FERTILITY DEVELOPMENTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: THE ROLE OF WORK–FAMILY TENSIONS

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ABSTRACT: *This paper provides an overview of developments in fertility, family policy models, and intensity of work-family tensions in the CEE region in the 1990s and 2000s. It hypothesises that the intensification of work-family incongruities in the 1990s might have been an important determinant of the decline in fertility seen in post-socialist countries in the 1990s, and that the implementation of reconciliation policies in some of the post-socialist countries in the 2000s might have led to diversity in rates of fertility improvement in the region. It concludes by encouraging more in-depth research on the interrelationships between fertility, women's employment, family policies and social norms regarding women's work in the CEE region, all of which would help verify these hypotheses.*

1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1980s fertility in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries was still much higher than in Western European countries. This situation changed rapidly in the following decade. While fertility levels remained stable in Western Europe, CEE countries were gradually entering the group of lowest-low fertility countries, with period Total Fertility Rates (TFR) falling below 1.35. Only recently have some improvements in fertility been observed, particularly in Estonia, Bulgaria, Slovenia and Lithuania, where TFR now exceeds 1.5.

The reasons behind fertility decline in CEE countries have been widely discussed in the demographic literature. Two explanations originally predominated the discussion: the first one referred to the effects of the economic crisis of the early 1990s and resulting social anomie (e.g. Billingsley 2010; Macura 2000; Perelli-Harris 2008; Philipov 2003), and the second to the spread of Western values and ideologies related to the second demographic transition (e.g. Kotowska 1999; Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 2002; Sobotka 2008; Sobotka, Zeman and Kantorová 2003). Recent developments in fertility in the CEE region and in-depth analyses of the reasons behind the transformations in

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family-related behaviours indicate another group of factors decisive for family-related behaviours in the region, namely factors related to the "replacement of state socialism regimes with economic and political institutions of contemporary capitalism" (Frejka 2008, 139). As a result of this change, employment was no longer guaranteed, public provision of cheap housing and social services ceased, new opportunities for professional career and self-development emerged, consumer aspirations exploded and the importance of education for earning an income and achieving personal success increased substantially. At the top of these developments, governments in many CEE countries started to withdraw public support from working parents. Altogether, these changes led to a rapid increase in tensions between work and family life.

The authors of the articles published in the special volume of Demographic Research on childbearing trends and policies in Europe provided an extended discussion of the role of various socio-economic factors on changes to family-related behaviours in the CEE region (e.g. see Frejka et al. 2008). Nevertheless, there have been very few studies so far that have attempted to obtain deeper insights into one selected group of factors and their possible impact on fertility in CEE countries. This paper aims to make up for this shortcoming, by paying closer attention to those factors that led to an intensification of the conflict between work and family life. This group of factors requires special attention for at least two reasons. First, tensions between work and family have been considered one of the most important causes of persistently low fertility in many Western European countries. It has been demonstrated widely in the empirical literature that Western economies displaying weaker conflict between work and family are characterised by higher levels of fertility (Ahn and Mira 2002; Engelhardt, Kogel and Prskawetz 2004; Kögel 2004; Rindfuss, Guzzo and Morgan 2003) and that women's employment, or an increase in women's wages, are more likely to depress fertility in countries characterised by poor public support for working parents (Andersson, Kreyenfeld and Mika 2009; Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). Recent studies on Western Europe have gone further and shown that improvements in the provision of childcare may lead to substantial increases in childbearing rates (Baizan 2009; Rindfuss et al. 2010). Second, as will be shown below, intensification of the tensions between paid work and family in the CEE region took place in a very specific group of countries and at a very particular point in time. Namely, CEE countries have long been characterised by relatively high women's economic activity. Consequently, for women born in the 1970s and 1980s, participating in the labour market was a natural path to follow after graduation, a path that had been followed by their mothers in the past. The intensification of the conflict between family and paid work therefore hit women who were prepared to participate actively in the labour market. Furthermore, it occurred exactly when women's involvement in paid employment was needed most, given the

increased importance of assuring the economic necessities for households and increasing employment instability among men.

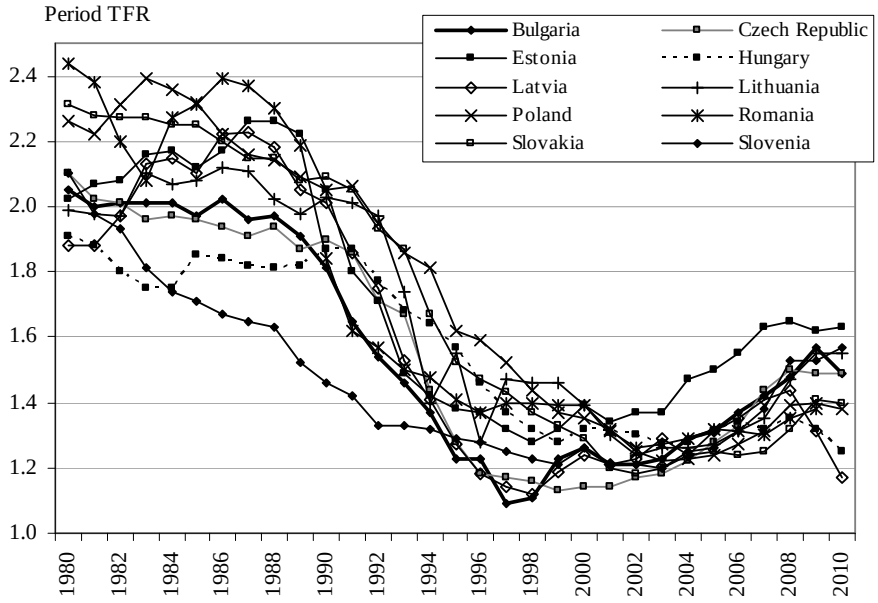
Whereas empirical research on the interrelationship between fertility, women's paid work and family policies in Western economies has been conducted on a large scale, there have not been many studies in these fields on CEE countries. In general, post-socialist countries were often classified as a single group of low fertility countries characterised in the past by women's high labour supply and relatively good conditions for work and family reconciliation, which deteriorated after the collapse of the state socialism (Muszyńska 2007; Pascall and Manning 2000). Recently, however, clear differences in fertility, women's labour force participation, and family policy models started to emerge in this part of Europe. This study therefore aims to gain deeper insights into developments in fertility and work-family tensions in order to highlight the most important trends of the 1990s and 2000s, identify major cross-country differences, formulate hypotheses and encourage further research on the topic in the region. Our considerations are limited to those CEE countries that entered the EU in the 2000s. This decision was unfortunately necessary due to the paucity of essential data available in international databases.

The paper is organised as follows. First, we provide a brief description of fertility developments in the CEE region. Second, we give some background information on the reasons behind increased pressure to participate in the labour market and earn an independent living and briefly discuss the situation in CEE region labour markets. Subsequently, we move on to describing the situation of women in CEE labour markets, sources of tensions arising between work and family, and women's responses to this new situation. Finally, we discuss the most recent developments in family policies, fertility and women's employment, pointing out emerging diversities in the region.

2 FERTILITY DEVELOPMENTS IN CEE COUNTRIES

At the end of the 1980s fertility in CEE countries was still much higher than in the West of Europe. In 1989 the average period TFR in the ten CEE countries that entered the EU in the 2000s amounted to 1.97, whereas in the EU15 it was 1.65. This situation changed rapidly in the following decade. While fertility levels remained stable in Western Europe, CEE countries were gradually entering the group of lowest-low fertility countries; indeed, in the late 1990s and early 2000s the TFR in the majority of them oscillated between 1.2–1.3. In some, such as Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Latvia and Slovakia, it even fell below 1.2. Only since the early 2000s have CEE countries started to experience a gradual improvement in fertility. As a result, the average TFR in

this region has risen from its minimum of 1.29 in 1998 to 1.44 in 2010. These improvements have been strongest in Estonia, where the TFR reached 1.63 in 2010, Slovenia (1.57) and Lithuania (1.55). The lowest fertility levels, below 1.3, are currently observed in Hungary (1.25) as well as in Latvia (1.17), which experienced strong downturn in period fertility in 2009, probably due to the severe economic recession (Sobotka, Skirbekk and Philipov 2011).



Source: Eurostat Statistics Database.

Figure I
Developments in period Total Fertility Rate in CEE countries, 1980–2010

This decline in period fertility in the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as recent improvements in fertility, were driven partly by shifts in the timing of childbearing. The era when the majority of first births were delivered before the age of 23 has passed. From the cohorts born in the 1980s onwards, women mainly began to enter motherhood in the second half of their twenties (Frejka 2008). The strongest shifts in the timing of births were observed in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, where the mean age at first birth has increased by more than four years since the early 1990s. In the majority of other CEE countries this increase amounts to around three years. Only in Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania and Poland has the magnitude of this change been weaker (around

two years). Part of the fertility decline can, however, be attributed to quantum effects whose magnitude seems to vary across countries. According to computations presented in Goldstein et al. (2009) and Sobotka (2011) the TFR adjusted for tempo distortion with the use of Bongaarts and Feeney method (1998) varies from 1.50 for Poland to 1.90 for Estonia. If the quantum effects were to be measured by differences between completed fertility for cohorts born in 1968 and adjusted TFR, the strongest quantum effects would be found in Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, and the weakest in Estonia, Bulgaria and Lithuania (own computations on the basis of the data presented in Sobotka (2011, 268)).

A typical feature of fertility decline in CEE countries is therefore postponement of first births and a decline in second or higher-order births (Frejka and Sardon 2007). The transition to first birth remains universal, although some increases in childlessness have also been observed in the region. According to estimates provided by Frejka (2008) and Frejka and Sardon (2006), the increase in childlessness was most pronounced in Poland where the proportion of childless women rose from eight per cent amongst women born in 1945–1955 to 15.5 per cent amongst women born in 1965. Poland currently has the highest levels of childlessness in the whole region, followed by Romania (13.1 per cent) and Slovakia (11.4 per cent).

Overall, this brief description of fertility developments in CEE countries suggests a gradual divergence in fertility in the region. In some countries – such as Hungary, Poland and Slovakia – quantum effects in fertility decline were relatively strong, and the countries consequently experienced weaker improvements in fertility. Fertility rates remain low there, with TFR at the level of 1.4 or lower. By contrast, in Estonia, Slovenia, Bulgaria and Lithuania, where fertility decline was to a larger extent driven by postponement of births, recent fertility improvements have been stronger and the period TFR in 2010 reached 1.49 (Bulgaria) or even exceeded this level (Estonia, Lithuania and Slovenia).

3 RISING MOTIVATIONS TO EARN AN INCOME VERSUS INCREASING DIFFICULTIES PARTICIPATING IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Replacement of the socialist regimes by the capitalist system resulted in a serious re-organisation of state and society, and consequently led to a profound change in the conditions of gaining income and participating in the labour force. Withdrawal of the state from its role as an employer as well as provider of financial support and social services, including free health care, childcare and education, resulted in an increase in individual responsibility for one’s

economic well-being. The household became more dependent on its own resources, and in particular on its ability to earn an income (e.g. Frejka 2008; Kotowska et al. 2008).

In parallel, CEE countries also experienced rapid improvements in the availability of various consumer goods and services, which were not accessible on the market during state socialism. This development led to an outburst of consumer aspirations – many households strove to acquire a better car, a video player or modern domestic appliances (Sobotka 2003, 2011). Consumer aspirations became more sophisticated over time, alongside improvements in countries' economic situations: younger individuals aspired to travel abroad, or for higher-quality housing. However, not all these goods were easily accessible. In particular, many CEE countries experienced marked increases in house prices, with Poland taking a leading position in that respect.[2]

The shift in responsibility for economic well-being from the state to the individual, together with an increase in consumer aspirations, led to an obvious increase in motivations to earn an income. At the same time, however, this task became more difficult in increasingly competitive and demanding labour markets. Economic restructuring, the transition from state-controlled to privately owned companies, and changes in the structure of labour demand led to massive transformations in the labour market (Allison and Ringold 1996; Frejka 2008; Gebel 2008; Kotowska 2005; UNECE 2000). As a result, employment was no longer guaranteed. Additionally, increasing labour market competition led to an increase in employers' requirements and the importance of education and personal skills for earning an income and achieving success increased substantially. Finding and maintaining employment became much more difficult and required much more effort on the part of individuals. Consequently, employment rates, which were high during state socialism, fell in all CEE countries and unemployment, previously an unknown phenomenon, spread rapidly. The labour market situation was most difficult in Slovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Bulgaria, where the unemployment rate exceeded ten per cent throughout most of the 1990s and in the early 2000s. In Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia it almost reached 20 per cent at the turn of the century.

4 INCREASING TENSIONS BETWEEN PAID WORK AND FAMILY

Competing in the labour market became particularly difficult for women in this part of Europe, as they were still perceived as the main providers of care (Heinen 1997; Siemieńska 1997; Stankuniene and Jasilioniene 2008). Consequently, they faced a situation in which they had to balance family and

[2] See Bank for International Settlements, www.bis.org.

paid work under the new conditions of labour force participation. This task turned out to be difficult, not only as a result of transformations in the labour market but also as a result of strong tensions between family and paid work that arose in the post-socialist countries in the 1990s.

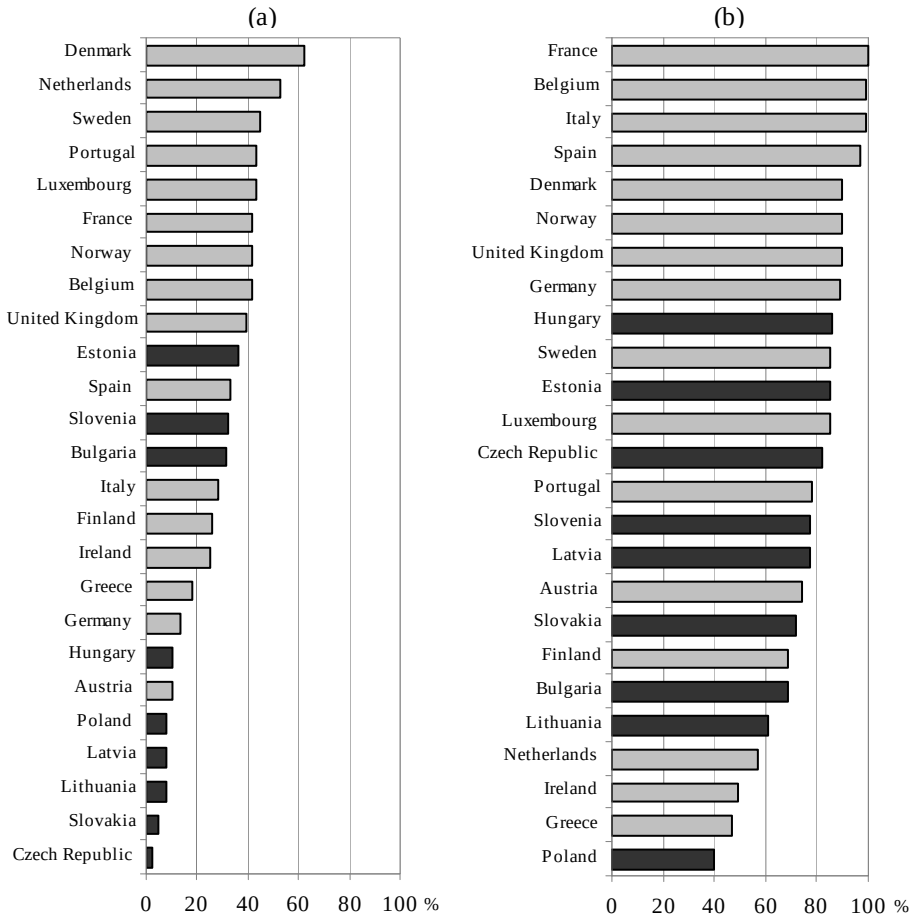
In general, one may distinguish three sources of work-family tensions: family policies or rather lack thereof, labour market structures (including flexibility of working hours and magnitude of the barriers to labour market entry), as well as social norms concerning gender roles (Aaberge et al. 2005; Adsera 2004; Engelhardt et al. 2004; Liefbroer and Corijn 1999; Matysiak 2011; Muszyńska 2007). Under state socialism, combining paid work and childrearing was fairly easy even if many of the above-mentioned elements were not conducive to work and family reconciliation. This was possible due to interplay of a group of factors that facilitated women's employment and at the same time allowed them to combine economic activity with childcare. These factors were: high expectations of women to work on the market (driven by a labour-intensive economy and low-wage policy), relatively good provision of public childcare for children aged over three (with enrolment rates in kindergartens of 80–90 per cent, except for Poland and Latvia, see Rostgaard (2004)) including children of school age, strong job guarantees and hardly any competition in the labour market. Virtually, all other elements of the system were unsupportive of the labour force participation of mothers. Public childcare provision for the youngest children was rather poor (with enrolment rates below ten per cent) in the majority of the CEE countries, the quality of public childcare was relatively low, parental leaves long (often up to three years), working hours in industrial companies were fairly rigid and part-time employment was scarce (Drobnič 1997). Furthermore, providing childcare was widely perceived to be 'women's work' with no incentives for men to participate in domestic and childrearing chores or any discussion on that topic (Heinen 1997; Pascall and Lewis 2004; Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). These shortcomings of the system, which would have led to strong tensions between work and family in a capitalist economy, did not depress women's labour force participation rates and fertility in the centrally planned economies characterised by uncompetitive labour markets. In such an environment terminating employment to care for a young child for a period of time brought no risk of job loss to women, and subsequent return to work after leave was fairly easy. It was thus common for mothers in CEE countries to cease paid work for the first two or three years after birth and to return to work smoothly afterwards by combining it with care of a pre-school and school-aged child. Altogether, the family policy model that evolved during state socialism was a dual earner–female double burden model in which men were solely responsible for earning income and women were expected to provide care as well as to work on the market.

It is therefore not surprising that the collapse of the socialist system and an introduction of labour market competition led to a strong increase in tensions between work and family life. Although social policy could have developed some instruments that would have mitigated the arising work-family conflict, in the majority of CEE countries exactly the opposite tendency was observed in the first decade of the economic transformation: the financial difficulties of the early 1990s led many CEE country governments to reduce expenditures on families. The responsibility for running childcare centres shifted to local authorities which, facing financial difficulties, increased enrolment fees and even reduced the number of childcare places available (Fultz, Ruck and Steinhilber 2003; Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). Nursery schools were particularly strongly affected by this change. Due to a decline in the number of children after 1989 enrolment rates in kindergartens have hardly changed, whereas enrolment rates in nursery schools have fallen dramatically. According to the UNICEF data presented in Pascall and Manning (2000), by 1997 the proportion of children aged 0–2 attending *crèche* declined by a magnitude of around three in Latvia and Lithuania (from a level above 30 per cent to around ten per cent) and almost halved in Poland (from just nine per cent to five per cent). Similar trends were observed in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (Saxonberg and Sirovátka 2006). Only in Slovenia did childcare facilities not undergo a reduction in the number of places (Kanjuo-Mrčela and Cernigoj Sadar 2011; Stropnik and Šircelj 2008). At the same time, governments withdrew financial support for families. Family benefits often became means-tested and through the 1990s their level deteriorated from 10–13 percent to below seven per cent of average wage (Rostgaard 2004). Not much changed initially as regards parental leaves, which remained long, allowing mothers to stay at home with their children for 2–3 years. Only Slovenia was an exception in this respect, since the total number of leave days was already relatively low there in the 1980s (the duration of maternity and parental leave totalled 365 days) though it was well paid (Stropnik and Šircelj 2008).

These developments in family policies observed in the 1990s were widely interpreted in the literature as attempts at "refamilisation", encouraging women to leave employment and become housewives (Fultz et al. 2003; Hantrais 2002; Robila forthcoming; Szelewa and Polakowski 2008). The situation only started to improve in the 2000s, and only in some of the post-socialist countries that started to implement reconciliation policies. The most notable reforms were undertaken in Estonia, where efforts were made to improve childcare provision and increase the level of payments during parental leave (coverage of parents on leave with pension insurance and introduction of a speed-premium scheme) (Stankuniene and Jasilionis 2009). Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania extended financial support for parents, raising parental leave benefits and increasing child allowances (Stankuniene and Jasilionis 2009; Szelewa 2010). Some CEE

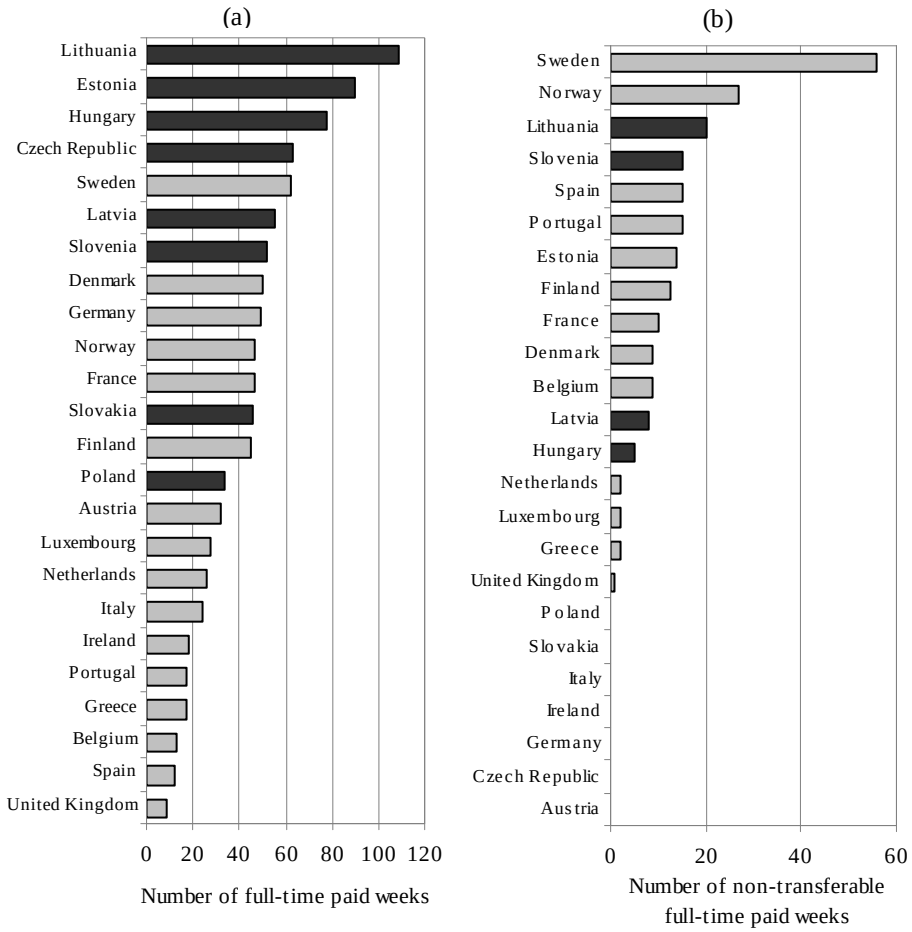
countries also introduced non-transferable paternity leaves; Slovenia was a clear leader in this respect, as it had already implemented a 90 days partly paid paternity leave in 2001. It was followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania, where paternity leaves of 1–4 weeks were launched in the second half of the 2000s (Moss 2009). Poland joined this group of countries in 2010.

Despite these recent improvements in family policies in some of the CEE countries, reconciliation of work and family in the region is generally difficult (Figures II–V). Compared with other European countries the post-socialist countries are currently characterised by very low childcare provision for the youngest children (aged 0–2), with enrolment rates hardly exceeding ten per cent except in Estonia and 30 per cent in Slovenia. Childcare provision for children aged 3–5 ranges from low to moderate, with the lowest enrolment of children in Poland (around 40 per cent) and the highest in Estonia and Hungary (slightly above 85 per cent). By comparison, in Denmark 63 per cent of children aged 0–2 attends *crèche* and 91 per cent go to kindergarten. Working hours in CEE countries are amongst the most rigid in the EU. According to the Eurostat survey "Reconciliation between work and family life" conducted in 2005, changing the start or the end of the working day for family reasons is much more difficult in CEE countries than in Western Europe (Figure IV). The only exceptions are again Estonia and Slovenia, where the flexibility of working hours seems to be relatively high. Instead, CEE countries score very highly as regards parental leave entitlements for women (Figure IIIa). In Lithuania, Estonia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Latvia the number of paid weeks of leave for women, measured in full-time equivalents, exceeded 50 in 2008; by comparison the only Western country which granted such generous parental leave entitlements was Sweden. Only Poland and Slovakia differ from the remaining CEE countries – the leaves are relatively long (over three years) but largely unpaid. Finally, the tensions experienced by women in CEE countries may also be culturally driven. As mentioned, women in this region are perceived as the main providers of care, and for a long time there has been no discussion about increasing involvement of men in household and care responsibilities. The traditional perception of the role of women is reflected in data from the International Social Survey Programme (2002), where respondents were asked whether a mother of a pre-school child should stay at home (Figure V). This belief was expressed predominantly by Polish and Slovakian respondents, though it was also relatively frequent in Hungary and Latvia, but not in Estonia and Slovenia. It is to be noted, however, that such a belief is also shared by inhabitants of some of the Western European countries, such as Great Britain, Austria and West Germany.



Source: OECD Family Database, data retrieved in January 2011.

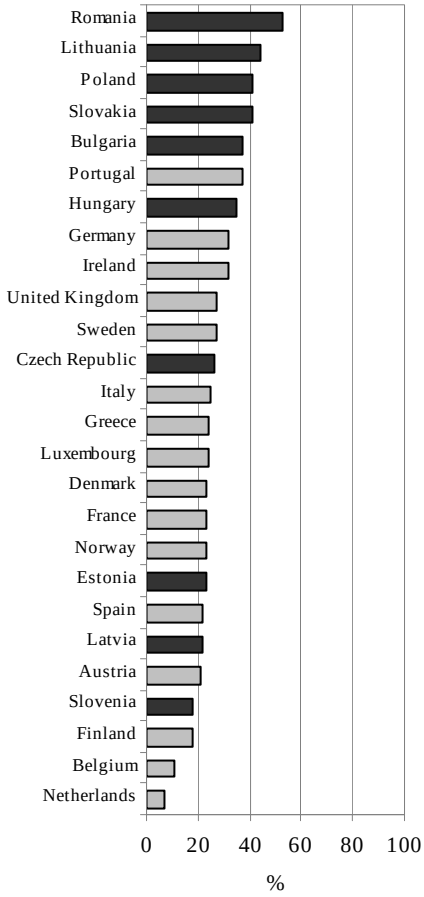
Figure II
Enrolment rates of children (a) aged 0–2 and (b) aged 3–5 in formal childcare arrangements around 2006



Source: OECD Family Database, data retrieved in January 2011.

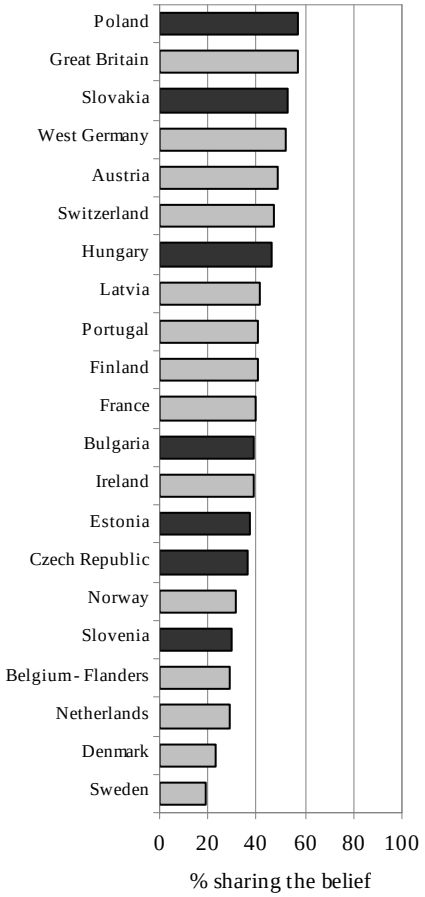
Figure III

Maternity, paternity and parental leave entitlements: (a) maximum length available for women in full-time equivalents and (b) number of non-transferable paid weeks for men in full-time equivalents around 2008



Source: Eurostat survey 'Reconciliation between work and family life', Eurostat Statistics Database.

Figure IV
Rigidity of working hours: proportion of women aged 25–54 who cannot vary the start or the end of the working day, around 2005



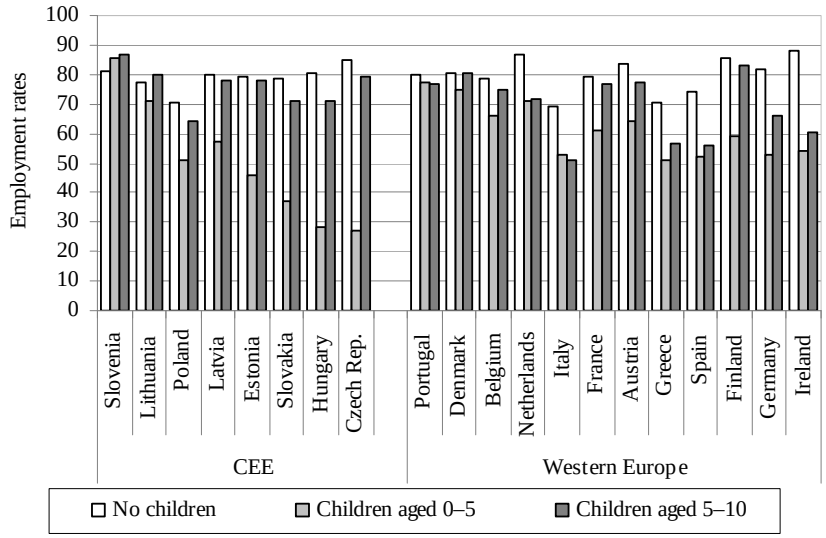
Source: International Social Survey Programme (ISSP 2002).

Figure V
Proportion claiming that the mother should stay at home when children are in pre-school age, around 2002

5 WOMEN'S RESPONSES TO AN INTENSIFICATION OF TENSIONS BETWEEN WORK AND FAMILY

Despite increasing tensions between work and family, and traditional opinions on gender roles which are deeply rooted in CEE societies, women abstained from reducing their economic activity (Matysiak 2009; Sobotka et al. 2008; Spéder and Kamarás 2008). While the employment rates of men fell substantially, this was not the case for women of reproductive age. Instead, various macro- and micro-level data revealed the strong determination of women to remain active and participate in paid employment.

Difficulties combing work and family, coupled with the strong determination of mothers to participate in the labour market are clearly visible in macro-level data presented in Figure VI. Its left-hand panel (CEE countries) shows dramatic discrepancies in the employment rates of childless women aged 25–40 and mothers of young children (aged 0–5). The only exceptions are Slovenia and Lithuania, where hardly any differences in the employment rates of childless women and mothers of young children are observed. On the other side of the spectrum lie the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia, where these differences are particularly pronounced and exceed 40 percentage points. Such differences in women's employment rates are not present in any Western European country present on the graph. Interestingly, however, we observe hardly any differences in employment rates for childless women and mothers of children aged 5–10 in CEE countries. This cannot be said about some of the Western European countries, such as Ireland, Germany, Spain or Greece. This simple graph may therefore indicate the strong determination of women in CEE countries to return to work after parental leave despite the long time spent out of employment, probably as a result of lack of external childcare opportunities and strong social pressure on mothers to stay at home.



Source: Author's computations using European Labour Force Survey (2004).

Figure VI
Employment rates of women aged 25–40 by age of the youngest child, Europe 2004

The strong determination of women in CEE countries has also been documented in more in-depth micro-level studies. These studies have focused largely on comparing first birth intensities of employed women and women who do not have a job, controlling for standard socio-economic and demographic characteristics. They unambiguously indicate that women in employment are at least as likely to enter motherhood as women who do not have a job. Such findings have so far only been established for the Nordic countries, where work-family incongruities are rather low. In other European countries employed women are typically more likely to postpone motherhood than those who do not work (Matysiak and Vignoli 2008). For instance in Poland, a country with the worst public childcare provision in the EU and very traditional opinions on gender roles, women tend to seek out paid work before they become mothers (Matysiak 2009). This preference for employment before birth might mean that in Poland employment constitutes an important factor in the formation of a family. This finding is even more interesting when taking into account the fact that employment has been found to constitute a clear barrier to the entry to motherhood in Italy, a country where the tensions between work and family are similarly strong (Matysiak and Vignoli 2011). In another study, concentrating on the Czech Republic, Kantorová (2004)

compared the role of women's employment on the transition to motherhood before and after 1990. She found an increase in the importance of labour market experience and having a job on family formation amongst highly educated women. Empirical studies on East Germany (Kreyenfeld 2004) and Hungary (Róbert and Bukodi 2005) have found the intensity of progressing to motherhood to be even higher for working women than those who are inactive.

The strong determination of women and mothers to participate in paid employment despite difficulties in combing work and family has very likely been evoked by two factors:

- a strong income effect, which has arisen as a result of increasing difficulties earning an income, rising instability of men's employment and expanding consumer aspirations,
- culturally rooted attachment of women to the labour force, resulting from the internalisation of the picture of the working mother.

Irrespective of the reasons and whether women want to work or need to work, they must have developed strategies allowing them to maintain their position in the labour market given the strong tensions between work and family. One such strategy could have been increased participation in education. While women outdistanced men in terms of taking and completing education at tertiary level all over Europe, this tendency was particularly strong in CEE countries. As a result, five CEE countries are ranked top in the EU as regards the ratio of female to male university graduates. These are Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary and Poland, where the ratio ranges from 1.87 (Poland) to 2.56 (Latvia). Another strategy adopted by women might have been to delay entry to motherhood and reduce family size. As stated by Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006, 198) "rather than leaving the labour market, they [women] have quite simply left the reproductive market". Similar views have been expressed by other researchers studying fertility decline in CEE countries, such as Kotowska et al. (2008, 826) for Poland, Koytcheva and Philipov (2008, 390) for Bulgaria, Sobotka et al. (2008, 436) for the Czech Republic, Stankuniene and Jasilionene (2008, 731) for Lithuania. They consistently emphasise women's determination to establish a stable position in the labour market before becoming mothers. This 'employment-first' strategy is claimed to be particularly popular amongst highly educated women, whose proportion has been increasing rapidly over the last two decades. Under the unfavourable conditions of labour force participation and strong tensions between work and family it could have led to the postponement of parenthood and may result in even lower completed fertility. In order to corroborate this conclusion, further research on the interrelationship between women's employment and fertility would be welcomed, possibly for countries where such studies have not yet been conducted.

6 EMERGING DIVERSITY IN FAMILY POLICY MODELS AND POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR FERTILITY AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT

Although it is undeniable that CEE countries have all experienced an increase in work-family tensions, it should also be noticed that the region is by no means a homogenous group in that respect. In fact, Figures II–V point to substantial differences in the level of public support for working parents and social acceptance of mothers' paid work. Some of these differences were already present in the 1980s, but they have increased as a result of diverse rates of deterioration in public support during the 1990s and a revival of reconciliation measures in the 2000s in some of the post-socialist countries. For instance, one may notice that childcare provision for the youngest children in Estonia, Slovenia and Bulgaria is far better (enrolment rates exceed 30 per cent) than in the remaining post-socialist countries (enrolment rates below eleven per cent). These three countries stand out from other CEE countries by their relatively high social acceptance of working mothers. Estonia, Slovenia and Latvia also appear to have more widespread acceptance of flexible working hours. Lithuania scores very highly when it comes to the generosity of leave provision – it grants long and well-paid parental and paternity leaves. By contrast, Poland and Slovakia seem to have the worst reconciliation measures: they score very lowly in terms of childcare services for the youngest children (Poland also takes the last position in the EU with respect to childcare provision for children aged 3–5), parental leave provision (they both grant long but low-paid leaves), rigidity of working hours and social acceptance of mothers' work. The situation in other CEE countries is more diverse. Hungary, for instance, offers quite good childcare for children aged 3–5 and generous parental leaves, but scores poorly on remaining dimensions. By contrast, in the Czech Republic childcare provision for the youngest children is very poor, but the country takes a middle position with respect to enrolment rates for children aged 3–5, flexibility of working hours and social acceptance of working mothers.

This diversity in family policies and attitudes toward working mothers has rarely been noticed in the context of the CEE region. The post-socialist countries were most often classified into one homogenous group of relatively good public support for working parents in the past, which deteriorated after the collapse of state socialism. The comparative study of family policies in 13 European countries conducted by Kontula and Soderling (2008) was one of the first which noticed the better performance of Slovenia compared with other CEE countries. The authors classified this country together with Finland into a 'day-care service model', which provided support for working parents via well-

developed childcare services. The fact that Slovenian family policies facilitate reconciliation between paid work and family life was also underlined in analyses of family policy conducted by Slovenian authors (Kanjuo-Mrčela and Cernigoj Sadar 2011; Stropnik and Šircelj 2008). By contrast, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Lithuania were grouped by Kontula and Soderling (2008) into an 'imposed home-care model' which relies largely on home-based care and only offers support to the poorest families. Another study which underlined cross-country differences in family policy models in the CEE region was performed by Szelewa and Polakowski (2008). They adopted a fuzzy set approach to analyse five aspects of family policy: public provision of childcare and its quality, duration of parental leaves, as well as the generosity and universality of parental leave benefits. Their analysis revealed four family policy models in the CEE region: explicitly familialistic, implicitly familialistic, female-mobilising and comprehensive support. In the first two models the responsibility for childcare is located within the family, but in the explicitly familialistic model the state pursues active policies to support the traditional family model, while in the implicitly familialistic model the state does not intervene in family matters and policies are consequently residual and formally neutral. The explicitly familialistic model covers the Czech Republic, Slovakia and – inconsistent with the previous evidence – Slovenia. Implicit familialism is implemented in Poland. The third model, female mobilising, is characterised by good childcare services, universal but less generous parental leave provisions and comprises Estonia and Latvia after the reform of their family policy models in the early 2000s. Finally, the comprehensive support model, typical of Hungary and Lithuania, does not create certain incentives, but aims to create choice for parents.

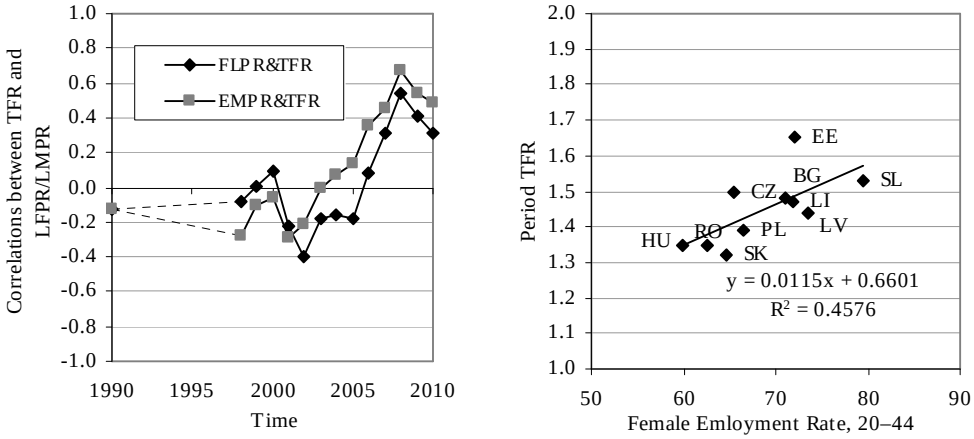
Future research should obtain further insights into the differences in support for working parents in the CEE region. Nevertheless, the few studies that have already made this effort demonstrate that such differences do exist. Despite some inconsistencies across studies and data sources, it seems that Estonia, Latvia and Slovenia tend to offer policies most supportive of work and family reconciliation, Hungary and Lithuania have policies which are multi-purpose and offer more choice to parents, while the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland tend to explicitly or implicitly favour a traditional male breadwinner family model.

These cross-country differences in public support for working parents and social support for mothers' paid work might have implications for fertility and women's employment. In fact, countries where reconciliation between work and family is easier (e.g. Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) were also characterised in the 1990s and 2000s by the highest rates of employment of women aged 20–44, and countries where the reconciliation is more difficult (e.g. Poland and Slovakia) exhibited lower rates of female employment. A

notable exception in this respect is Hungary, where women's employment was low in the 1980s and remained low despite its comprehensive support for couples with children. Apart from Latvia, the countries with the highest rates of women's employment also experienced the most pronounced improvements in fertility in the 2000s. Stronger improvements in fertility in high women's employment countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Slovenia) and weaker improvements in low women's employment countries (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia) led to a reversal in the cross-country correlation between the period TFR and women's employment rate in the CEE region in the mid-2000s (Figures VIIa-b). This correlation started to emerge in the mid-2000s and reached its peak in 2008, i.e. just before the economic slow-down that hit many CEE countries. In the following years it weakened slightly, which might have been caused by temporary shifts in employment and fertility rates caused by the financial crisis.

The phenomenon of the positive cross-country correlation between fertility and women's employment has so far been observed for Western developed economies and was interpreted as a sign of the increasing diversity in the conditions for work and family reconciliation across countries (Ahn and Mira 2002; Engelhardt et al. 2004; Engelhardt and Prskawetz 2004; Kögel 2004; Rindfuss et al. 2003). Its emergence in CEE countries thus suggests that strong tensions between work and family hinder fertility and women's employment and hence that easing the work-family conflict is the right path to follow in this part of Europe as well. However, it is to be noted that the data presented here might also reflect a temporary phenomenon and that future research on this topic is needed. In particular, more in-depth analyses of the interrelationship between fertility and women's employment are required for the CEE region, in order to better recognise whether the differences in fertility rates and women's employment are indeed due to cross-country differences in public support for working parents and social acceptance of mothers' paid work. Furthermore, micro-level studies should be carried out to establish the causal effects of reconciliation measures on fertility and women's employment in the CEE region and formulate family policy recommendations more precisely.

a) 1990–2010 b) 2008



Source: Author's calculations; labour market data retrieved from OECD Employment Database, fertility data retrieved from Eurostat Statistics Database

Figure VII
Cross-country correlation between period Total Fertility Rate and Women's Employment Rate (EMPR)/Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

7 CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we provided an overview of developments in fertility and work-family tensions in the CEE region in the 1990s and 2000s. We demonstrated that the intensification of work-family incongruities in the 1990s might have been an important determinant of fertility decline in post-socialist countries in the 1990s, given the importance placed on women's employment for family formation and the strong determination of women in the CEE region to participate in the labour force. Furthermore, we also showed that the 2000s brought some changes in family policies in some of the post-socialist countries, leading to an increase in diversity in the family policy models in the region. While Estonia and Slovenia appear to have implemented policies supporting mothers' employment, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland seem to have followed the re-familisation path which they entered in the 1990s. Hungary and Lithuania are to be found somewhere in the middle, offering comprehensive support to parents, aiming to provide them with the choice of outsourcing part

of the childcare or providing it at home. In parallel to this emerging diversity of family policy models, CEE countries started to exhibit differences in fertility levels as well as women's employment rates. All these developments led to an emergence of the positive cross-country correlation between period TFR and women's employment in the region. It is too early to say whether the positive cross-country correlation is driven by differences in country-specific conditions in work and family reconciliation, or if it is just a temporary phenomenon caused by the interplay of several factors unrelated to work-family tensions. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the interrelationship between fertility, women's employment, family policies and social norms on women's work in the CEE region requires closer attention. In-depth studies are therefore called for in order to investigate the role of the increase in work-family incongruities on fertility decline in the 1990s, as well as the role of the emerging diversity in family policy models, so as to better understand variations in levels of fertility seen in the 2000s.

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