



European
Commission

Exchange of good practices on gender equality

Parenting in France

France, 05-06 November 2013

Comments Paper - Croatia

ISTITUTO
PER LA
RICERCA
SOCIALE



The information contained in this publication does not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the European Commission.

Justice

This publication is supported by the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Solidarity - PROGRESS (2007-2013).

This programme is implemented by the European Commission. It was established to financially support the implementation of the objectives of the European Union in the employment, social affairs and equal opportunities area, and thereby contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 Strategy goals in these fields.

The seven-year Programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

For more information see: <http://ec.europa.eu/progress>

Parenting in Croatia – reconciliation of work and family life

Ivana Dobrotić
University of Zagreb

1. Introduction

1.1. Socio-economic situation in Croatia

Compared to other EU countries Croatia entered the recession period somewhat later, but it also lasted longer. Unfavourable economic trends have marked the entire period since the end of 2008. The GDP growth rate became negative in 2009 (-6.9%) and the same trend has continued until today (-2% in 2012), with the exception of 2011, which brought a zero GDP growth rate. According to current estimates, the negative trend should continue also throughout 2013. This had an adverse effect on the situation at the labour market, the salaries and the poverty rates of particular groups in society (including small children). The unemployment rate is among the highest in the EU (15.9% in 2012), and an additional drop in already low employment rate was also noted (from 62.9% in 2008 to 55.4% in 2012). The employment rate of the prime working-age population (25-49) was 70.1% in 2012, with a gender gap in the employment rate of 6.3 percentage points in favour of men. This gender gap is almost non-existent among the childless men and women (0.4 percentage points in favour of men). Still, it becomes pronounced in the case of parents (i.e. mothers) with small children (20 percentage points higher employment rate of fathers in comparison to mothers of one child under the age of six), and it is growing with the number of children (Eurostat 2013).

Hence, the gender gap in the employment rates becomes more pronounced with motherhood. Childless women and women with primary school-age children have the highest employment rates, indicating that career breaks are of temporary character in most cases. While speaking about work-family policies it is important to notice not only that a dual earner family has been a prevalent norm in Croatia, but that both, men and women, predominantly work full time hours. The share of employees working part-time in Croatia is very small and decreasing (8.4% in 2012), and the mean of reported working hours is 41.1 hours for men and 40.4 hours for women (Dobrotić et al. 2013).

The total population in Croatia is declining. The demographic situation has been marked by population ageing and, from a comparative perspective, less pronounced pluralisation of family forms than in other EU member states. According to the 2011 census data the share of the population 65+ was 17.7%, which exceeded the number of young people from 0 to 14 years of age for the first time. The divorce rate is 1.3 and the share of children born outside marriage 14%. The total fertility rate was 1.41 in 2011, and a crude rate of net migration is recording negative values since the onset of the crisis (Eurostat 2013).

The public debt reached the level of 53.7% of GDP in 2012 (HNB 2013). The total social protection expenditures are considerably lower than in the EU27 (29.4%), amounting to 20.4% of GDP in 2011. It is a similar situation with expenditures on the

function family/children which reached 1.6% of GDP in Croatia (2.3% in the EU27) (Eurostat 2013).

1.2. Work-family policies in Croatia – main characteristics and trends

Croatian work-family policies have been determined by the socialist legacy. The socialist period favoured the economic independence of women and in order to facilitate women's participation in the labour market the state introduced different policy instruments such as paid maternity leave, labour market related protection, publicly organised and subsidised childcare. From a comparative perspective, for that time progressive and rather liberal legislation in the field of reproductive rights and family relations was also introduced (e.g. free choice on fertility, divorce related rights, rights of children born out of wedlock) (Puljiz and Zrinščak 2002).

The socialist period brought quite generous maternity leave as, following several reforms, an earnings-related maternity leave was extended until the child turns one year of age, with 100% compensation rate (Dobrotić 2012). The childcare system covered 30.3% of children in kindergartens and 7.8% in nurseries in 1989 (Baran et al. 2011). Still, different family policy measures were directed solely towards the mothers attached to the labour market and they failed to address the position of women in the private sphere. Although fathers became entitled to "additional maternity leave" in the 1970s,¹ that was only on an exceptional basis and with the mother's gate-keeping function (Dobrotić 2012).

Similarly to other postcommunist countries, Croatia also experienced an explicit discursive turn towards retraditionalisation and refamilisation in the 1990s, however, due to pronounced socio-economic difficulties most of the proposed familialistic reforms were never implemented. In the last 20 years three strategic documents have been enacted in the family policy area. Two of them were driven by strong pro-natalist discourse and ideas that directed the reforms in the family policy predominantly towards the leave system and family benefits.

Since 1990 there were a few new elements introduced in family policy. First, maternity leave was extended in the case of multiple births, the third and any subsequent child until the child turns three years of age (paid at low flat-rate level). Second, the leave-related rights ceased to be an exclusive right of employed parents (i.e. mothers). Third, the family benefits became less generous (e.g. maternity allowance became capped; an earnings-related maternity allowance was replaced by low, flat-rate allowance during the "additional maternity leave", i.e. after the child turns six months of age;² stricter eligibility criteria were introduced in the area of childcare allowances, the real value of family benefits dropped; family benefits were not indexed). Fourth, a pro-natalist supplement was introduced for families with three or more children. Fifth, a gender sensitive terminology was introduced in the leave system, the leave-related rights became more flexible for parents (a) typically attached to the labour market and the parental leave became an

¹ Leave was divided into "maternity leave" (until the child turns 6 months of age) and "additional maternity leave" (additional 6 months after the maternity leave). It was as late as 2009 that a gender sensitive terminology was introduced and "additional maternity leave" started to be called parental leave.

² With the reform in 2009 a ceiling on maternity leave was withdrawn and parental leave (former "additional maternity leave") becomes again earnings-related, however, with a ceiling set at very low level (at the level of a previous low, flat-rate allowance).

individual right of both parents. Sixth, the pluralisation of childcare providers was enacted and new quality standards in childcare were introduced (Dobrotić 2012).

The current leave system provides parents with earnings-related maternity leave until the child turns six months of age (100% of earnings, with no ceiling). It is obligatory for mothers to take 98 days (28 days before the expected date of delivery and 70 days after the birth).³ After this compulsory maternity leave period, the maternity leave can be used on part-time basis and the father of the child can use the remaining period of maternity leave (if the mother agrees).

The parental leave is an individual right of both parents and each parent is entitled to four months of parental leave per child for the first and second born child (15 months per parent for twins, other multiple births and the third and every subsequent child). The parental allowance is set at 100% of previous earnings, however, with a ceiling set at a low level (at 80% of the budgetary base rate for eight months of parental leave – 350€ and 50% for the remaining leave period – 219€).⁴ Two months of the parental leave became non-transferable in 2013. The parental leave can be used until the child turns eight years, parents can use their entitlement at the same time or consecutively, and the parental leave can be taken on part-time basis - in one period or in several periods (no more than two times per year, each time no less than 30 days). Available data illustrates how the leave-related rights are predominantly used by mothers. The maternity leave is dominantly exercised by mothers, while around 2% of fathers exercised their right on parental leave (VRH 2011).

There are also other work-related leaves in Croatia. In the cases when parents have fully used maternity and parental leave, one of the employed parents has the right to an unpaid career break, i.e. not to work until the child turns three years of age. During that time, the parent's rights and obligations regarding his/her employment are suspended, and the rights to compulsory health insurance and retirement insurance are maintained. There is also an entitlement to shorter leave periods to care for an ill co-resident spouse or child, where the payment and the lengths of this leave varies depending on the child's age (15-40 working days for each illness, 70-100% of earnings with a ceiling of €563 per month). Additionally, pregnant workers have a right to use one working day off per month in order to attend prenatal examinations, breastfeeding mothers are entitled to two hours paid absence from work per day and a worker has the right to seven days full paid leave for important personal needs, including those related to marriage, childbirth, or the serious illness of a member of the immediate family.

The Early childhood education and care (ECEC) system has not been a subject of important discussions and policy reforms for more than 20 years. There is no entitlement to ECEC at any age, though all six year olds should attend ECEC for at least 250 hours as preparation for school.⁵ ECEC is part of the educational system, and the responsibility for its financing and the development of new capacities is set at local level. That resulted in pronounced and stable regional differences in childcare availability as their development heavily relied on the economic

³ Flat-rate allowance for parents who do not meet the condition of at least 12 months of continual insurance or 18 months of insurance with interruptions in the last two years; maternity leave starts 28 days before the expected day of birth in the case of employed mothers (for more details see Dobrotić 2013a).

⁴ Gross average earnings were €1,040 in 2012.

⁵ Since September 2014 the communities will become obliged to provide the place to all six year olds in preschool program.

performance of a particular local area in Croatia (Dobrotić et al. 2010). The ECEC system remained dominantly public and in the 2012/2013 pedagogical year it covered 18.6% of nursery-age children (0-2) and 54.9% of kindergarten-age children (3-6, without preschool).⁶ Hence, the levels of attendance at formal services are well below the average of European countries, especially when it comes to older age groups where Croatia is placed at the bottom of the line (Matković and Dobrotić 2013). Consequently, parents still largely rely on non-formal forms of care, predominantly grandparents (Dobrotić 2013b). If we look into the trends in the ECEC coverage rates, they have been growing slowly until the recent financial crisis when Croatia started to record stagnation. Here it is important to notice that the mentioned growth in coverage rates in the last 15 years cannot be prescribed only to new childcare capacities, but also to a decreased number of children in the 0-6 age group. Also, different geographical areas have been differently affected by the crisis and there are some areas in Croatia that recorded a decrease in the ECEC coverage rates in the last years (see Matković and Dobrotić 2013).

There are also pronounced regional differences in the quality and affordability of childcare, meaning that children are entering the childcare system under different rules. Additionally, the UNICEF study on community-based services and support for parents of small children in Croatia indicated that a significant number of children (mainly those living in families of lower socio-economic status) is entering the ECEC system at late age (immediately before entering the primary school), a smaller number of them is not attending any kind of the ECEC programmes before entering the primary school and the preschool is often quite shorter than recommended by the State pedagogical standard. Half of the parents do not see the ECEC programmes affordable, which is one of the main barriers for their children's participation in ECEC. They are also reporting problems with some indicators of the quality of childcare such as too big groups and absence of different items, as well as a problem with working time of childcare facilities (Dobrotić 2013b). UNICEF research additionally reported about the problems of availability and affordability of other community based services in Croatia (e.g. different services in the healthcare system, support groups for parents, counselling services etc.), which is particularly pronounced among the parents of lower socio-economic status and those living in rural areas (Pećnik 2013).

The described system provides parents with limited possibilities for work-family balance. Both, men and women, are reporting conflict between the obligations that arise from the work and the family life (Dobrotić and Laklija 2009; Pećnik and Tokić 2011; Dobrotić and Pećnik 2013), where the workplace characteristics (quality and flexibility of the workplace, long working hours and work intensity...) and care obligations (especially for the elderly) are among the main factors that contribute to higher conflict (Dobrotić and Laklija 2009).

The different leaves are predominantly exercised by women and research data constantly reports an asymmetrical division of care work and other household related tasks within the family (Dobrotić and Pećnik 2013). The gender pay gap in Croatia is 17.6% (Eurostat 2013), while discrimination of (future) mothers at the labour market is one of the important problems that has not been tackled seriously. Studies showed (e.g. Galić and Nikodem 2009) how women are still experiencing

⁶ If we include the children who attended the preschool programme (between 11 and 14 thousands per year) the coverage rate for kindergarten-age children rise to 61.6%. However, we have to have in mind that the purpose of the preschool programme is not to facilitate a work-family balance. It is intended as a preparation for school (one year before entering a primary school) and it can last up to 250 hours per year.

different forms of discrimination at the labour market (e.g. questions related to marriage and number of (planned) children in job interviews, sexism, termination of a work contract due to pregnancy).

2. Recent reforms and current policy debates

The work-family balance has not gained an important place on the political agenda in Croatia. Although it has become one of the goals which recently started to be referred to around some of the reforms in the family policy area, we cannot claim that there is a comprehensive work-family policies agenda. Hence, the latest reforms can be seen more as a reaction on external demands than as a result of planned policy which aims to tackle problems related to the reconciliation of work and family life.

Recently, two reform proposals were enacted. First, to regulate the grey market and as a response to a shortage of places in the ECEC facilities the government introduced an Act on nannies in March 2013, which is focused mainly on the provision of care, omitting an educational dimension of ECEC. The Act regulates the conditions and basic standards under which nanny services can be provided. Nannies can provide childcare for children under the age of fourteen years (one nanny can provide childcare for a maximum of six children), while the financing is left to the local municipalities decision (they can finance nanny services if they decided so). Second, in order to harmonise with the EU Council Directive 2010/18/EU on parental leave the leave system has been changed in April 2013. The parental leave increased to eight months – four months per parent, with two months transferable to the other parent and two months that are non-transferable. This reform replaced a previous leave legislation that provided three months leave for each parent plus two additional ‘bonus’ months if the father uses his three months entitlement. One of the main arguments used in the reform proposal was that this change will allow increased participation of fathers in childcare. Still, the argument was not closely related to the gender equality agenda and it was stressed how the new leave system will allow a father to “donate part of his time to the family, according to his work obligations” (VRH 2013).

As these two acts only came into effect it is hard to predict their implications for work-family balance and parenting practices. That is especially the case with the Act on nannies as it is hard to predict how the local communities and parents are going to behave, what can have also different implications for the ECEC system. Regarding the changes in parental leave legislation, as the parental leave remains to be paid at low level, based on similar experience of other countries, it can be presumed that this reform is not going to significantly affect parenting practices in Croatia.

3. Transferability issues

The discussion paper on France identified some practices relevant for the Croatian case, most of them related to the ECEC. One of them is related to the fact that childminders’ services in France involve also education duties for children. Namely, as stated earlier, Croatia regulated nannies’ services in 2013, but the law has not explicitly foreseen an educational dimension in providing these types of services. Also, one childminder is allowed to care for less children in France than in Croatia,

what is especially relevant from the aspect of care quality. Additionally, challenges related to the problems with job quality of childminders could be an important learning point for Croatia who just started to institutionalise this type of services.

It is also interesting to notice that France has childcare centres offering a part-time care targeting inactive women and the quotas for children from families of lower socio-economic status. Namely, the lack of the ECEC facilities in Croatia created local eligibility criteria that favour employed parents who have priority at waiting lists for childcare. Consequently, inactive parents with small children are facing problems with childcare when they are trying to find a job. Also, children from families of lower socio-economic status are predominantly left out of the system, and those are the children who benefit the most from the inclusion in ECEC.

Additionally, an entitlement to ECEC as in France is an example of good practice Croatia should also follow, as well as paradigmatic turn towards social investment discourse that recognised importance and positive elements of the development of new ECEC facilities.

Regarding other areas, the presented webpage <http://www.mon-enfant.fr> was very interesting practical example showing how to make information on ECEC availability and costs easily available for parents. Also, paternity leave and family friendly policies at work place are additional examples of good practices the Croatia should follow.

4. References

Baran, J., Dobrotić, I., Matković, T. (2011), Razvoj institucionaliziranog predškolskog odgoja u Hrvatskoj: promjene paradigme ili ovisnost o prijašnjem putu?. *Napredak: časopis za pedagoški teoriju i praksu* 152(3-4): 521-539.

Dobrotić, I., Laklija, M. (2009), Korelati sukoba obiteljskih i radnih obveza u Hrvatskoj, *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 16(1): 45-63.

Dobrotić, I., Matković, T., Baran, J. (2010), Zaposlenost žena i pristup sustavu predškolske skrbi za djecu u Hrvatskoj: postoji li veza?, *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 17(3): 363-385.

Dobrotić, I. (2012), Dejavniki politik usklajevanja plačanega dela in družinskih obveznosti v posocialističnih državah, *PhD thesis*, University of Ljubljana.

Dobrotić, I. (2013a), Croatia country note, in: P. Moss (ed.) *International Review of Leave Policies and Research 2013*, http://www.leavenetwork.org/lp_and_r_reports

Dobrotić, I. (2013b), Dostupnost i korištenje usluga predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja te drugih oblika skrbi. In: N. Pećnik (ed.), *Kako roditelji i zajednice brinu o djeci najmlađe dobi u Hrvatskoj* (166–179). Zagreb: UNICEF.

Dobrotić, I.; Pećnik, N. (2013). Doživljaj roditeljstva, roditeljsko ponašanje i prakse: postoje li rodne razlike? In: N. Pećnik (ed.), *Kako roditelji i zajednice brinu o djeci najmlađe dobi u Hrvatskoj* (75-83). Zagreb: UNICEF.

Dobrotić, I., Matković, T., Zrinščak, S. (2013), Gender Equality Policies and Practices in Croatia – The Interplay of Transition and Late Europeanisation, *Social Policy & Administration* 47(2): 218-240.

Eurostat (2013), *Statistics database*,
http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/statistics/search_database

Galić, B., Nikodem, K. (2009), Percepcija rodni jednakosti i šansi pri zapošljavanju u hrvatskom društvu. Pogled nezaposlenih žena, *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 16 (3): 253-270.

HNB (2013) *Ekonomski indikatori*,
http://www.hnb.hr/statistika/h_ekonomski_indikatori.pdf

Matković, T., Dobrotić, I. (2013), Promjene u obuhvatu programima predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja u Hrvatskoj na nacionalnoj i županijskoj razini između 1990. i 2012. godine, *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 20(1): 65–73.

Pećnik, N., Tokić, A. (2011.), *Roditelji i djeca na pragu adolescencije: pogled iz tri kuta, izazovi i podrška*. Zagreb: Ministarstvo obitelji, branitelja i međugeneracijske solidarnosti.

Pećnik, N. (2013), *Kako roditelji i zajednice brinu o djeci najmlađe dobi u Hrvatskoj*. Zagreb: UNICEF.

Puljiz, V., Zrinščak, S. (2002), Hrvatska obiteljska politika u europskom kontekstu, *Revija za socijalnu politiku* 9(2): 117–37.

VRH (2013), *Konačni prijedlog Zakona o izmjenama i dopunama Zakona o roditeljskim i roditeljskim potporama*, www.sabor.hr