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Childcare policy² in the Czech Republic and Norway: two countries, two paths with many possibilities³

ABSTRACT: *The objective of this paper is to analyse and compare the design and governance of the contemporary childcare policy in the Czech Republic and Norway in relation to the situation of households with dependent children under school age. Following this, we review certain provisions of the childcare policies of the two countries, whose systems possessed certain similarities at the beginning of the 1990s, although they represent distinct types of welfare state. Our analysis reveals that the chief differences in childcare policy have persisted and adapted to the key features of the welfare regimes. The two countries' central childcare policy values contrast with each other (equity and free choice in Norway vs. re-familisation and strong 'family dependency' among individuals in the Czech Republic) and exhibit differences in the structure and extent of policy measures, as well. Policies in both are less sensitive to the needs of children with specific needs (such as migrants in Norway or Roma children in the Czech Republic).*

KEYWORDS: childcare policy; early childhood education and care; households with dependent children; governance; policy design; comparative research

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INTRODUCTION

Childcare, like care for the elderly and the unemployed, has in recent years become a focal point for scholars, governments, and supranational bodies across Europe (EC, 2009; 2010a, b; 2013; OECD, 2011a; 2012; 2015; Horák, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2013; Sirovátka & Greve, 2014; Belle, 2016). This is a purposeful response to the evolving form of many contemporary households with young children, an evolution that has seen changes in structure, gender roles, and family member preferences as part of the effort to participate in the labour market and to reconcile work and family life. Ideally, several conditions must be met: an adequate supply of flexible jobs for both parents and their willingness to fill these vacancies, and accessible high-quality childcare services targeted to the individual needs of children.⁴ This reconciliation, moreover, must take place in an environment in which the well-being of all household members, parents and children alike, is ensured — within the household, in the nursery or kindergarten, and at work. This is reflected in the welfare states that, to a greater or lesser extent, support the reconciliation of work and family life, in the design of childcare policies and other interventions focused on the family and the working environment (cf. Esping-Andersen, 1999; Leitner, 2003; Natali & Bonoli, 2012).

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² In this text we use the term 'childcare policy', which is a bit broader than 'childcare services' but narrower than 'family policy'. It encompasses some policy provisions relevant for the parents of pre-school children that help parents to share caring responsibilities and costs, and to achieve a work-life balance (care facilities, maternal/paternal/parental arrangements and related cash benefits and marginally also work-family balance measures).

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⁴ Under the '4-A framework' perspective used in the Early Childhood Education (ECEC) concept, the availability (a government's commitment to provide ECEC), accessibility (the ability of all children to attend education and care), acceptability (the obligation to provide good-quality ECEC) and adaptability (the government's obligation to provide an education that is inclusive of all children) of childcare facilities should be ensured (see Belle, 2016).

At the same time, in response to critics of the post-war bureaucratic welfare state and economic issues in evidence since the crisis of the mid-1970s, the governments have made efforts to achieve cost savings and to increase efficiency by incrementally implementing the principles of new public management and new public governance, and this is impacting the current public policy, including childcare policy (see Meuleman, 2008; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2009; Osborne, 2010). New public management advocates for a greater involvement of the market and market methods in areas that have traditionally functioned on the basis of contracting-out, management by objectives, monitoring inter- and intra-organizational processes, outputs and outcomes, and so on.

New public governance, meanwhile, calls for public policies to be coordinated and implemented via cooperation between state and non-state actors from the private and civil sector to a greater or lesser extent (cf. Kickert, Klijn & Koppenjan, 1997; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). Facts that significantly bear on the way the current public policy is governed include: what kind of actors (or networks of actors) participate in policymaking and policy implementation; and how the needs of target groups — in the case of childcare policy, households with dependent children — are taken into account by those who create the policy.

In relation to the information above, the objective of this paper is to compare the design and governance of contemporary childcare policies in the Czech Republic and Norway in relation to the situation of households with dependent children under school age. Following this, we try to determine whether there has been a convergence or divergence between the two childcare systems, which possessed certain similarities at the beginning of the 1990s, although they represent distinct types of welfare state (see detailed explanation below). We analyse specific conditions as well as selected measures and their governance in childcare based on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data (mentioned in section method and data later in the paper). In our point of view, understanding of the childcare policy development in both countries is important.

In the following text, we first introduce the reasons why we are comparing the childcare systems only in the Czech Republic and Norway, key characteristics of the welfare regimes in these countries and the most important milestones in the development of their childcare policies. Then we analyse the key characteristics of the two policy systems in terms of the population in need (households with dependent children), policy design (benefits and services provided), and the governance of both policies (their regulation, financing, and implementation) that should take a good view on what the policies are. Within these areas of comparison, we explore similarities and differences of both systems that we compare in the end of the paper.

WHY COMPARE CHILDCARE IN NORWAY AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

Comparing childcare in Norway and the Czech Republic is not easy due to the distinctive welfare regimes in the two countries based on different historical, political, economic and cultural conditions. Moreover, in Norway, the social system and the childcare system develop continuously with some critical junctures/windows (Bahle, 2009; Jeroslow, 2014) being observed mainly in the late seventies and nineties as a result of the accumulation of changes in the childcare policy demand.⁵ In the Czech Republic, important critical junctures that influence today's policy are rooted in the historical beginning of the childcare and during the period of socialism⁶ (Hašková & Saxonberg, 2012). Then, only slow and modest path-dependent policy change in childcare provision and accessibility is emerging (Sirovátka & Válková, 2016).

On the other hand, comparing the childcare in terms of its design and governance being affected by the recent trends, a development is also challenging because of the strong and often discussed general tendency to policy convergence guided by the process of Europeanization and globalization (for example, through the good practices framework in social welfare). Regarding the providing of childcare, there are at least two good reasons to such comparison.

First, the Czech Republic is among the countries which have been formed by communist ideology for many years and the process of economic and social transformation started 'not before' 1989. By then, some analysts expected that post-communist countries would develop in the direction of a universalistic welfare model typical for Scandinavian countries as a result of the previous extensive

⁵ Among the key milestones belong the introduction of following benefits and services: the paternity leave in 1977, the parental leave in 1978, the father's quota in 1993, cash-for-care benefits in 1998 and boom in childcare services during the ninetees.

⁶ The codification of the division of day care into preschool children aged below three and above three in 1872 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire can be considered as the first critical juncture, followed by the decision in the early 1950s to move nurseries under the ministry of health and the decision in the 1960s to introduce extended maternity leaves for mothers (Hašková & Saxonberg, 2012: 3).

social security institutions and coverage in the state socialist era (Kuitto, 2016). Thus, we can assess the current features of welfare regime and childcare in the Czech Republic compared to those typical of universalistic regimes (Norway represents the universalistic model of welfare state, although some are specific (Ellingsæter, 2003, Ellingsæter, 2012, Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen, 2007) or hybrid (Rostgaard, 2014) compared with other Scandinavian countries).

Second, the reality proved that the development of welfare state in the post-communist as well as in Western countries has varied considerably and depends also on the overall post-war development of economy and social policy. In such a point of view, Norway and the Czech Republic formulated their family and child care policies rather implicitly in the beginning (Eriksen, 2001) and directed them towards general family support model in some respect. In the early nineties, both countries reached the unprecedentedly high level of female employment including the women with children in the pre-school age (Ellingsæter, 2012). The general preview on the parental childcare was rather similar. Since the healthy psychological development of the child was considered to be a benefit of care for the youngest children inside the family, the enrolment rates of children below 3 years in nursery schools and kindergartens was really low (Ellingsæter, 2012). During the late nineties, childcare policy in Norway changed considerably following the path of the dual-earner/dual-caregiver model of family policy (Duvander et al., 2010) and strengthening the principle of gender equality (which was focused, nevertheless, from the beginning of family policy, Ellingsæter, 2003); while in the Czech Republic, strong emphasis on the re-familisation and marketization of social care persisted.

WELFARE REGIMES AND FAMILY POLICY IN NORWAY AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Norway is a representative of the Scandinavian welfare state model, which is known for its extensive support for families with children through policies aiming to reconcile work and family life, to share paid and unpaid work more equally between men and women, and to provide solutions that reflect the interest of the child (Rostgaard, 2014). It advocates principle of universalism as well as equal opportunities for men and women in society (Andress & Heien, 1999; Ellingsæter & Leira, 2006; Thorkildsen & Kavli, 2009). The present Norwegian model has developed gradually in a dynamic interplay of supply and demand over the past 30–40 years (Ellingsæter & Gulbrandsen, 2007). As in other Nordic countries, in Norway, family policy was formulated rather implicitly from the beginning – it was the part of an extensive system of public social security and health services till 1997, when the Christian People's Party had family policy and values put on the political agenda as 'family issues' (Eriksen, 2001). Currently, the principle of gender equality has been accented not only on the labour market but also in caring responsibilities accompanied by the emphasis on parental choice and wish to maintain state neutrality (Skevik & Hatland, 2008). The first is represented by the father's quota in parental leave introduced in 1993 and later extended, while the second is posed in the cash-for-care benefits introduced in 1998. As a result, the present Norwegian childcare (welfare) model exhibits some distinctive features compared to other Scandinavian countries, for example, in mixed governance of childcare or much slower process of institutionalism of childcare as legal right (Ellingsæter, 2012). According to Korpi (2000), it represents a more dualistic family policy and has been ranked high on policies that give both dual-earner support and policies that give more general family support. Rønsen and Skrede (2006) suggest labelling the Norwegian policy towards family and work as 'gender equality light', while Duvander et al. (2010) propose that the dualism of the Norwegian family policy presents the possibility of gender equal parenthood more as an option than as a norm.

In contrast to Norway, it is not easy to unambiguously categorize the Czech family policy and welfare regime. Indeed, the social policy in the Czech Republic – like in other post-communist countries – arises from the Bismarckian tradition that was interrupted by the era of communism and normalisation.⁷ After 1989, some analysts expected that the welfare state reforms remain minimal, others suggested to develop the post-communist welfare states towards Scandinavian-like model or residual model with a neoliberal emphasis (Wagener, 2002; Kuitto, 2016). Because of the strong conservative tradition of the post-communist welfare states, some scholars assign the post-communist social systems to the Esping-Andersen's conservative-corporatist regime with the general family support model. However, in today's literature, these regimes are increasingly classified into the specific category called 'hybrid' (Cerami & Vanhuysse, 2009; Kuitto, 2016) because of the melding features, which are typical for the different kinds of more mature

⁷ 'Normalisation' is a period in the history of Czechoslovakia associated with the government of the Czech Communist Party that extended from spring 1968 to autumn 1989; and during which, many repressive measures were in force (such as purges within the Communist Party, layoffs, the renewal of censorship, the abolition of many interest and political associations and organisations, and other steps) (Pullmann & Kolář, 2017).

welfare states (Szikra & Tomka, 2009). Cerami (2006) suggests the emergence of the Central and Eastern European welfare regimes combining pre-communist (Bismarckian social insurance), communist (universalism, corporatism and egalitarianism) as well as post-communist (market-based schemes) features. Moreover, some analysts show that the emerging welfare states in post-communist countries are heterogeneous as well (Kuitto, 2016; Cerami & Vanhuysse, 2009). As Szikra & Tomka (2009) argue, as a result of strong path-dependencies, the Central and European welfare systems have grown more diverse and mixed than the ones we find in Western Europe. In this perspective, the present Czech family policy may be seen as a combination of conservative and liberal values (Sirovátka, 2004; Saxonberg & Sirovátka, 2009; Plasová, 2012). Together with Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, and Estonia, it subscribes to an explicit familialism policy model that supports familial childcare and reinforces gendered parenting by rewarding families with public support to provide childcare themselves. It promotes the disproportion that exists between men and women in labour market participation and in the division of household responsibilities and childcare (Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008; Bartáková, 2009; Javornik, 2014). The main responsibility for care provision is moved to the family, and it is women who primarily interrupt their careers to care for young children before returning to paid (mostly full-time) employment after several years (usually three) (Plasová, 2012). The traditional gender role division persists as the cultural norm and the main starting point for creating family policy, despite the fact that the principle of equal opportunity is gradually permeating the discourse ('political correctness') as a result of the EU integration.

KEY MILESTONES IN CHILDCARE DEVELOPMENT IN NORWAY AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

As mentioned earlier, the childcare policies in each country differ in structure and extent, although both started from a relatively similar point in the early nineties. In this section, we introduce key milestones in childcare development in Norway and the Czech Republic. We do not attempt a systematic comparison or chronological description of the development of both policies. Instead, we concentrate on those proposals and measures that have had the greatest impact on the current contours of childcare in the two countries. In both countries, these milestones may be linked primarily to the potential of institutional care for children, the benefits of caregiving parents and the relevance of the active fatherhood concept.

Prior to the 1990s, the *Norwegian* parental leave and childcare policies lagged a bit behind the policies of most other Nordic countries (Rønsen, 2004). From that time, nevertheless, Norway embarked on the path of fast development of measures supporting gender equality and universal access to childcare. Together with Sweden and Denmark, it pioneered the transformation of parenthood into a political issue, offering extensive policy packages to parents of young children (Lappegård, 2010).

Three measures are especially important when analysing the key elements of Norwegian family and childcare policy. First, the Norwegian parental leave programme is intended to make the combination of female employment and family life more feasible not only through the mother's rights on the labour market but also by the possibility of father's leave. In 1993, Norway was the first country to introduce a father's quota of one month, and it was subsequently widened to the current ten weeks (Rostgaard, 2014).

Second, Norway has very extensive formal day care facilities tied up with the 'childcare revolution' from the 2000s (Ellingsæter, 2012). Some specific features are characteristic of the fast development of childcare in Norway. Norway has supported not only the quantity of day care services but also their quality at the same time; this was reflected in a number of policy documents during the 2000's (Ellingsæter, 2012). Similarly, in tandem with the increased efforts to achieve full coverage, the equal financial treatment for private and public kindergartens by the state has become the reality. Finally, one element of the 'childcare revolution' is the mixed governance of childcare services, in which the establishment and expansion of kindergartens is a municipal responsibility with the central government being responsible for funding and legal/regulatory aspects, including a relatively unified standard of services (Ellingsæter, 2012). Because of this holistic approach (Ellingsæter, 2012), social investment approach (Jeroslow, 2014; Ellingsæter, 2012) and monitored high quality of childcare, the idea that kindergartens are good for children in their own right is now widely shared in Norway, to the extent that one might call it hegemonic (Seeberg 2010), and this idea serves to legitimise the system. This hegemony, however, is balanced by a persistent, if relatively mild, form of complementary gender ideology (male breadwinner/female care provider) as represented by the Christian conservative party.

Third, the principle of free choice and state neutrality is supported by the provision of the Norwegian childcare cash benefits that are generally available as long as state-subsidized day care facilities are not used. The main purpose of such a benefit scheme is to give families more flexibility with respect to their own childcare options. Its critics argued that benefits reduced incentives for women to participate in the labour market and therefore, encouraged a more traditionally gender-differentiated family (Ellingsæter & Leira,

2006); while those who are in favour of these benefits suggest that the cash-for-care scheme would give families ‘real freedom of choice’ (Lappegård, 2010).

As noted above, childcare policy in the *Czech Republic* has a legacy traceable to the communist era, with striking universalist features. Most fell away with the end of the state socialist system, but some, such as strictly dividing children into under-three and over-three age groups and offering extended periods of parental leave, are still in place. The latter policy descends from political decisions made in the 1960s and 1970s; the former sets up distinct objectives for childcare facilities — health for younger children and education for older children (Hašková, Saxonberg & Mudrak, 2013).

In the Czech Republic, there is only partial coverage of young children (especially those under 4 years), which is due to the persistently insufficient capacity of formal day care facilities. Indeed, the evolution of childcare in the Czech Republic has been particularly marked by a significant loss of childcare facilities (‘nurseries’) for the youngest age groups after 1989 and a growth trend in demand for these services by contemporary parents with children under four. To meet this demand (partly motivated by the reality that private childcare facilities are beyond the financial reach of most parents, Šebestova, 2013), alternative forms of childcare by private child-minders or neighbours and newly emerging corporate kindergartens have come into being since 2007,⁸ and guaranteed places in public childcare facilities have been proposed in 2017.⁹ This proposal has generated particularly lively discussion because it represents a U-turn in the Czech childcare policy to date.

The scheme of very long paid parental leave is another distinctive aspect of contemporary Czech childcare. It represents the strong orientation towards supported re-familialism and only weak decommodified defamilialisation through childcare services (Saraceno & Keck, 2011). Regardless of the low and flat rate of parental benefits, parental leave belongs to the schemes that have seen a relatively high development driven by the effort to move closer towards the principle of gender equality in recent years. It is now more flexible in terms of both the length of support period and the possibility for parents to combine work, home care and the use of formal childcare facilities.¹⁰ From this perspective, the relative flexibility of parental leave is the core presumption for the ‘intermittent’ job career for parents. These options, however, depend on labour market capacity and employment opportunities (especially part-time and flexitime) for women with small children, which are, however, limited in the Czech Republic (Plasova, 2011; Plasova & Godarova, 2015). In general, the combined effect of a persistently flat parental benefit rate and a limited supply of childcare facilities for children aged 0 to 3 years feeds the imbalance between the roles of women and men in Czech society. Nor does the ability for fathers to take parental leave lessen the problem of gender inequality — the benefit has been taken by only about 1% of fathers (Mařikova, 2008). There is also a proposal to grant regular (but not mandatory) paternal leave in the first weeks of a new-born’s life but so far it remains at the proposal stage.

METHOD AND DATA USED FOR COMPARISON

In the following text, we assess the similarities and differences between childcare policy in the Czech Republic versus Norway using three dimensions or fields of comparison created on the basis of the available evaluative literature (Rossi, Lipsey & Freeman, 1999; Hendl, 2005) and our previous methodological experience with its use (especially Horak, 2005; Horakova, 2010; Horakova & Horak, 2010). These dimensions or fields are: the population in need, policy design, and governance of policy. They take their basis from a logical model that leads to a practical solution that parallels the policy cycle model, examining public policy as a process that consists in a series of particular stages and substages comprising the initial identification of the public problem and its subsequent policy solution (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995).

Within particular dimensions and sub-dimensions of comparison (presented in Scheme 1 below), we follow the individual characteristics of both policies based on a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data obtained for the last decade: national and

⁸ This trend is represented by new facilities for children from one to six years of age that have been in place since 2014 (publicly or privately funded ‘children’s groups’) and from 4 months to 4 years of age in the form of new ‘micro-nurseries’ inaugurated in the beginning of 2017, both funded by ESE.

⁹ The guarantee of places in public childcare facilities is a current innovation that will guarantee a place in a public kindergarten or nursery for four-year-old children from September 2017, for three-year-olds from 2018 and for two-year-olds from 2020.

¹⁰ There is a single restriction on childcare and work options for parents with very young children – if they are taking benefits, parents are only allowed to place a child less than two years of age in a childcare facility for 46 hours a month.

international statistics (Czech Statistical Office, Statistics Norway, Eurostat), legislation, research studies, professional literature, newspaper articles, and interviews with key policy stakeholders¹¹ conducted by colleagues on our project team (Širovátka & Válková, 2017). Because we use a combination of data source types to cover certain comparative dimensions, they are not explicitly detailed in Scheme 1. Given the scope of this article, the quantitative data is used only to a limited extent, summarized verbally in the final comparison.

Scheme 1: Dimensions and sub-dimensions of comparison and related indicators.

Dimensions and sub-dimensions of comparison	Indicators
POPULATION IN NEED	
1. Structure of households with dependent children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> number and percentage of two-parent/single parent/at risk-of-poverty households with dependent children and households with children with special needs
2. Well-being of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to services and entitlement to benefits
3. Equality/inequality between men and women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> division of care work and unpaid housework accessibility and use of childcare facilities/ part-time jobs wage differences work position of men and women on the labour market
4. Employment of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> full-time/part-time employment of women
POLICY DESIGN	
5. Philosophy of policy design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> kind of division of care between parents, state and market supported by the policy*
6. Design of parental leave and care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> amount/extent/duration of parental benefits, entitlement to parental benefits number and percentage of public/private facilities for children of a specific age right to place children of a specific age/all children
GOVERNANCE OF POLICY	
7. Strategies of government:	
- objectives of facilities provided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> focus/content of objectives of care services provided
- to the childcare system and its environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasis on regulation/financing/accessibility/quality of public/private childcare facilities for children of a specific age emphasis on work conditions on the labour market (flexible labour market)
- to the population in need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> emphasis on advantages for all parents/single-parent households/disadvantaged families regarding taxes, services and benefits
8. Regulation at particular levels of the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> centralized/decentralized childcare system level of cooperation among social and political actors system of control
9. Financing/cost of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> state expenditure on public/private facilities subsidy of public/private facilities by parents
10. Accessibility of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> enrolment of children by age group in public/private childcare facilities in specific municipalities/regions
11. Quality of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> professional achievements of staff educational standards (child-to-staff ratio) hygienic and space standards

Note: * We used a typology of six models of the division of labour between parents, state and market suggested by Crompton (1999): male breadwinner/female carer model, dual earner/female part-time carer model, dual earner/state carer model, dual earner/marketized carer model, and dual earner/dual carer model. Source: authors

¹¹ 30 interviews with investors, regulators and care providers were conducted at the beginning of 2016 (16 in the Czech Republic and 14 in Norway).

In the first area of comparison ('population in need'), we focus on the target groups of childcare policies in both countries. We give information on the structure of households with children, the well-being of children, inequality between parents, and the employment of women. In the second area of comparison ('policy design'), we concentrate on the design of parental leave (other child and family benefits are purposely excluded),¹² and on care services in each country vis-à-vis the other. In the final area of comparison, we concentrate on four key dimensions of governance of both policies compared ('regulation and financing of childcare policies', 'accessibility and quality of childcare services'). The concept of governance is used here as a mode of coordination among different social and policy actors identifiable just in the area of regulation, financing, and the implementation of care services (cf. van Berkel, Graaf & Sirovátka, 2011; Horák, 2012; Horák, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2013). In keeping with this, we concentrate on governmental strategies, regulation at particular levels of the system, public financing and cost for consumers, and on the accessibility and quality of childcare services provided. The information thus collected allows us to compare both childcare systems ('final comparison').

POPULATION IN NEED

The focal point of childcare policy for preschool children has logically been the children themselves and the households in which they grow up. Recent childcare studies also point to other significant themes: the well-being of children, equality between men and women, and the employment of women. These are topics that should be taken into account by the policy makers who fashion childcare policies (Plasová & Kubalčíková, 2017; Bjørnholt et al., 2017).

Restricting the focus to *children* shows that both countries possess a similar childcare recipient structure, even though in terms of numbers, the figure is twice as high in the Czech Republic, as it is in Norway (in 2014, 690,000 children younger than five as against 376,000) (Eurostat, 2015). At the same time, there is an almost equal *proportion of families with dependent children and preschool children*, while the two-parent household with children (52% of households in Norway, 38% in the Czech Republic in 2014) prevails over the single-parent household with children (11% in Norway, 4% in the Czech Republic in 2014) (ČSÚ, 2015; Statistics Norway, 2015). Only a small proportion of households are at a risk of poverty (under 10% in Norway, under 15% in the Czech Republic) (Eurostat, 2015) and similarly, the proportion of children with disabilities or other specific needs (immigrant background in Norway and Romanians in the Czech Republic) is small but not insignificant (Brenna, 2010; MŠMT, 2015).

In the case of *children's well-being*, there is legislative support embodied in various exemptions for handicapped children and children from low-income households in both countries (SV, 2009). In particular, the free access of children from these groups to childcare services is heightened by the use of kindergarten and after school facilities, and the administration of public facilities within education ensures higher quality for the services provided. This is seen as the chief means of breaking the cycle of disadvantage. In Norway, it is essentially the left-wing politicians who support the idea of free services for low income groups. Such projects have been tried in the relatively disadvantaged areas of larger cities, and full participation of all children included in these schemes, usually all children aged 3–5 years, tends to result from such trial projects (Aarseth, 2014).

Looking at the *equality between men and women*, it becomes evident that Norway has one of the highest levels of gender equality in the world, while the Czech Republic contends with sharp inequalities (although women in both countries have more responsibility for the care of children). This is confirmed by the values of the global gender gap index that benchmarks the gender gap in individual countries on the basis of economic, educational, health, and political criteria.¹³ It ranks Norway third in gender equality out of all the countries surveyed in 2016 (with a score of 0.84, where 0 is inequality and 1 is complete equality), while the Czech Republic ranked 77th (with a score of 0.69). In the specific category of economic participation and opportunity, Norway's score was 0.82, placing it

¹² In addition to the benefits provided during parental leave (so-called periodic parental leave benefits according to Eurostat statistics), there are a number of other family and child benefits which cover various life situations, and which, for the sake of simplicity, we set aside in this article (these are social protection benefits for families/children, income maintenance benefits for childbirth, the Family/Child allowance to help with the costs of raising children, and the Birth Grant paid for childbirth and adoption). These benefits in fact serve to guarantee a certain living standard. In general, all these benefits in Norway have ranged from the average level for the EU25 countries to a figure several times that amount over the last decade, while in the Czech Republic the same benefits have been below the EU25 average for that same period (closer Eurostat, 2015).

¹³ The Global Gender Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories (sub-indexes): Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment (WEF, 2017).

seventh. The Czech Republic scored 0.65, putting it in the 89th position (WEF, 2016). A concrete look at the gender pay gap¹⁴ shows that whereas in Norway, women earned 14.9% below the average gross hourly earnings of men in 2016, in the Czech Republic the figure was 22.5% (vs. an EU 28 average of 16.3 %) (Eurostat, 2017a).

Although the *employment of women* is high in both countries (72.8% in Norway, 64.4% in the Czech Republic in 2016) (Eurostat, 2017b), only a small proportion of women in the Czech Republic have the opportunity to work part-time (10% in 2016 in comparison to 38.1% in Norway and 31.9% in the EU 28 (Eurostat, 2017c). This reflects a cultural pattern (supported by conservative and religious politicians as well as politically indifferent employers and citizens who expect low labour participation by women with children under three years of age, while according them a primary role in caring for these children in the home (Plasová, 2011; Válková, 2010).

POLICY DESIGN

Although the structure of the types of *benefits to families with children* is similar in Norway and the Czech Republic, they significantly differ in generosity and costs. The state expenditure on family benefits¹⁵ has consistently been one-third higher in Norway than in the Czech Republic and the average of all OECD countries (with both at similar levels of around 2% of GDP) in the last decade. Family benefits public spending in the Czech Republic is similar to the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, while the expenditure in Norway is similar to Finland and France (OECD, 2017).

Tab. 1: Family benefits public spending as a % GDP in selected European countries over the previous decade.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Norway	3.073	2.971	2.791	2.692	2.745	2.660	3.099	3.070	3.037	2.976	3.022
Czech Republic	1.680	1.744	2.055	2.015	2.252	2.300	2.423	2.380	2.201	2.181	2.216
OECD	1.966	1.940	1.925	1.931	1.943	2.073	2.263	2.235	2.149	2.146	2.139

Source: OECD (2017)

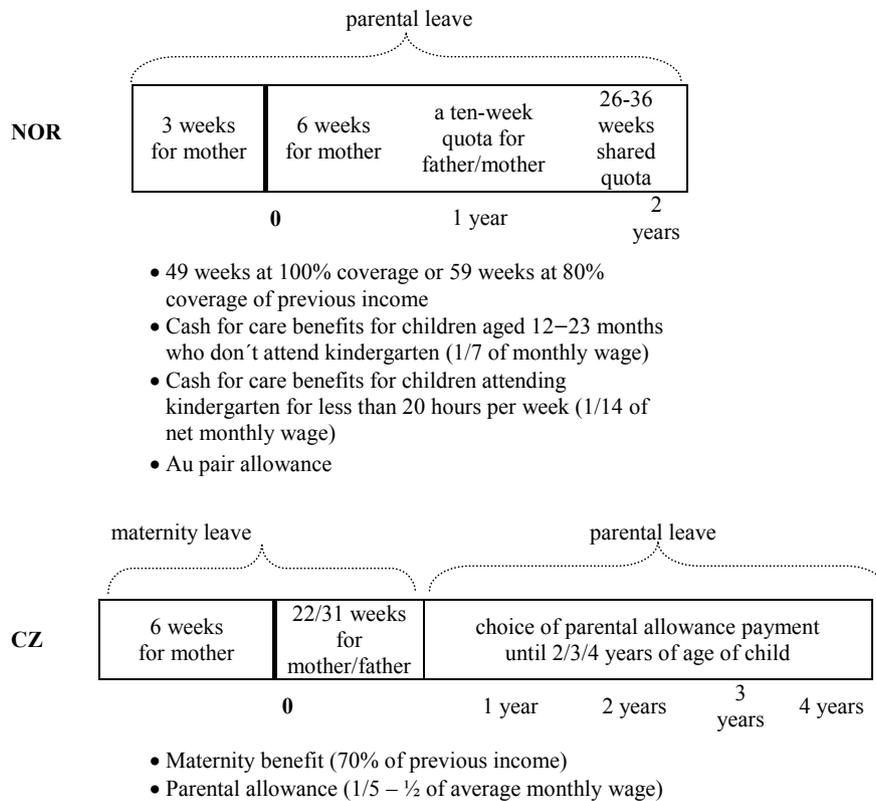
The difference between Norway and the Czech Republic exists also in the design of benefits that cover the time-period associated with the birth of a child and his subsequent care. These events are covered by benefits under the ‘parental leave’ legislation in Norway and under ‘maternity leave’ and ‘parental leave’ in the Czech Republic. Both systems differ in three key aspects: in the level of flexibility of possible take-up, in the generosity of coverage provided for income loss, and in the length of time-period the benefit is paid for (up to two years old of a child in Norway and four years in the Czech Republic) (see Scheme 2 below). The Norwegian parental leave can be characterized as a unitarily delivered and generously funded system where the benefits are calculated from the previous income and delivered for a relatively short time period (1 year and one week at 100 percent coverage, or 1 year and 11 weeks at 80 percent coverage, compared to the previous salary) (NAV, 2013).

By contrast, the maternity leave and parental leave in the Czech Republic are fragmented, poorly funded and delivered as a flat rate for a long period of time (maternity leave usually for 7 months at 70 percent coverage of the previous salary, and parental leave for 1 year and 12 weeks to 3 years and 7 months at ½ to 1/5 of the average monthly wage until the child reaches four years of age, with the level of benefit depending on how long the benefit is received) (MPSV, 2016a).

¹⁴ Gender Pay Gap is defined as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of men and women expressed as a percentage of the average gross hourly earnings of men (Eurostat 2017).

¹⁵ The family benefits spending indicator we use here in accordance with OECD (2017) reflects public spending on family benefits of three types: cash benefits, public spending on services for families with children, and financial support provided through the tax system.

Scheme 2: Systems of parental leave in Norway and in the Czech Republic.



Source: authors

The flexibility to swap take-up between parents is much greater in Norway because the involvement of fathers in caregiving is far more common than in the Czech Republic (a ten-week maximum for the mother, a ten-week maximum for the father, and a shared maximum which equals the rest of the leave period — for 6.5 or 9 months, depending on whether parents choose 100% or 80% coverage) (NAV, 2013; 2015). In the Czech Republic, the concept of active fatherhood has made its way into public policy only gradually. Fathers can alternate with mothers in the care of children on parental leave. In addition, a new instrument is planned for implementation by the Czech government at the end of 2017: a so-called ‘paternal postnatal care benefit’ amounting to 70% of the previous salary. It is intended to allow fathers to take care of new-borns until they are 6 weeks of age (MPSV, 2016b).

Whereas parents in Norway have the legal right to place all their children older than one year of age into *public or private collective facilities* (‘kindergartens’), parents in the Czech Republic have a right to place children usually older than three years into public facilities (Školský zákon, 2016). Therefore, there are also other forms of public (‘nurseries’) or private facilities in the Czech Republic (‘children’s groups’, ‘micro-nurseries’, and other private facilities provided either by professionals or as part of unregulated trade) that are more or less accessible to parents with children older than one year (see in detail below in the section on accessibility of childcare services). These facilities are established by both regional offices (in the Czech Republic) and municipalities (in both countries) as well as by the national or international care-for-profit companies, churches and parishes (in both countries) and other non-commercial, private actors (in Norway) (for more details see EC/EACEA/EURYDICE, 2015). Further aspects of these facilities in both countries are taken into account in more detail in the following sections (focusing especially on regulation, financing, accessibility, and quality).

The current Czech childcare policy design is also likely to be increasingly influenced by the new Family Policy Concept (‘Koncepte rodinné politiky’), which was created at the end of 2016 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in cooperation with the Expert

Committee on Family Policy. This strategic material proposes specific measures to address problematic topics related in particular to the gender pay gap noted above (which harms the entire family financially), to the design of the parental allowance (which is currently financially disadvantageous and provided for too long a period), to the provision of tax reductions aimed at families with children and employers (in order to improve the financial situation of families and increase the employment of women) and to the design of Czech pre-school facilities, which we discuss later in the text (especially by making them more accessible and higher quality) (see OKRP, 2017; MPSV, 2016c).

REGULATION AND FINANCING OF CHILDCARE POLICIES

The authority responsible for *the regulation of childcare* differs in Norway and in the Czech Republic depending on the extent and diversity of facilities offered in both countries. Norwegian childcare ('kindergartens') is managed by a single ministry (Ministry of Education and Research) that has the overall responsibility for financing and regulating the quality, content and security of children's rights to attend public and private pre-primary institutions (defined as pedagogical undertakings for children under school age/less than six years – 'kindergartens') (NMER, 2011). In the Czech Republic, responsibility for financing and regulating the public and (in some cases also private) pre-primary institutions are in the hands of both the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs ('children's groups', 'micro-nurseries') and the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports ('kindergartens'). Private corporations and private kindergartens that are not on the Ministry of Education's List of Legal Entities are regulated by the Ministry of Industry and Trade (Plasová & Godarová, 2015).

Whereas public kindergartens are established by the state, municipality, region or association of municipalities, private facilities are established by religious, legal persons or other legal entities. In Norway, providers of both public and private forms of kindergartens must respect the same legal framework. The responsibility for providing childcare services is held by the regional office or municipality in both countries (or trade office in case of private services in the Czech Republic) and the monitoring is performed either by the municipality (in Norway) or by the local education authority ('školský úřad') (in the Czech Republic).

The quality of care is regulated at the national level in both countries by the enforcement of hygienic standards and standards stipulating the educational and professional level of staff. In Norway, the increasing attention directed to the quality and content of kindergartens includes a provision which has been in place since 2005 that ensures children's rights to express themselves and to influence everyday life in the kindergarten (Lurie & Tjelflaat, 2012). Specific children's needs are reflected through advanced cooperation among a number of actors, especially at the local level (kindergarten directors, health centres, schools, child protection services, kindergarten teams, and pedagogical/psychological service providers). In the Czech Republic, stable cooperation takes place only between city boroughs and kindergartens and, in addition, only during periods when it is necessary to utilize the full capacity of the public kindergartens (Plasová & Godarová, 2015).

Financing of childcare is secured in both countries from national and supranational sources (state expenditure and grant schemes from the EU) and by individual fees paid by parents.

In the first case, the level of expenditure on public and private childcare services is quite high in Norway (ordinarily three times higher than in the EU, as in the case of benefits), whereas the same expenditure is at an average level in the Czech Republic (Eurostat 2015, see Table 2). These monies cover very high-quality services in both countries (public and private kindergartens in Norway and public kindergartens and other private facilities listed in the register of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports in the Czech Republic).

Tab. 2: Expenditure on pre-primary level of education as a % of GDP in the Czech Republic and Norway in 2003–2012.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
CZ	0.52	0.48	0.49	0.51	0.50	0.49	0.60	0.63	0.66	0.54
NOR	1.52	1.56	1.65	1.50	1.54	1.51	1.61	1.58	1.55	1.42
EU 28	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.50	0.51	0.52	0.56	0.56	0.57	- / a

Source: Eurostat (2015)

Note: a: Because the scale of ISCED was changed in 2012, Eurostat does not yet have all data from particular Member States.

In the second case, some public and most private facilities in both countries use ESF sources (unfortunately, accurate statistics are not available). Finally, the costs for parents in public kindergartens are graded according to the parental income in Norway and requested as a unified fee for all the parents in the Czech Republic (with exception of low-income families that have relief). The price for one full-time place in public kindergarten is similar in both countries: maximum of 4% of the household's combined salary income before tax in Norway and between 3–5% of the average wage in the Czech Republic (Haug & Storø, 2013; Horák Horáková & Sirovátka, 2013).

In Norway, parents' costs for private kindergarten differ only marginally from its public form: the only difference may be an added fee for meals in private kindergartens (Haug & Storø, 2013). On the other hand, private facilities in the Czech Republic (nurseries corporate kindergarten, babysitting etc.) are very costly, open only to wealthy parents in large cities (the cost of private nursery schools for children under three years of age are 60% of the average monthly wage compared to 44% for private kindergartens) (Horák, Horáková & Sirovátka, 2013; Plasová & Godarová, 2015). For this reason, a small number of parents in the Czech Republic hire nannies in the grey economy (where prices are much lower, and quality is ensured by references from friends (Paloncyová et al., 2013)) and other parents shy away from use of any kind of facilities and stay at home with their children.

ACCESSIBILITY AND QUALITY OF CHILDCARE SERVICES

In Norway, the same proportion of preschool children attends public and private kindergarten, whose *accessibility* is almost universal (98% in 2013). The same proportion of children in the Czech Republic attend public facilities, however accessibility for children younger three years is very poor (Eurostat 2015). Concretely, eight out of ten children under three years of age (80%) attended some preschool facilities in Norway in 2013 compared to two out of ten children (5%) in the Czech Republic (Eurostat, 2014). The number of nursery schools and children's groups focused on children older than one year is thus very limited in the Czech Republic (31 nursery schools to accommodate less than 1000 children in 2013) although the number of children's groups dramatically increased in 2016 (from 100 for 1455 children in April to 400 for 5,500 children in December) (Eurostat, 2014; IHIS, 2014; 2013; MŠMT, 2016). At the same time, kindergarten attendance for children older than three years was also higher in Norway than in the Czech Republic (96.5% versus 77% in 2013) (Eurostat, 2015; MŠMT, 2014) (for more details see Table 3).

Tab. 3: Enrolment of children by age in early childhood education and childcare in the Czech Republic and Norway in 2013.

Age	0 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 years	Total 3–5
CZ	-	-	21301	71550	101638	105265	52464	278453
Total population	108692	109146	119504	121413	122945	118385	108825	362743
In %	-	-	17.82	58.93	82.67	88.92	48.21	76.76
NOR	1894	42336	56365	60946	62981	62266*	386	186193
Total population	60530	61429	63427	64443	63386	61799*	62108	189628
In %	3.13	68.92	88.87	94.57	99.36	100	0.62	98.19

Note: *The number of enrolled children and number of children in the total population were obtained from different data sources, the disproportion between them can probably be explained by the different methodologies of data collection or by the registration of the same children in more than one kindergarten.

Source: Statistic Norway (2015), CSO (2015)

The absence of services for children under three years of age in the Czech Republic has prompted a large-scale media debate on the part of policymakers, legislators, childcare policy experts and parents over how the problem should be tackled. Czech parents also often complain about the gradual closing of kindergartens during the summer holidays (and thus, a need to repeatedly move children between kindergartens) (Plasová & Godarová, 2015). As noted above, the use of childcare facilities is significantly influenced by the

general attitudes of the public and employers, who expect women with pre-school children to stay at home and provide personal care to their children.

Both countries also differ in their strategies for dealing with children with special needs (particularly speech disorders, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and mental disability) or who are disadvantaged (especially the children of single mothers, unemployed parents, and immigrants in Norway, and Roma children in the Czech Republic). While in Norway, the clear majority of special needs children attend preschool facilities alongside healthy children (except those with visual impairments); in the Czech Republic, these children are sent to special facilities. Norwegian kindergartens are a success story, and for majority of children, kindergarten is a good place to be.

A closer look at the working conditions and the qualifications of staff in public childcare facilities – who represent the general framework for ensuring *the quality of services* – shows that the quality is good in both countries, although the maximum number of children per staff member is higher in the Czech Republic (12.9) than in Norway (3.7) (data for the 2013/2014 school year) (Eurostat, 2015; MŠMT, 2015). Norway puts strong legislative emphasis on the quality of early childhood education in public kindergartens that meet the requirements of international documents. In the Czech Republic, the quality of public childcare services is traditionally good in terms of the care provided, staff training, children's psychosocial development, pedagogical and hygienic standards (OECD, 2011b). However, the quality of private childcare facilities for children under three years of age is not controlled by law and thus is out of state control (with the exception of hygienic and qualifications standards) (Kuchařová et al., 2009; Palonciová et al., 2013).

FINAL COMPARISON - WHAT ARE KEY SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHILDCARE IN NORWAY AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC?

The childcare policies of both countries Norway and the Czech Republic have long traditions, and both serve the needs of an almost equal, similarly structured proportion of families with dependent children and preschool children. This is apparent from looking at the *population in need*. Only rarely must they contend with the needs of at-risk-of-poverty families and children with disabilities or other special needs, such as immigrants in Norway or Roma children in the Czech Republic.

Despite this, several problems have been identified related with the *well-being of parents* in the Czech Republic, specifically regarding the status of women with young children, who have reduced opportunities for permanent full-time or part-time employment. The reasons may be sought in the lack of childcare facilities for children younger than three years and in the limited accessibility of facilities for older children in some localities. A role is also played by the absence of paternity quotas in the parental allowance and by the expectations of fathers and employers that women with young children will wish to stay at home; part-time jobs also are subject to low availability. When Czech women with young children do work, they are often confronted with limited career opportunities. By comparison, Norway is characterized by a dominant sense that men and women should be equal as regards gender equality in the labour market, the quality of part-time employment, and the sharing of childcare tasks at home.

Each country has attempted to solve the issues outlined above in its own way, corresponding to differences in the countries' philosophy (in terms of attitudes toward gender equality in society and the division of care between parents, the state, and the market), the structure of their systems of benefits and childcare services, and differences in the way they conduct governance. Norway is among those countries that utilize the family policy model, combining support for familism and defamilialisation (optional defamilialisation by Leitner, 2003), where parents may choose to care for their children within the family and have the opportunity to participate part-time or full-time in the labour market, which is enabled by the existence of flexible jobs and childcare facilities. The Czech Republic represents an explicit familistic family policy model (one in which gender roles in families are often separated, fathers are the breadwinners and mothers the caregivers until their children reach three years of age) (cf. Szelewa & Polakowski, 2008; Saraceno & Keck, 2011).

In keeping with the differences in the philosophy underlying the childcare systems in the two countries, the *maternity leave systems* also differ in both countries: whereas, unitarily delivered and generously funded maternity leave calculated on the basis of previous income and delivered for a short period of time is usual in Norway, fragmented, poorly funded maternity and parental leave delivered flat-rate for a longer time period is the norm in the Czech Republic.

Similarly, the proportions of public and private childcare services provided and the legal entitlement to use them are distinct in both countries; whereas, the proportion of services is about half in Norway and Norwegian parents have the legal right to place their

child from one year of age in these facilities, private facilities are used only marginally in the Czech Republic (rather by high income households).

The current state of childcare policy for preschool children in Norway is the result of a gradual *emphasis by the government* on ensuring the rights of all children to be placed in public or private preschool institutions (universal coverage) and on improving the functioning of the entire childcare system administratively (decentralization of responsibilities to municipalities that are better able to map the real needs of children), financing (equal financial treatment of private and public kindergartens) and quality (in which the balance between care and educational goals in kindergarten is currently under discussion). Thus, the *regulation* of childcare is more advanced in Norway than in the Czech Republic, where many aspects of family policy are not covered (reversing discrimination against women with young children in the labour market, the non-existence of quality regulation of private kindergartens). In response to these challenges, the Czech government in recent years has prioritized creating an adequate number of facilities for children from an early age (because facilities in existence until 1989 have gradually been abolished) and watching out for the well-being of women. In the first case, new facilities for children from one to six years old (children's groups) and alternative forms of childcare provided by private child minders or corporate neighbours and kindergartens have been established. Additionally, the principle of having guaranteed places in public childcare facilities could help foster the expansion of institutional care options for parents. In the second case, offering tax advantages to parents and making the Czech labour market more flexible thorough part- and flexitime jobs for women have come under discussion by politicians and experts.

These trends indicate high accessibility and good quality of public and private childcare facilities, focused on educational goals for preschool children of any age, may be identified in Norway on the basis of the *output of childcare policies* designed to prevent low accessibility and the average quality of delivered public childcare facilities focused on health goals for the youngest preschool children in the Czech Republic. Hand in hand with this trend, the *financing* of childcare is well developed in Norway but underdeveloped for the youngest children and at an average level, compared to the EU standards in the case of older children in the Czech Republic. Moreover, while in Norway, fee levels for public and private services are low and essentially symbolic (about 4% of the average wage in the economy), in the Czech Republic only public services are low — fees for private facilities are high (about 50% of the average wage in the economy).

The final comparison of childcare policies for preschool childcare in both countries is given below in Scheme 3.

Scheme 3: Fields and particular dimensions of comparison of childcare policy in the Czech Republic and Norway.

Dimensions and sub-dimensions of comparison		Key characteristics	
POPULATION IN NEED	The Czech Republic	Norway	
1. Structure of households with dependent children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> about half of all households are two-parent households about one tenth of all households are single-parent households and at risk-of-poverty households small proportion of households with children with disabilities or specific needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> more than one-third of all households are two-parent households about one twenty-fifth of all households are single-parent households small proportion of households with children with disabilities or specific needs 	
2. Well-being of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> kindergarten and afterschool facilities for children with disabilities or specific needs for free (See also dimension 10) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> kindergarten and afterschool facilities for children with disabilities or specific needs for free (See also dimension 10) 	
3. Equality/inequality between men and women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unequal division of care work and unpaid housework between parents childcare is the woman's task, missing childcare facilities and part-time jobs strong gender and wage inequality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> equal division of care work and unpaid housework between parents childcare load shared equally by spouses strongly institutionalised gender and wage equality 	
4. Employment of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> high full-time and low part-time employment of women, career limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> high full- and part-time employment of women 	

Continued **Scheme 3:** Fields and particular dimensions of comparison of childcare policy in the Czech Republic and Norway.

Dimensions and sub-dimensions of comparison		Key characteristics	
POLICY DESIGN		The Czech Republic	Norway
5.	Design of parental leave and care services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fragmented, poorly funded parental leave, delivered at a flat rate over a long time-period extremely low number of public and private facilities for children under 3 years of age (public and private 'nurseries') and a gradually growing number of current ('children's group') and planned ('micro-nurseries') facilities both public and private public and private "kindergarten" for children over 3 years of age right to placement only for 5-year-old children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unitarily delivered and generously funded parental leave, calculated on the basis of previous income and delivered for short time period public or private 'kindergarten' for children from one year of age, right to placement for all children
GOVERNANCE OF POLICY			
6.	Strategies of government:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly stated educational objectives of public childcare facilities and pressure from parents on the quality of private facilities increasing the capacity of public and private facilities for children from the youngest age, tax advantages for parents and making the labour market more flexible through part- and flexitime jobs for women general benefits for single-parent households and strong support of disadvantaged families through free kindergarten and afterschool facilities, promoting the integration of Roma children in nursery schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> clearly stated educational objectives for public childcare facilities and pressure from parents for quality in private facilities universal coverage of all children, decentralization of responsibilities to municipalities, equal financial treatment of private and public kindergartens and improving the quality of services provided targeted benefits for single-parent households, support the integration of immigrant children and handicapped children in mainstream kindergartens (except for the visually impaired)
7.	Regulation at particular levels of the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> decentralised system, insufficient cooperation by actors at particular levels and limited control of quality in private facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> decentralized system, well-developed cooperation among actors and a system of controls
8.	Financing/cost of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> substantial state subsidies for public kindergartens for children aged 3 to 6 and symbolic/low payments for parents high cost of private childcare for private facilities for children under and over three tax deductions for children attending childcare facilities and financial discounts for at risk-of-poverty households 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Substantial state subsidies for public and private facilities parental income subsidy benefits and tax advantages for single parents
9.	Accessibility of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> limited accessibility for children younger than 3 years, especially in big cities, and good accessibility for older children, with large intraregional differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> full accessibility for ordinary and disabled children older than 1 year, overcapacity in some municipalities
10.	Quality of care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> high professional, educational and hygienic and placement quality in public facilities, with limits on the child-to-staff-ratio, not checked in private facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> high professional, educational and hygienic and placement quality in public and private facilities

Source: authors

In general, family and childcare policy in Norway is widely elaborated, comprehensive and accessible, and thus, it presents the suitable benchmark for the Czech Republic (Sirovátka & Válková, 2016). A wide security net of benefits and childcare schemes based on the notion of equality of opportunity is provided, in which the model of valence rather than position politics prevails. The result is no deep division between political parties or population categories when it comes to ends. Values and principles of gender equality, labour market participation by both genders, and the need for a comprehensive childcare system are widely shared. In contrast to the Czech Republic, family policy in Norway is highly reactive, that is, it responds to the needs of the target group. The government introduces or enlarges services or provisions if there is a public interest in them. The fast development of childcare services in the 2000s (the so called ‘toddler invasion’, Ellingsæter, 2012) accompanied by the strong emphasis on their increasing quality is one example of such policy reactivity. Although enrolment rates of children below 3 years in nursery schools and kindergartens was relatively similar (similarly low) in both countries, only in Norway, it started to grow very fast towards a universal arrangement that is now reflected both in that day care is institutionalised as a social right for children in the age group 1—5 years and that the great majority of children in this age group (90%) are enrolled in childcare services (Ellingsæter, 2012). Sirovátka and Válková (2016) explain this by the ‘policy feedback’ (Jordan 2013) that resulted in providing stronger support to gender equality and the dual earner/dual carer model in Norway, while in the Czech Republic, it resulted in the persisting re-familisation. The Czech family policy response on the needs of target group is rather weak and it manifests in relatively strong path-dependency, which is strengthened by the fiscal possibilities and pressures. Social welfare provisions are realised only inside the financial framework set by the government (this especially limits the development of social care services). The contemporary design of Czech family policy is thus the outgrowth of government decisions from the communist era; changes in family policy after communism’s collapse in 1989 were not so significant (Hašková, 2007; Hašková & Saxonberg, 2012).

To summarize, our analysis has shown that the principle differences in childcare policy have persisted and been adapted to suit the key features of the respective welfare regimes. Policies are in both cases less sensitive to the needs of children with specific needs (such as migrants in Norway or Roma children in the Czech Republic). The central values that drive childcare policy, however, differ between the two countries. While in Norway, the key idea of childcare policy is the principle of equity and opportunity for parents to choose the most feasible childcare arrangement; in the Czech Republic, persistent re-familisation and strong ‘family dependency’ among individuals are primary. This is reflected in the structure and extent of policy measures offered in the countries as well. Unlike in Norway, in the Czech Republic — despite a declared interest in bolstering equality — the real-world family life choices that Czech parents have at their disposal are limited. The capacity of public childcare facilities is inadequate, there is a lack of public support for private childcare services and flexible working arrangements, and there is no functioning active fatherhood component in Czech childcare policy as yet.

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