on indirect costs, often described as opportunity costs. Not only are indirect costs impossible to calculate in precise figures, but they also have strong subjective determinants and are difficult to grasp empirically. In addition, while both parents may contribute to direct costs, in the absolute majority of cases the indirect costs are worn by the woman. The concept of costs connected with children is nonetheless a useful (though not the only) instrument for understanding the changes in demographic behaviour and for conceiving family policy measures. I. Možný (2004: 18) has pointed out that the increase in the opportunity costs during early parenthood since 1989 have decreased the interest in marriage and parenthood.

Family policy necessarily reflects changes in the position of women. An analysis by the OECD in 2005 cited as sources of the decline in fertility the higher education levels of now several generations of women, their ambitions in the area of economic activity and financial independence, the relative decline in the value of parenthood, problems achieving a work-life balance, and the need to achieve a certain economic standing before starting a family. Another factor is the level of unemployment and changes in the employment structure, such as the decline in the proportion of agricultural work. Outside economic factors, significance is ascribed to the decline in the marriage rate and changes in social security systems. Even the

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<sup>4)</sup> Cited from Kamerman, 2003.

<sup>5)</sup> These authors (though not just them) devote attention to an important topic which it is not within the scope of this paper to address – the funding of family policy measures, their sources, and the forms of use and redistribution.

<sup>6)</sup> For example, even between the post-socialist states there are many differences in family and social policy, despite the similarities of background and their subsequent transformations.

often-mentioned changes in the value orientations of women and the growing awareness of the incompatibility of family and employment have been taken into account. *Liefbroer* and *Corijn* (1999) distinguish between “structurally” based incompatibility (the discrepancy between the real opportunities open to women and the inhibitions to using them) and “cultural” incompatibility (relating to the discrepancies between recognised values and the attitudes towards the role of women in society), which is an important observation for both theory and practice.

A study by the European Commission on **The Social Situation in the European Union** (2005) also includes among the factors affecting fertility in individual EU countries socio-economic specifics, cultural specifics, and policies focusing on the family and fertility (p. 100). Here again the role of women’s employment is emphasised: “In countries where women are employed, but where no corresponding support in public policy exists, and men do not participate in family responsibilities, fertility rates tend to fall. Conversely, wherever there are policies enabling women to combine employment and family and men take on a greater role in household responsibilities, couples who want children tend to fulfil their wish”. These comments on procreative behaviour point to the need for state intervention, not just in the form of benefits and services, but also by means of creating the conditions for harmonising family and work (and for changes in the behaviour of men and even women).

A primary reason for applying a broad understanding of family policy is the parallel effect of the socio-economic and the culturally normative context on family behaviour and on the formation of the living conditions of families. Family policy should be based on the role of the overall economic conditions of family life and should be done so not just in the interest of eliminating poverty (which in the Czech Republic is relatively low). At the same time it is essential to cultivate a pro-family climate in society (*Zeman*, 2000: 55; *Hoem*, 2005: 568), without which no state measures can have any sufficient and long-term effect.

Without an important task is finding a way of incorporating within family policy those aspects important for developing a pro-family climate which lie within the spectrum of roles and responsibilities of the main actors in family policy but which form an essential part of this climate – this means the overall socio-economic context in which families, children, seniors, and young people at the start of their professional careers and (potentially) parenthood live. It is necessary to address the relationship between the public and private spheres of life. The most striking case is the role of the community, but also for instance the role of employers, whose approaches today rarely tend to be “family friendly”. The fact that family policy is conceived at the level of government, which bears the responsibility for fulfilling the general and specific objectives, and yet these objectives can only be fulfilled with the participation of other subjects, who follow the policy through, means that the very relevance of family policy can be called into question.

A broad understanding of family policy creates a specific relationship between family and social policy, which is not a relationship of system to sub-system, even though they have areas in common. That is why many experts and politicians still view their relationship in this way or focus attention mainly on those areas that overlap (e.g. *Poláková*, 2003; *Munková*, 2002; partly also *Sirovátka*, 2005; *Neyer*, 2003). On the one hand, the family needs much broader support than what is provided by financial transfers and social services (see above). On the other hand, within social policy it is necessary to coordinate measures aimed at benefiting families with measures that primarily target, for example, senior citizens or the disabled. In this context *I. Tomeš* (2001: 6) observed a specific feature of social policy, and it is not the family that he includes under social policy, but “social events connected with the family, maternity, and raising children”. Yet, as *T. Sirovátka* demonstrated in a similar context, the contemporary family is becoming a “more urgent” target of social policy than before, given the significant changes it has undergone and given the effects of the presence of children in

the household on family income levels and the employment of parents. However, the need for external assistance to families with elderly members is still underestimated, even though the elderly, especially in an era that supports active old age, should not be just the target of narrowly defined social-policy measures. Family policy must today reflect the extension of life expectancy and increased migration. A prominent expert on family policy theory, *M. Wingen*, has noted that family policy must form a separate system, distinct from the social policy of the state, a system that will formulate mutually complementary financial and non-financial, state and private, legislative and local measures. This system must be targeted at all families and cut across society as a whole (*Zeman*, 1999). The objectives of family policy derive from the understanding of its relationship to pro-natal policy. The majority of European countries today reject any explicit pro-natal policy regardless of their demographic development (*D'Addio – D'Ercole*, 2005: 49). Conversely, its integration with social policy is consistently (and naturally) strong.

The family policy concept drawn up by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 2005 is based on a broad and complex understanding of family policy, which is evident in the document's Preamble and Implementation Principles (*Koncepce*, 2005: 8–9). The authors realised that the first version of the concept could not be perfect and complete and instead interpreted it as the foundation for further work on the policy concept and programme. For this reason also they tried to situate the specific measures they proposed within the context of "current possibilities", and as a result the so-called implementation section (p. 9), describing the objectives and tasks for the most immediate period, does not replicate the breadth of the concept proclaimed in the introduction. One reason for this is that the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the government, through which the family policy is implemented, have strictly defined responsibilities and authorities, but a broad understanding of family policy requires the involvement of a wide range of subjects.

### **Defining the family and new "family" forms**

Although as the target of family policy the family needs to be defined as precisely as possible, it is almost impossible to find a suitable definition in the otherwise very rich literature on this topic. The family is not precisely defined even in the Czech Act on Families, the first part of which is devoted to marriage and states, in § 1, par. 2: "The main function of marriage is to start a family and raise children". In 1990 *I. Možný* has also described the family in relative detail: "...it is assumed that the characteristic, natural, and predominant form of family in the society of our culture is a monogamous couple family, thus a household made up of a male and a female as partners and their children" (*Možný*, 1990: 18). It is not clear whether he has in mind just marital couples or not, but he goes on to draw attention to the transitory nature of this family form. Later he writes that "the core of the human family is the relationship between the mother and child, not the relationship of the couple; the relationship between the mother and the father in the system of the human family is instrumental in character: the basic couple provides protection" (*Možný*, 2002: 205)<sup>7</sup>. It is necessary to stress the final part of this quotation. The protective role toward this "family core" that it mentions must be ensured in the interest of the child and the mother if the family breaks up or never originates, and must be done so by means of family policy and the involvement of another subject. If there is no mother, and it is the father (or foster parent) that is in the family core, the principle remains the same. What is important here is support for intergenerational solidarity and relationships, which in family policy is a topic that figures somewhat marginally.

Given the difficulty of defining the family, only some (and mostly earlier) efforts concentrate on the definition of the "uncomplicated" nuclear family, which for the ("modern") concept of

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<sup>7</sup> An indirect confirmation is that we have no problem with the term "single-parent family".

family policy is a necessary but too narrow perspective. It even has the drawbacks recalled by *F. de Singly* (1999: 11), in that the effort “to define the family in terms of its form or structure ... involves the risk of detracting attention from the relationships that from a theoretical perspective are however the most important”. From the perspective of family policy the basic object of interest are the relationships and functions of families and their “performance” (according to the latest and at least the best-sounding term). Authors dealing theoretically with the family and empirical research on the family do not attempt to define it and increasingly tend to analyse more the changes in family and demographic behaviour rather than the family as such.

Generally, the family is today understood as an institution that is formed by parents (a parent) and children, and preferably they are the parents’ (the single-parent’s) own children. The transformation of the family in recent decades complicates this definition. The instability of the family and the practical approaches for addressing the effects of the break-up of the family, when, for example, the needs of an orphaned child or children of divorced parents are catered to by – alongside the “remaining” parent (or in the case of deceased parents, instead of them) – other relatives or other persons of no relation, means that the family corresponding to the above-mentioned definition, i.e. the monogamous couple, two-generational family, is often referred to as the “traditional” family. Various people in practice can fulfil the function of providing for a dependent child<sup>8)</sup>; the structure of the family changes, families are unstable, and all this cannot be overlooked and on the contrary must be taken into account in family policy (cf., e.g., *Možný*, 2002: 18 ff.).

For the purpose of family policy, or at least for some family policy measures, it is useful to define the household as their target (*Tomeš*, 2002: 61). This is an easily definable unit that can be statistically described (and statistically defined). Nevertheless, there are often situations in which it is desirable to use family policy or social policy where the household (family) members do not live in the same household but rather alone or separately from their families (single-parent families, foster families, family members in institutional care). Given the very clear and (at least today) irreversible trend of the decline of the “traditional” family and the increasing predominance of alternative family arrangements, it is necessary to conceive family policy for a wider circle of family living arrangements (parents-children, grandparents-grandchildren, etc.) and non-family living arrangements of children living with other people caring for them (foster parents, step-parents). The 28th session of the Conference of European Ministers of the Family recommends that “the activities of the state focusing on protecting the family not be restricted to the traditional family” (28th session, 2006: 4). In its closing declaration it proposes that governments respond to socio-demographic changes by adopting legislation that takes into account the various difference forms of the family (*ibid.*, p. 9).

The **National Report on the Family** elaborated under the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in 2004 abandons defining the family. It criticises attempts at a broad concept and as an adequate basis proposes first defining the individual, socially relevant functions of the family (*Národní*, 2004: 9). According to the authors of the introduction to the report, “in a narrower concept, the natural nuclear family, which is by far the predominant type of living arrangement in the Czech Republic, can be regarded as an institutionally structured social community that is based on a family and a marital relationship as the two basic lines of relationship... The state should however in its family policy concept make a decision about what form of arrangement it considers the most appropriate. In this regard it is necessary to realise that in the light of the stability of the partnership union a family based on marriage best fulfils all socialisation, economic, and regenerative functions” (*Národní*, 2004: 10). Unlike

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<sup>8)</sup> There is no need for institutional facilities to immediately come to mind, as there are numerous more provisional forms, such as care provided by grandmothers, stepfathers, foster parents, adopted parents, etc.

the other documents cited above, this text clearly proposes orienting family policy primarily around married couples with children<sup>9)</sup>. The family policy concept of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs developed in 2005 did not adopt this interpretation, but it in no way questions the precedence of a marriage-based family.

### Goals, objectives, and effects of family policy

The basic goals of family policy derive from how explicit it is and how broad its conception is. The traditionally “narrow” goals are support for natality, income redistribution to benefit families with children, and the elimination or reduction of the poverty risk (as a result of the presence of children in the family or the inadequacy of employment incomes, these involve both support for social incomes and support for the employment of parents). Family policy saw a gradual increase in the emphasis on the well being and life chances of children and on the more balanced positions of both spouses or partners in a union (e.g. *Hantrais*, 2005, *Sirovátka*, 2000), on work-life balance (*Sirovátka*, 2005; *Kocourková*, 2002<sup>10)</sup>), on preventing social exclusion, on the security of family members in various stages of life, and on developing human resources (*Kocourková*, 2002; *Zeman*, 2000). Briefly put, the family policy agenda has been expanding in the modern, globalised world, and the creators of family policies have no other option than to respond to this in the breadth of their concepts.

The effectiveness of family policy and the usual instruments of family policy can be assessed in an international comparison, but this naturally also suffers from certain drawbacks of a methodological and practical nature. The limitations of comparison result from the fact that they are incapable of capturing data on every contextual effect that differs between individual countries. The results of such comparisons are consequently not straightforward. According to a study by the OECD (*D’Addio – D’Ercole*: 59), the least reservations are found in the results of analyses from various countries on the positive effect of day care for small children as long as a series of basic conditions are fully met – that it is affordable and geographically accessible, that it is organised according to the needs of (working) parents, and that it provides services of adequate quality. Less consistent are the results of studies of the effects of financial subsidies and relief. Similarly inconsistent results are notes also by *J. Paloncyová* in the case of the relationship between child allowances and fertility in European countries (*Matějková – Paloncyová*, 2004: 34). In this comparison (for the year 2001) the Czech Republic is the country with the lowest fertility, despite ranking at almost the middle of the scale in terms of the amount of the allowance it provides as what percentage of the total average income it constitutes<sup>11)</sup>.

At any rate, a comparison of studies of family policy instruments confirmed that they contribute to increasing fertility, albeit with varying degrees of reliability. The direct relationship is usually evident in the case of financial transfers to families with children, in the case of benefits during parental leave, higher employment among women, and the higher percentage of women working part time. Conversely, fertility is reduced by higher unemployment, the amount of the opportunity costs to mothers, and the length of the parental leave.

The system of financial subsidies to families with children (and other families in low-income households), however generously conceived, need not have substantial effects if the relative value of the benefits (in relation to other incomes) is low and de-motivating. Although as a system family and social benefits in the Czech Republic are on the whole generous, their

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<sup>9)</sup> In the cited study J. Hoem uses the example of Germany to point out the limited effectiveness of this kind of approach (Hoem, 2005: 569).

<sup>10)</sup> Kocourková notes, for example, the transition from the concept of the “welfare state” to the so-called “care-giving society”, in which care for children and the elderly is adequately valued by society.

<sup>11)</sup> Critical comments relating to wage gaps, etc., would suggest themselves, but the conclusion about the weak correlation is losing validity.



impact in terms of benefiting children is small in comparison, for example, to the effect that benefits have on senior citizens. As *Trbola* and *Sirovátka* have shown, among children aged 15 and under the effectiveness of social transfers in reducing poverty is limited (around 59% compared to the average 79%), and the same applies in the case of families with four or more children, where the distribution of social benefits has the effect of decreasing the amount of poor by just 44% (*Trbola – Sirovátka*, 2006: 49).

Family policy in its narrow interpretation has no pro-natal goals, but it also focuses on the conditions and quality of parenthood. Yet, as *J. Kocourková* (2002) notes, “pro-natal measures are only one of a number of factors that can influence decisions about starting or the size of a family. The effect of these measures cannot be isolated or quantified. Their effect can only be evaluated in the context of the effect of other conditions”. On the other hand, some measures are only effective in connection with some individuals or groups, while on others they can have a neutral or even the opposite effect (e.g. financial benefits and the length of parental leave appeal more to low-income groups). However, this evaluation is complicated by the fact that the positive effects only manifest themselves over a longer period of time (*D’Addio – D’Ercole*: 59, 63).

### **The needs and interest of the public – the legitimacy of family policy**

There is little doubt about the legitimacy of family policy among the Czech public. Empirical studies have repeatedly shown that, on the one hand, Czech families value their autonomy, and their awareness of the responsibility that lies with them for their family life is growing, but on the other hand, families demand from the state an assured standard of living and assign the state a function of protection and assistance, especially for families that have been “weakened” in any way, i.e. mainly those with health disabilities, single-parent families, the unemployed, and families with many children (data from the **Family 2001** survey).

Studies have also recorded a critical stance towards social policy targeting the family. One finding reached by *V. Haberlová* (*Komplexní*, 2002: 13–14) is the following: “Doubts and misgivings are evoked by the effort to focus family policy preferentially on population measures. By contrast, support is given to the need for targeted and diversified family policy. ...According to the findings of representative surveys conducted by STEM on social policy, roughly one-half of the public feels that the provision of social services is more important than the provision of material support. ...The public is divided into two groups over the choice between a state family policy that financially supports women with small children so that they can remain at home with their children as long as possible and a policy that concentrates on creating conditions enabling mothers to at least partially re-enter the labour market. The slightly more numerous group in all types of family and household is the group that prefers improving the conditions for women with small children to enable them to re-enter the labour market”. The results of a series of surveys conducted in 2006 as part of a project called **Family, Employment, and Education** strongly concur with these findings. More educated people and women tend to support the variant of women’s employment more, but other differences are not significant.

From an analysis of ISSP data, *Saxonberg* and *Sirovátka* (2005: 15 ff.) found that the demands of women in the Czech Republic and Poland during the transition period with regard to work-life balance would be met by a family policy that differs from both the state-socialist and the conservative policy (the combination of which to some degree characterises the situation today). They point out the discrepancy between the change in the value system and the unchanged and thus inadequate character of family policy in the two countries. However, studies have also discovered a discrepancy between declared values and real expectations: for example, they note the adoption of the two-income model of the family and the demand to satisfy the work expectations of women, and at the same time the strong orientation of women

toward the family and motherhood. It appears that the very limited development of instruments to support work-life balance in this country is a fundamental problem.

### **The European context of state family policy**

The European Union does not establish a uniform family policy, as it does in the case of social policy. However, attempts have been made to draw up EU family policy (*Národní*, 2004: 214). In conformity with the essential mission of the EU there are generally applicable directives that relate mainly to the relationship between family life and employment and the relationship between the fulfilment of family and professional functions of individuals. The basic directives focus on themes such as parental leave, measures aimed at support improved job safety and health protection for working pregnant women and women shortly after child-birth or still nursing, certain aspects of organising working hours, e.g. part-time work, or the unification of families<sup>12)</sup>.

Other resolutions, programmes, and documents that refer to the position of the individual as an employee and a family member relate to, for example, the coordination of social security systems, health security, and social security requirements. *G. Munková* (2002: 7) summarises the main priorities of the EU in relation to the family, women, men, and children as follows:

- work-life balance (involving fathers in looking after children, the concept of parental leave, facilitating part-time work in order to reconcile work and family life),
- support for the multiplicity of family structures that are emerging, or in other words acknowledging differences between family models (creating uniform access to benefits for married and unmarried couples, for single-parent families, etc.),
- taking into account specific needs at individual stages of the family cycle, i.e. supporting solidarity between generations (especially focusing attention on children and their legal protection, care for the elderly).

In addition to these priorities, in the context of policy aimed at preventing social exclusion, the European Commission has, for example, engaged in tackling domestic violence, creating procedural materials to support parenthood in families at risk of social exclusion, etc.

### **Summary**

Family policy is essentially the sum of government measures and the measures of other government-backed subjects designed to assist families and individuals in fulfilling their family and especially their parental roles<sup>13)</sup> and to assist the healthy development of children and their social integration. Family policy is intended to support the outlook of parenthood, protect the interests and guarantee the rights of children, parents, grandparents, and persons performing parental functions, and to do so in conformity with the rights of those persons in terms of their legal civic standing. The traditional content of family policy in the Czech Republic has been family benefits, paid maternity leave, and later also parental leave (including securing the return of women/men to their employment after leave), facilitating care for children of working parents from a young age, assistance in covering the costs of having children, and previously it also encompassed the provision of health care for children and mothers (during pregnancy and after childbirth) and partly also support for housing.

Later the focus of family policy became a kind of eclectic combination of various “ideal types”. The state retains significant influence in the area of family benefits, whereby it resembles the “Scandinavian type”, but with fewer financial resources compared to Scandinavian countries, and with the qualification that with regard to care for very small children (in nurs-

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<sup>12)</sup> Accessible at: <http://www.mpsv.cz/cs/2500>

<sup>13)</sup> For example, the father's role after the dissolution of a marriage, when the child is consigned to the care of the mother, or in the case of the parental roles of unmarried partners.

eries) state support has been very limited. The increased responsibility families have assumed in the past decade thanks to the changes in values and norms in society, the reduction in the real amount of family benefits, and the targeting of family benefits at the most needy families is a scenario that bears features of the Anglo-American concept of family policy. While this concept requires the increased role of the market, it has only come to be managed recently with the greater involvement of the non-governmental sector (including efforts to make it a significant part of contemporary family policy). The extension of parental leave is itself a debatable form of “compensation” for the long-term high rate of women’s employment (and corresponds more to the continental type), which has resulted in the need for numerous amendments to it. Nevertheless, its effect is still unclear. The length of leave corresponds to the wishes of many mothers, but its purpose from the perspective of supporting natality and the employment of mothers has been seriously questioned in some domestic and foreign studies (D’Addio - D’Ercole, 2005; Kuchařová et al., 2006).

One of the key issues of contemporary family policy is work-life balance, which is a necessity that has been evoked by the situation today where the requirements for success in the labour market come into conflict with people’s ability to perform properly their roles as parents (cf., e.g., Sirovátka, 1999; Sirovátka, 2006; Saxonberg – Sirovátka, 2005). This is consistent with findings from international studies stating that countries with “above-average” fertility apply this policy in some form (and promote the model of “the two-income family”). This focus has proved more effective in the circumstances of the 21st century than policy oriented toward so-called familialism (the model of “general support for families”; cf., e.g., Hoem, 2005). Sirovátka proposes responsibly weighing the possibility of combining both models, which is the direction in which contemporary practices are headed, with an increasing “emphasis on combining the principles of individual choice and solidarity” (1999: 49). The author also points out that “while there is prevailing agreement that family policy supports the child-raising function of the family..., dispute reigns over the question of how much family policy influences reproductive behaviour”. If we acknowledge – and there are many arguments for doing so – that family policy has an influence on fertility, then we can go on to ask which measures are more effective and which less so. In this regard, approaches that emphasise family benefits are often questioned (e.g. Poláková et al., 2003). O. Poláková herself considers the generous financial assistance to families in France to be one of the three main factors behind the country’s high fertility, and France is a good example of the positive effect of measures directing at facilitating a work-life balance. J. Kocourková also notes that today “financial support for families is more a matter of social policy, while reconciling employment with the need to care for a family and the concept of the quality of men and women have moved to the centre of family policy” (Kocourková, 2002).

Family policy should be a kind of compromise between its explicit and its implicit interpretation in the sense that it requires formally and consensually defined goals, focuses, and basic principles, including the definition of the roles and competences of the main actors. But at the same time it should leave room for the activities of various other subjects, including the families themselves, which even amidst a “non-focus” on family policy can substantially assist in achieving these goals. Family policy should be comprised of informally, implicitly conceived policies that can provisionally be referred to as policies for children, policies for seniors, policies for parents, and policies for the socially vulnerable or those at risk of social exclusion, all under the umbrella of a policy aimed at the stable economic and social development of society. The idea arises in this sense of a kind of family mainstreaming<sup>14)</sup> as an expression of the understanding that the family, like old age (in relation to which “age mainstreaming” is promoted) or the equality of women and men (in the now established agenda of “gender

<sup>14)</sup> The European Parliament has been calling for the formulation of European “family-mainstreaming” since 1994.

mainstreaming”) a complex phenomenon. It should be added that there could even be “frictional points”, e.g. where support for prolonged economic activity in the interest of active old age comes up against the desirable possibilities of inner-family mutual assistance (grandparents caring for grandchildren). Similar “friction” points can be found even at a more general level, where, for example, at times one-sided interpretations of the rights of women and the rights of children can clash<sup>15</sup>).

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<sup>15</sup>) Here I have in mind, for example, the right of a child to parental care and the right of a woman to professional employment. Here, however, it is often not a matter of family-policy measures but is about a search for a rational and sensitive “compromise” in individual cases and in the general awareness.

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