

## **Analysing Childcare Policies in Central and Eastern Europe: Accounting for the De-familialising Potential of Paid Informal Childcare Services**

Borbála KOVÁCS

Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford

The post-socialist transformations of most Central and Eastern European (CEE) economies and welfare states have been unanimously seen to have led to the refamilialisation of caring, in particular childcare during the early years (Saxonberg and Sirovatka, 2006; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008). At the same time, the economic transformations of centrally planned, labour intensive socialist economies in conjunction with slowly reforming insurance-based welfare systems have buttressed the widening of disparities between ‘employment-rich’ and ‘employment-poor’ households across the region. In terms of childcare, these disparities manifest themselves in multiple forms, in particular as differentiated experiences of work-life conflict in employment-rich and employment-poor households, differentiated access to insurance-based time and cash benefits for childcare during the early years as well as differentiated demand for and access to partially or totally subsidized formal and unsubsidized or partially subsidized informal childcare services. Working women in work-rich and higher income households have become increasingly more likely purchasers of personalised domestic services, childcare included, offered by women in work-poor or low income households living close by. As a result, informal paid childcare services have remained mostly local in CEE countries (Hrzenjak, 2012) rather than global as in many of the advanced economies of the global North (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2003; Lister et al., 2007; Lutz, 2007).

Analyses of childcare policy developments in CEE welfare states have exclusively focussed on paid parental leave provisions and public or publicly subsidised childcareservices (Fodor et al., 2002; Saxonberg and Sirovatka, 2006; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008: 118-119), mapping the divisions of childcare labour between families and the state only. Yet local mixed economies of childcare (Daly and Lewis, 2000) include various market actors, including babysitters and nannies, who offer home-based childcare services for pay in CEE countries, too (Hrzenjak, 2012). While post-socialist childcare policy developments have been seen to support familial childcare arrangements in different ways, local supplies of personalized, home-based childcare services may be seen to undermine the documented re-familialising *potential* of childcare policies by making available informal, but non-familial care.

The focus of the present paper is to provide a critical discussion of the re-familialising potential of childcare policy packages in mixed economies of care where paid informal carers are readily available. The focus of the paper is the ways in which local markets of personalised childcare services are relied upon to counteract the familialising incentives of childcare policy packages by

providing familial carers, mothers in particular, with additional exit options as regards childcare. To illustrate how this might happen, the paper draws on the experiences of 19 urban and five rural Romanian single- and dual-earner families with children under five in an explicitly familialist policy context. Building on this conclusion, the paper argues for the inclusion of local informal childcare service markets and national regulatory frameworks pertaining to them in analyses of childcare policy packages alongside paid parental leave provisions and public or publicly subsidised formal childcare services for a more appropriate appraisal of the potential outcomes of childcare policies for families.

### References

- Ehrenreich, B. and Hochschild, A. R. (2003) *Global woman: nannies, maids, and sex workers in the new economy*, London: Granta.
- Fodor, É., Glass, C., Kawachi, J. and Popescu, L. (2002) 'Family Policies and Gender in Hungary, Poland, and Romania', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 35, pp. 475-490.
- Hrzenjak, M. (2012) 'Hierarchisation and Segmentation of Informal Care Markets in Slovenia', *Social Politics*, 19 (1), pp. 38-57.
- Lister, R., Williams, F., Anttonen, A., Bussemaker, J., Gerhard, U., Heinen, J., Johansson, S., Leira, A., Siim, B. and Tobío, C., Gavanas, A. (2007) *Gendering Citizenship in Western Europe: New challenges for citizenship research in a cross-national context*, Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lutz, H. (2007) *Migration and domestic work: a European perspective on a global theme*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Saxonberg, S. and Sirovátka, T. (2006) 'Seeking the Balance Between Work and Family After Communism', in Haas, L. and Wisensale, S. K. (eds.) *Families and Social Policy: National and International Perspectives*, London: Haworth Press.
- Szelewa, D. and Polakowski, M. P. (2008) 'Who cares? Changing patterns of childcare in Central and Eastern Europe', *Journal of European Social Policy*, 18 (2), pp. 115-131.