

FAMILY POLICY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF (NOT JUST) DEMOGRAPHERS*

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Family policy is not a theme that is new to the pages of the journal *Demografie*, which in recent years has published articles, for instance, by V. Kuchařová (2006: 229–240), L. Rabušic (2007: 262–272), and J. Kocourková (2008: 240–249) on, among other things, the significance of family policy in the Czech Republic. It has also printed discussions of the need for a pronatal policy in the Czech Republic, a position advocated mainly by V. Srb and M. Kučera, who published articles primarily relating to J. Rychtaříková's detailed analysis of trends in fertility. This is understandable, as demographers study state measures in support of families with children from the perspective of their impact on the reproductive behaviour of a given population. Since it is impossible to clearly separate family policy from pronatal population policy, in the 1990s the role of family policy in the Czech Republic was not given a proper assessment. Nevertheless, in the past decade a shift has occurred in both the political scene and in expert circles. The significance of family policy is no longer questioned and now the discussion instead centres on its content.

State support for families with children tends to grow in times of economic difficulty. With the adoption of the Janota package of austerity measures in September 2009, the question was raised in the Czech Republic, as it had been previously in the 1990s, of how tenable it is for families with children to be left to bear the burden of the costs of the economic crisis. The proposal to reduce the birth allowance from 13 000 to 10 000 Czk and cut the parental allowance by 10% fortunately failed to pass through the Chamber of Deputies, but MPs did not openly come out in opposition to the planned reduction of the maternity allowance, which would have the biggest impact on women with middle and higher incomes. Effective 1 January 2010, the monthly financial assistance in maternity for middle-income women is between eight and the thousand crowns, i.e. two to three thousand crowns less than in 2009. From the perspective of the long-term development of family policy in the Czech Republic this step must be viewed as lacking vision and as disruptive to the stability of financial support for families. Political representation in the Czech Republic has shown itself to be still inclined to underestimate the fact that both frequent changes and cuts in state family support negatively impact the population climate.

This series of papers on the issue of family policy opens with a speech by Vladimír Špidla, which he presented in Prague during the Czech Presidency of the EU at an international conference on 'Family Childcare and Employment Policy'. He touches on a very current issue –

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^{*)}'Family Policy in the Perspective of (Not Just) Demographers' by J. Kocourková is the title of the Introductory article of the thematic issue of *Demografie*, 2009, 51 (4) devoted to the subject of family policy. In addition to original articles, the issue also contains the previously published articles of G. Neyer (Family Policies and Fertility in Europe: Fertility Policies at the Intersection of Gender Policies, Employment Policies and Care Policies. MPIDR Working Paper WP-2006-010 (2006), available at: <http://www.demogr.mpg.de/papers/working/wp-2006-010.pdf> and O. Thévenon (Les politiques familiales des pays développés: des modèles contrastés. In *Population et Sociétés*, N° 448, septembre 2008). The selection of articles published in *Czech Demography*, 2010, vol. 4, includes only original, previously unpublished articles.

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the expansion of childcare facilities as one of the Barcelona objectives. The Barcelona objectives need to be viewed as an attempt to modernise society across the EU, and improving the conditions of families with children has become an incontrovertible part of that process. Špidla emphasises that it is in the interest of every family and every child for EU Member States to invest in the development of good-quality, specialised services designed to advance the education and personal development of children.

This text is followed by a contribution from Gerdy Neyer, who analyses the ways in which measures in support of fertility, employment, childcare, and gender equality are interconnected. Lessons can currently be drawn from the 1990s, when Sweden and Finland were hit with an economic crisis. Neyer points out that, unlike Sweden, in Finland family policy arrangements prevented the fertility rate from falling.

In Olivier Thévenon's article data from a newly developed OECD database that collects information on family policy measures in different states are used to create an up-to-date typology of advanced states. The results confirm the unique position of France, where various forms of state support are directed at all families regardless of their income. The author shows that in France family policy in the 1970s did not depart from the long-term objective of supporting fertility. By contrast, Wendy Sigle-Rushton takes the example of England and Wales to show that a higher fertility rate does not have to be the result of a generous family policy. She argues that the generous family policy in Scandinavian countries stimulates not just higher fertility among women but also the postponement of fertility until women are older. The less developed, liberal family policy in Great Britain oriented towards supporting the traditional family does not create any motivation for women with lower education and lower income to postpone fertility and thus contributes to their higher fertility. However, an inauspicious consequence is that there are substantial differences in fertility rates by education or social status. Sigle-Rushton sums up by noting that in Great Britain the costs of reproduction are excessively born by those who have the fewest resources.

Marta Korintus' article analyses the development of childcare services in Hungary. She shows that the Czech Republic and Hungary shared a similar history in the area of family policy not just before 1989 but also after. Like in the Czech Republic, in Hungary after 1990 priority was given to developing a system of long paid leave to ensure parental care for small children. As a result the capacity of nurseries in Hungary has decreased by 60% over the past 25 years. Like in the Czech Republic, most children up to the age of 3 are at home with the mother. The issue of promoting gender equality and achieving a work-life balance has been largely ignored. The author attempts to elucidate in more detail the causes of the failure to date to implement the Barcelona objectives in Hungary. An interesting finding is that in 1993 a new form of childcare was introduced in Hungary, so-called family-based day care. This measure is strikingly similar to new measure put forth in the Czech Republic in the Topolánek Government's Pro-family Package in 2008 – care by a non-parental figure and the institution of mutual parental assistance.

Family policy in the Czech Republic is the subject of two articles. Milan Kučera reiterates the importance of population and family policy for the future of demographic development in the Czech Republic and identifies the problem areas in the life of families with children that a broadly conceived family policy ought to address. He expresses his disappointment over the opportunities that have been wasted, but is still confident that it is possible to mitigate the demographic-social debt faced by future generations. In the final article, Kateřina Jirková reflects on the character of contemporary family policy in the Czech Republic. She identifies the main shortcoming as the lack of continuity in family policy, which reflects the long-term political disagreement over the basic direction of family policy. She examines the most recent concept adopted by the Topolánek Government, the Pro-family Package, which, however, was dropped when the government fell, and she documents the difficulty involved in intro-

ducing even single measures in the field of family policy. In her view, this dire situation is the result of both the lack of authority invested in the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and the Ministry's lack of expert competence. She proposes a solution in the establishment of a Government Council for Family Policy made up of ministers from selected ministries.

As the articles by foreign authors show, the theme of family policy has come to occupy an important place in international demographic literature. At present it is no longer questioned that by adopting certain measures the state can significantly influence the living conditions of families with children and indirectly thus have an effect on the decisions people make about reproduction. Recent developments in the Czech Republic have shown that these issues warrant proper attention.