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Volume 34 - Post-Communist Reform in the Czech Republic: Progress and Problems (2016)

Perspectives on Business and Economics

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2016

# Gender Inequality in the Czech Republic: Institutional and Societal Barriers to Equality

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## Recommended Citation

Heintzelman, Lisa, "Gender Inequality in the Czech Republic: Institutional and Societal Barriers to Equality" (2016). *Volume 34 - Post-Communist Reform in the Czech Republic: Progress and Problems (2016)*. Paper 7.  
<http://preserve.lehigh.edu/perspectives-v34/7>

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# GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIETAL BARRIERS TO EQUALITY

*Lisa Heintzelman*



## Introduction

In 2014 the Czech Republic had the second largest overall gender gap in the European Union (EU), Malta having the largest. Based on its overall gender gap index, which measures how women fare relative to men on various measures (including economic participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment), the Czech Republic ranked 96 out of 142 countries in the world (Schwab et al., p. 9).<sup>1</sup> Gender equality in the Czech Republic has declined over the past ten years—it had been ranked 53rd in 2006 but dropped to 75th by 2011. Alarming, the Czech Republic fell 13

places between 2013 and 2014. Although it joins many other countries that have closed the educational gender gap, with a first-place score, and although it achieves top scores in “Health and Survival,” it does very poorly in all the economic and political rankings. Gender equality is clearly an important social issue; however, it is also a serious economic issue when countries waste the scarce resources of talented female workers. There are significant economic benefits to a country when women participate in the labor force at the same rate as men do,<sup>2</sup> which will only happen when women have the same opportunities in the labor force as men and are fairly treated and paid.

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<sup>1</sup>Since 2009, Iceland has been ranked first, with the narrowest gender gap in the world, which provides a benchmark for gender equality conditions. Examining surrounding European countries helps gauge the relative gender equality conditions in the Czech Republic; by this measure, Austria is 36th, Poland 57th, Slovak Republic 90th, and Hungary 93rd (the U.S. ranked 20th).

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<sup>2</sup>The McKinsey Global Institute estimates a \$28 trillion, or a 26 percent, increase in the annual global GDP in 2025 if women were to participate in the labor force at the same rates as men. This economic gain would require a rise in female participation from the 64 percent today to 95 percent by 2025, which, although unlikely in the short term, reinforces the importance of working toward gender parity in the future.

According to a study by the McKinsey Global Institute, women comprise 50 percent of the global working-age population but create only 37 percent of global GDP. Every nation would be better off if men and women were leading full, balanced lives; this can only happen when men and women are treated with parity.

The legacies of communism as well as lingering traditional stereotypes have made the gender inequality situation especially dire in the Czech Republic. Women in the Czech Republic struggle to find a healthy work-life balance due to many factors, including the maternity-leave structure, current societal norms, few childcare facilities, and a lack of flexible working arrangements. The discrimination that many women face in the Czech Republic can be seen through several factors, including women's lower labor force participation rate, occupational segregation, and a large and persistent gender wage gap.

In this article, I examine the current situation for women in the Czech Republic and suggest possible ways in which government policies can be used to create a more equal society. The first section examines the history that has led to the current situation. Section two considers women's educational choices. Section three describes women in the labor force, including potential discrimination they face as well as occupational segregation. Section four discusses the current government policies that attempt to combat gender inequality. In the last section, I suggest possible solutions to improve women's position in the Czech Republic.

## **The History of Gender Inequality**

To understand the existing policies and social norms regarding gender equality, it is important to examine the history of the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic has not always been so far behind other countries in promoting gender equality. Indeed, in the early 1900s it was considered progressive in its views and actions toward gender equality. T.G. Masaryk, the first Czechoslovak president (1918–1935), championed gender equality and felt there was “a profound connection between building a real democracy and supporting women's participation in societal life” (Koldinská,

p. 8). In the first Czechoslovak Constitution in 1920, women were granted the right to vote, a success for the young nation, and soon after women's groups became active in efforts to enforce equal treatment of women. However, World War II and the following communist era stifled these early triumphs in gender equality (Koldinská, p. 8).

By 1939, the Czech Republic began experiencing compulsory labor force participation to combat the prevalent poverty, so women entered the workforce in masses and the trend of dual earners began (Koldinská, p. 8). As the communist government took over and began to run all aspects of society, the movement to improve women's position in society waned, and instead women's rights ended up being an instrument of communist propaganda (Koldinská, p. 8). Under communism, women were incentivized to work, which caused female employment to rise rapidly. This, combined with the use of propaganda, created the image of a full-time working mother who used extensive childcare services and managed household duties (Koldinská, p. 8). It must be kept in mind that the high female employment level under communism was used mostly to combat poverty and not necessarily to improve women's equality. Yet these measures increased women's overall labor market participation and childcare support, as a dense network of childcare facilities was established starting in 1950.

However, these socialist policies that artificially made men and women appear equal did not change societal attitudes or eradicate gender stereotypes. Women still had the double burden of caring for a household as well as working full time, so they were seen as the inferior earners while men were career-focused. These roles further perpetuated stereotypes of men being the main breadwinners and women the caretakers (Jonášová et al.). The events that occurred during and shortly after the communist era ended have shaped the policies and attitudes that exist in the Czech Republic today; these connections are discussed later. The next section explores the education of women and how their choice of college major can influence occupational segregation in the

**Table 1**  
**Female Tertiary Graduates as Percentage of Total Graduates**

Field of Study	Czech Republic	EU Average
Education and training	80.7	79.4
Humanities and arts	70.6	67.5
Social science, business, and law	68.3	61.5
Science, math, and computing	38.1	40.3
Engineering, manufacturing, and construction	28.0	26.9
Health and welfare	83.2	75.4
Math, science, and technology	11.5	12.6
Science, math, computing engineering, manufacturing, and construction	37.2	35.2

*Source:* Eurostat 2012.

workforce.

### **Women's Educational Choices**

Before looking at women's participation in the workforce and possible discrimination against them, it is important to examine the role of education in affecting women's labor market choices. Because higher education is free, the Czech Republic is a very well-educated country; in fact, it has the highest attainment of tertiary or upper-secondary education in the EU, with 87 percent of the population achieving this education level, well above the EU average of 72.7 percent. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment, in which 15-year-olds worldwide take examinations to measure their academic success, Czech students score above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) averages in science and math, while falling just below the average in the science assessment. Girls score higher on average in reading, but boys outscore girls narrowly in math, and both have the same average score in science (OECD). Thus, younger students are getting equal instruction in each area of study and receive the same opportunity in their secondary-level education. Academic segregation—men and women making different choices about fields

of study—does not occur until students reach the tertiary level, which includes short-term vocational schools to doctoral programs, where they have greater control over their studies.

Once students advance to the tertiary education level, there are more women enrolled at the university level, with women comprising 57 percent of all students (Eurostat). More women go on to complete university degrees than men as well, at 21 percent and 20 percent, respectively (OECD). Yet, this numerical advantage of women over men does not translate to higher female employment. As seen in Table 1, there is extensive gender segregation in fields of study, with students entering those fields that are considered traditional for their gender. Women tend to prefer fields in the healthcare and education sectors, where 80 percent of the graduates are female, whereas science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, as well as construction and manufacturing, see a female deficit. It should be kept in mind, though, that this type of difference in majors chosen by men and women is seen across the EU and throughout the world.

As Table 1 shows, the segregation by field of study in tertiary studies in the Czech Republic is comparable to what is found in the rest of the EU; however, in the

Czech Republic these gender differences are increasing.<sup>3</sup> Over the period 2003–2012, graduation rates of women in traditionally female fields have been increasing, whereas the number of female graduates in the non-traditional degrees (e.g., STEM fields) have been constant or decreasing (Eurostat). Czech women inevitably pursue careers in traditional fields and are at a disadvantage because their true strengths may lie within the math and science realm. Therefore, it is vital that young women be encouraged to take an interest in non-traditional subjects despite the stereotype that men flourish in this area of academia. This will allow women to seek greater career opportunities.

Men and women appear to have the same academic opportunities in the Czech education system. Consequently, if more women are graduating from Czech universities every year, in a truly equal society there should be a greater number of women than men in the workforce, but this inference does not hold true. The superb academic environment gives way to unsatisfactory working situations for women. In the next section, I examine the conditions in the workforce, which may lead to a better understanding of the gender gap by occupation.

### **Women in the Workforce: Barriers to Economic Participation and Opportunity**

According to Schwab and colleagues, between 2013 and 2014 the ranking of the Czech Republic fell from 95 to 100 out of 142 in the “Economic Participation and Opportunity” category. This means that Czech women’s experience in the workforce is much worse than in most other countries at comparable levels of development. In this section I investigate why this is so by looking at the experience of Czech women at work, including potential discrimination against women, employment rates, the occupational segregation (both horizontal and vertical) that

exists, and the very large gender pay gap that Czech women face in most occupations. These obstacles in the Czech work environment not only hurt a woman’s standard of living but also, if a woman feels she is being treated unfairly, may act as a strong disincentive to work.

### **Discrimination**

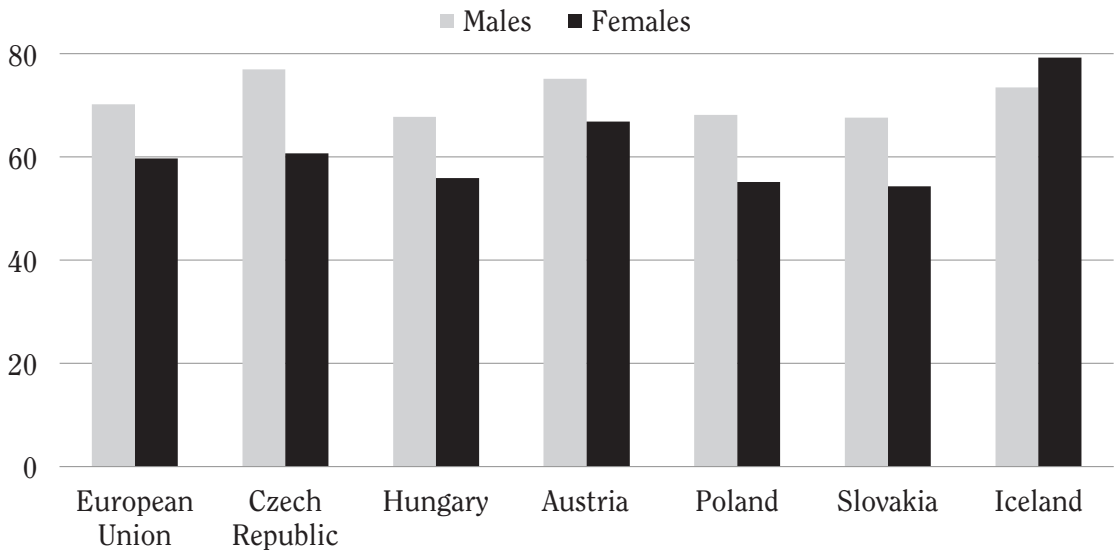
Discrimination can be defined as “employment, wage, and promotion practices that result in workers who are equal with respect to their productivity being treated differently because of...characteristics unrelated to their job performance” (Hyclak et al., pp. 355–56). According to McKinsey, women worldwide are underrepresented at every level in the workforce. This may be due to labor market discrimination, which can occur at all stages of the work process—hiring, promotion, remuneration, and everyday office settings. Women may be discriminated against in the workplace because of personal prejudices that employers may hold, which prevent them from hiring certain applicants. In addition, “unfair stereotyping” of women, in which incorrect or outdated data are used to characterize women, can lead to women not being hired. Certain fields can become “crowded with women” due to discrimination, prejudices, or women’s inability to search freely for jobs because of their household or family responsibilities (a woman is more apt to put her family’s perceived needs or husband’s job first and then find herself a job, so she may face more self-imposed constraints). This “job crowding” contributes to lower wages that are typically found in so-called female fields, such as education and healthcare, which further worsens the gender pay gap (Hyclak et al., p. 372).

Despite the fact that more women are graduating from university each year, with 164.5 Czech female graduates for every 100 male graduates in 2012 (both vocational education level and bachelor’s level), a larger percentage of men are employed (Eurostat). Figure 1 presents the employment rates of male and female bachelor’s, master’s, and Ph.D. graduates in the Czech Republic and in several other countries in 2014. It is notable that in each country male tertiary-level

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<sup>3</sup>From 2003 to 2012, the Czech Republic saw a 6.7 percent decrease in female graduates in STEM fields compared with an EU average of a 1.9 percent increase in those fields (Eurostat).

**Figure 1**  
**Employment Rates (%) of Tertiary-Level Graduates Ages 15–64**



*Source:* Author's calculations using Eurostat data, 2014.

graduates have higher employment rates than do comparable women. Furthermore, according to Schwab and colleagues, these relative employment disparities align closely with the country ranking according to their gender gap indexes. With the highest gender equality ranking in the world, Iceland achieves almost equal employment of men and women, with only a 4.9 percentage point difference. Conversely, the Czech Republic, regarded as having the lowest degree of gender equality in the EU, experiences the largest gap, 14.9 percentage points, which is a strong indicator of the labor market disparity Czech women confront (Eurostat).

Figure 1 leads to the obvious question: Why are more men finding jobs than women? Men and women receive equal educational experiences, but there is inequality in the opportunities they choose after graduation. Admittedly, these different employment rates may be partially due to women's choices of majors, which limit their post-graduation job opportunities, as well as women's choices of jobs. However, causes for these trends

must also be examined (specifically, the communist legacy and prevailing stereotypes) to see whether discrimination or some other phenomenon may create an unfavorable work environment.

### **Occupational (or Horizontal) Segregation**

Another indicator of gender inequality is occupational segregation, which occurs when men and women are not evenly distributed across careers and instead are concentrated in what has come to be known as gender-specific industries and occupations. This phenomenon is common in many countries, including the United States, but is particularly noticeable in certain countries with high gender-inequality rankings. Paul Swanson has studied the Duncan index of dissimilarity, which is a measure of the degree of occupational segregation, and found conditions in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Sweden to be particularly bad (cited in Hyclak et al., p. 360).

In the Czech Republic, the distribution



of women and men across occupations is characterized by extreme gender differences (“The Current Situation...,” p. 9). Careers like administrative workers and nurses are overcrowded with women, who make up 84 percent and 95 percent of those jobs, respectively. In contrast, men pursue more technical or manual roles (Křížková, p. 4) such as construction, which is the second most popular male field, comprising 15.5 percent of all working Czech men but only 1.7 percent of working Czech women (“The Current Situation...,” p. 8). Occupational segregation causes the phenomenon of “crowding” that can lead certain fields to have a higher supply of workers than the field needs. This surplus of workers, particularly in traditionally female fields, can result in low wages or lead to unemployment when there are no job openings (Hyclak et al., p. 372).

### **Vertical Segregation**

Vertical segregation, or the concentration of women in different job ranks, prevents women from achieving upper-level executive positions within their workplace (European Foundation...). Czech companies are missing an opportunity to achieve economic success by failing to diversify their upper-level and board positions. As of 2011, women occupied only 12 percent of the board positions in large companies, which is below the EU average of 14 percent. This small number of women on boards has increased by only one percentage point since 2004, showing that companies are not taking the initiative to promote deserving women into prominent positions (“The Current Situation...,” p. 10). Only nine percent of women are on the statutory bodies of the 100 largest Czech companies; the smallest female representation on supervisory boards exists in banks, financial groups, and insurance companies (Koldinská, p. 20).

However, increasing the number of women in management is a very slow process. The situation is, to some extent, a result of the poor structure of maternity leave and childcare policies, which I discuss later. Many of the female candidates have left the workforce to raise their children, so when managers are looking for employees to promote, more men

have the qualifications needed. There are currently no policies or measures to tackle the strong gender segregation in the labor market (Křížková). But ultimately, firms are harmed by this segregation because they are not making the best use of the human capital available to them.

### **The Gender Pay Gap**

Admittedly the overall gender pay gap may be a flawed measure of discrimination as it reflects in part women’s choices with respect to fields of study and career and the decision to work full time or part time. However, this aggregate measure is useful for comparing Czech women’s pay—relative to men—to that in other countries. In addition, it is beneficial to see how this gap has changed through time. In 2014 the Czech Republic was ranked 119 out of 131 in wage equality, according to the gender gap index rankings, which is reflected in its very high gender pay gap (Schwab et al., p. 65). On average, in 2011 men earned 25.5 percent more than women, compared with the EU average of 16.4 percent (“The Current Situation...,” p. 11). Within-job wage inequality is prevalent as well, with Czech women receiving 10 percent lower pay than their male counterparts when performing the same job in the same company (Křížková, p. 4).

Although statistics are unavailable on the pay gap by marital status or family structure, the data can be classified by age range. For women ages 25 to 34, the pay gap is 11.9 percent, the second worst in the EU. By ages 35 to 44, when most women are raising children, there is a sharp increase in the pay gap to 29.2 percent, which is the worst pay gap in the EU (Eurostat). Not only is the pay gap much worse in the Czech Republic at all levels but also the gap grows as women move into their prime career years. Women who must leave the workforce to raise children, due to lack of childcare arrangements, are further penalized by noticeably reduced pay compared with their male coworkers.

Moving up the corporate ladder only aggravates the pay inequality that women face. In upper-management positions, where women are a clear minority, the pay gap can reach up to 48 percent (Křížková, p. 4). This large gap

provides little motivation for women to move into management positions, where they would have more responsibility but not a proportional pay raise. Their low pay reflects a low value placed on female employees.

The gender pay gap points to the deeply ingrained gender discrimination in the Czech labor market. For mothers on maternity leave, there is less incentive to return to work if they will be penalized for their time away by receiving much lower pay than men. Additionally, the large gender pay gap creates an economic incentive for women to care for children and take maternity pay rather than return to work (Koldinská, p. 17). With fewer working mothers in the labor force, the employment gap increases, as does the loss of potential economic earnings. In short, the current work environment in the Czech Republic has many characteristics that are unfavorable to women due to both women's personal career choices and labor market discrimination. In the next section, I examine government policies to address these concerns.

## **Government Policies: Do They Help or Hinder Women?**

In this section I discuss how Czech government policies, notably those for maternity leave and childcare, may actually have hindered women's economic progress.

### **Maternity Leave**

Family policies in the Czech Republic have a major influence on the labor force participation of women with young children. The government lacks policies that facilitate the reconciliation of work and childcare, making it harder for mothers to return to work. The long maternity leave and subsequent parental leave may, at first, seem to be desirable policies for mothers, but they may end up hurting women in the long run. The Czech Republic has one of the longest maternity leaves in the world (Jonášová et al.), lasting a maximum of 28 weeks and beginning six weeks prior to the due date. The law also states that the maternity leave has to be a minimum of 14 weeks and must extend at least six weeks after the birth (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

[MLSA]...). This mandated length allows women to appreciate the joys of motherhood without worrying about job security, but it also eliminates the choice for career-driven mothers to go back to work immediately after birth.

All employers are obligated to grant maternity leave to both male and female employees. Although employees do not receive pay during this period, their positions are held for them to return to upon the conclusion of the leave (MLSA...). As maternity leave ends, new parents can use the flexible parental leave policy; they can choose the length and continuity of the leave up until their child's third birthday and start or stop the leave anytime, at their convenience (MLSA...). Parental leave is available to both mothers and fathers, but only two percent of men accept this responsibility (Jonášová et al.). Men are viewed negatively and seen as submissive if they share in childcare duties. This hinders women who want a career yet are expected to care for the children. The parental leave could extend to three years, so women struggle to maintain their career expertise and reenter the workplace. Many women consequently fall behind in their careers during this time, which contributes to the large pay gap in the Czech Republic (Jonášová et al.). Furthermore, the gender pay gap increases over time for mothers using parental leave (Formánková and Dobrotić, p. 418).

Not only does the maternity policy contribute to the gender pay gap but also it has an impact on female employment. As Formánková and Dobrotić (p. 42) note, Czech women experience the highest impact of parenthood among all EU countries, with employment of Czech women 32.3 percent lower due to motherhood. When they return to work, they may face a steep learning curve to reestablish their skills and may experience discrimination from their employers, being penalized for their leave.

Czech employees are not guaranteed the same jobs they held prior to their leave; but the employer must offer a position corresponding to the parent's skill level until the child turns three (European Platform...). Job security is one benefit of this family policy;



however, some employers exploit women returning from parental leave by offering them a position that requires lower qualifications with fewer responsibilities than the previous job. Employers can also discriminate against working mothers by seeking loopholes in labor regulations to dismiss the employee. Even if employers hold the new mothers' jobs during leave, they can terminate them at any time, including their first day back, an outcome that occurs often (Jonášová et al.).

Although the maternity and parental policies of the Czech Republic seem generous and flexible, they may actually make it difficult for mothers to seek employment and find a work-life balance (Formánková and Dobrotić, p. 410). This institutionalized problem is exacerbated by the lack of childcare facilities for children of pre-kindergarten age. I examine this dearth of childcare and its impact on women's lives.

## Childcare

The extreme shortage of childcare facilities that exists in the Czech Republic puts a strain on new mothers. The fall of communism signaled the end to the mandatory work requirement for women, causing unemployment to rise and fertility rates to fall. Childcare facilities were no longer viewed as necessary to support working mothers and lacked national support, so their number rapidly declined in the 1990s (Formánková and Dobrotić, p. 413). Although there were 1,043 childcare facilities for children in 1991, that number fell to only 46 in the nation by 2011 (MLSA...). Health and safety concerns contributed to this significant decline, as strict operating regulations forced many childcare facilities out of business (European Platform...). As they closed, childcare responsibilities shifted dramatically from the government to the families, burdening them with finding alternative arrangements.

Despite a high demand for pre-kindergarten care for children under the age of three, only four percent were enrolled in such care in 2012 (European Platform...). Nonetheless, the government currently has no immediate plans to increase the number of daycare facilities (European Platform...).

Figure 2 shows the availability of childcare facilities for young children across the EU.<sup>4</sup> The Czech Republic finds 98 percent of children three or younger spending zero hours per week in childcare facilities, the lowest percentage in the EU. For children over the age of three, there is a more established network of kindergartens; but these institutions could be improved by providing more flexible hours to suit the needs of working parents (MLSA...).

The current childcare structure leaves parents of young children with few options, obligating them either to turn to nontraditional or expensive alternatives or to take time away from their careers using parental leave, which in turn supports a culture of full-time motherhood (Formánková and Dobrotić, p. 414). This shortage of childcare facilities can be seen in the employment figures, with only 34.4 percent of women with children under the age of six employed, compared to 93.8 percent of men (Formánková and Dobrotić, p. 420). The extreme reduction in the number of children in childcare facilities creates a hardship for women seeking work-life balance and has a direct impact on the labor force participation of women with children.

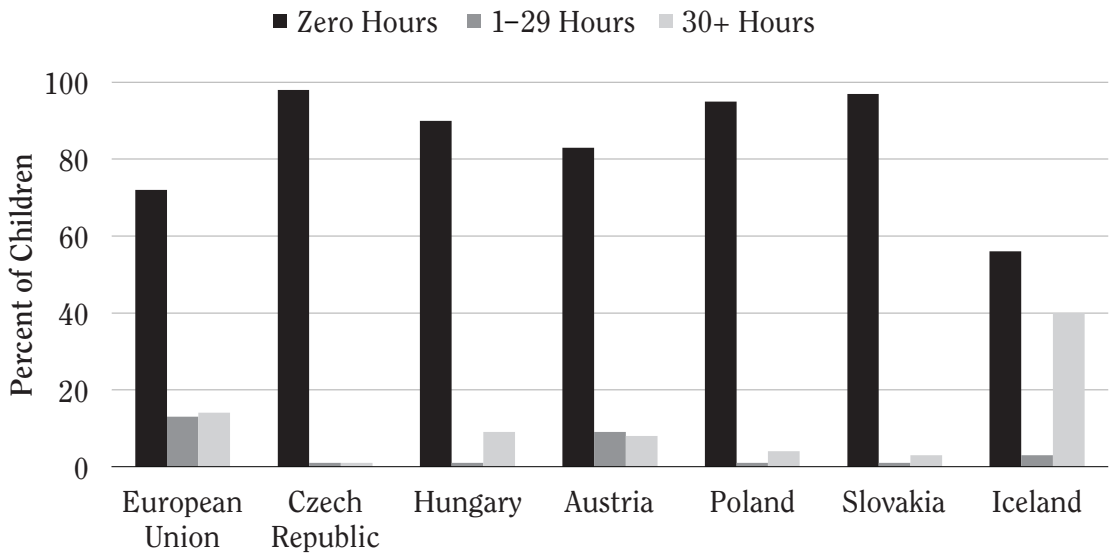
Currently, strengthening the childcare network is not a priority of the government and its family policy. Instead, families must find solutions other than government support. In addition to childcare challenges, societal barriers also have an impact on women's decisions to take long parental leaves. As discussed previously, the Czech social environment supports traditional gender roles (Křížková, p. 3). Women who do not take advantage of the long parental leave offered by the Czech government are often viewed as "heartless mothers," "overly ambitious," or "career-oriented go-getters" (Jonášová et al.). These negative labels, combined with the difficulty in finding childcare, influence women to forgo a career in exchange for full-time motherhood.

Due to these institutional and societal

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<sup>4</sup>Iceland has the smallest gender pay gap but provides the most childcare: 40 percent of children under the age of three receive at least 30 hours of childcare per week. There appears to be a correlation between the apparent gender pay gap and the amount of childcare provided.

**Figure 2**  
**Percent of Children 3 or Younger in Childcare, by Hours/Week**



Source: Author's calculations using Eurostat data, 2013.

customs, the Czech Republic faces the “highest negative impact of parenthood on employment among all EU countries” (Formánková and Dobrotić, p. 410). The long breaks in employment, the difficulty in reconciling work and care, and societal judgment keep working mothers away from the labor force. The challenge of balancing parenthood and work adversely affects women’s careers, as seen in their long absences from work as well as in the gender gaps in both rates of employment and pay. In the next section, I present and evaluate various measures and policies that may fix these gaps.

### **How to Fix the Gender Inequality Problem**

In the previous sections, I discussed the many obstacles women face in the Czech Republic. Next, I examine possible solutions to the problem by looking at flexible work schemes, including part-time work, the empowerment of women through legislating female representation in politics, and current government legislation dealing with gender inequality issues.

### **Flexible Work Schemes: Is Part-Time Work the Answer?**

As a solution to the challenge of balancing work and family life, women may seek more flexible working arrangements. In surveys taken in the Czech Republic, women expressed their desire for alternative working arrangements to aid in work-life balance: 63 percent of women want to work during maternity leave; 54 percent of mothers would like flexible working hours or the opportunity to work from home; 43 percent of women would welcome part-time schedules (Jonášová et al.). Yet part-time work is relatively uncommon in the Czech Republic compared to other (developed) countries in the EU. Only eight percent of women are provided with these flexible options, and the government has never introduced measures to support this provision (Jonášová et al.). Employers in the Czech Republic do not like to allow workers to reduce their hours, and employees rarely ask for this flexible arrangement. Full-time work is ingrained in Czech history, as a result of the communist era (Koldinská, p. 19).

With few opportunities for flexible working arrangements, women must choose to work full time or not at all, contributing to the low employment of working mothers.

According to Claudia Goldin, the last step in achieving gender equality does not necessarily require government involvement; instead, it must include changes in the labor market to “enhance temporal flexibility.” The gender pay gap could shrink if companies did not disproportionately reward employees who worked longer hours or “particular hours.” The solution “must involve a reduction in the dependence of remuneration on particular segments of time” (Goldin, p. 1,117). Thus, flexibility is a key factor to grappling with women’s employment choices.

### **Women in Politics**

The Global Gender Gap Report of 2014 considers political empowerment a fundamental requirement for gender equality. The Czech Republic, which ranks 109 out of 142 in “political empowerment,” experiences an underrepresentation of women in politics (Schwab et al., p. 9). Political power is vital to equality, and there is currently little opportunity for women to gain political positions. In both the 2004 and 2009 Parliament elections, the Czech Republic had the second lowest representation of women in the EU, only ahead of Malta, where no women were elected to Parliament (Šprincová and Adamusová, p. 5). In the European Parliament in 2015 only 23.8 percent of Czech politicians elected were women, so it did not reach the critical 30 percent threshold of female representation that the EU requires. In the other Czech political institutions, women comprise fewer than 20 percent of all politicians. Although the Czech Republic has low representation of women, it is important to keep in mind that other countries struggle with low political representation of women as well, including the United States.

Despite the underrepresentation, the Czech government does not currently have any legislation in progress to increase women’s participation in the political life of the country (Koldinská, p. 20). Past elections have proved that voters support female candidates, but the political parties do not nominate women in

agreement with their constituents’ votes. To increase female representation, political parties must nominate women to electable positions, especially the party with the highest number of votes that has the most influence on the final political representation within the governing body (Šprincová and Adamusová, pp. 7–8).

Once elected, women have a low share of decision-making power within parties at all levels of politics, and their opinions are less respected (Koldinská). Moving up the political ladder, there is a clear trend that the more senior the position, the fewer women in office (Šprincová and Adamusová, p. 4). Men are associated with governmental departments that are viewed as vital and powerful, whereas women more commonly work in “humanistic and social” departments that are regarded as less important (Koldinská, p. 20). Female politicians are rare in the so-called power sectors, like finance, defense, and transport, and in other departments dealing with issues of national importance (Šprincová and Adamusová, p. 4). The absence of women in influential political offices demonstrates the unmistakable gender segregation in Czech politics. The Czech Republic needs women in politics to shape policy, champion initiatives aimed at closing the gender gap, and help overcome the glass ceiling that exists in Czech politics. One way to have more women in politics would be to introduce legal quotas for female representation, as has been successfully implemented in eight EU countries as of 2013. These quotas range from 30 to 50 percent and carry with them sanctions for non-compliance (Dahlerup et al.). Another step would be to provide support for nongovernmental organizations that promote gender-equality principles.

### **The Current Legal System and Relevant Legislation**

Government policies and legislation can be used to combat gender inequality. However, the Czech government has so far done little to create equality, even when problems are identified. It did not incorporate equality of men and women into law until the late 1900s when its goal to become a member of the EU forced it to harmonize Czech law with EU law.

The Anti-Discrimination Act (ADA) and the Labour Code are currently the main pieces of Czech legislation to enforce equality. The ADA of 2009, which was adopted hesitantly by legislators, outlines the concepts of equality, including legally defining discrimination and harassment. It establishes equal access to employment, requires that employers deliver equal treatment, and implements the antidiscrimination directives required for EU accession; but it goes no further to address gender equality or discrimination. The Labour Code also outlaws discrimination in the workplace, especially concerning remuneration and equal treatment. Although these policies are written into law, they are rarely enforced in practice. For example, the Labour Code's equal pay provision is not enforced, as evidenced by the gender pay gap (Koldinská, pp. 7–14).

The Department of Equal Opportunities for Men and Women coordinates the national effort to promote equal opportunities for men and women. Within the Department, the Government Council for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, a permanent advisory board, is the main body to promote equality by creating proposals for methods to increase equality, identifying problems, and setting priorities regarding gender equality (Gunda Werner Institute). Yet, a government advisory board with no tools to implement gender policies is ineffective; the board can only discuss and recommend certain policies, but its impact should stretch far beyond that. When examining the government priorities and recent legislation related to gender equality, the results are disappointing. The official agenda of the Czech government does not focus explicitly on equal opportunity issues and currently has no political movements to support equality (Gunda Werner Institute). One positive measure is the recent passing of Act No. 274/2014 Coll., that would provide support for the creation of children's groups, a type of childcare arrangement. Employers are incentivized through tax breaks to create private children's groups for their employees to allow mothers to return to work (Koldinská, p. 18).

In 2014 the Czech government released its "Government Strategy for Equality of

Women and Men in the Czech Republic for 2014–2020" (Department of Human Rights and Minorities). The report identifies current problems, sets goals to achieve gender equality, and outlines the main strategic areas (e.g., labor market equality, women in decision-making positions, and reconciliation of family and working life). It targets problems, for example, low female employment, and specific goals—in this case, that female employment reach 65 percent (Department..., p. 16). However, this document is vague in defining precise actions the government is going to take to achieve these goals, and sometimes the goals are only to create action plans by 2020, which may not be implemented until long after.

## Conclusion

Because the causes of gender inequality are complex, there is not a simple solution. The Czech government has often been criticized for its inability to prioritize equality policy and to implement legislation. However, with few data available, it is difficult to determine if the recent equality measures that the Czech government has enacted will have an impact on the lives of working mothers. The gender discrimination in the Czech Republic may be a greater problem than any one piece of legislation can fix because it is difficult to change the attitudes and behaviors of an entire nation (Koldinská, p. 9). Yet, the government must continue to promote equal rights of men and women and lead by example, as a positive role model for the Czech people.

With the government reminding its citizens that equality is vital, the private sector can also take the lead in implementing programs to help working mothers. By extending part-time work, providing childcare facilities, and helping families find flexible working arrangements, the private sector can more easily offer options that will ease the work-life balance for families and encourage women to re-enter the labor force. Such solutions could be implemented immediately at the discretion of each company, without having to fight the bureaucracy associated with government legislation.

In the end, though, it is crucial to remember that no one law, policy, or program

will close the gender gap and solve all the problems associated with the inequality of men and women, especially when women themselves may make choices that have a negative impact on their future career prospects. Admittedly, some women do not re-enter the labor force out of personal choice; however, decisions not to work should be their own, rather than a consequence of institutional and societal

barriers. By listening to what Czechs need, the government and private sector must work together to provide solutions ensuring an environment in which everyone's work is valued fairly. The process may be slow, but ultimately the Czech Republic will thrive when it overcomes the institutional and societal barriers to achieving gender equality.

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