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Gender equality and parenting-related leaves in 21 former socialist countries

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Abstract

Purpose – This article explores the patterns and dynamics of parenting-related leave policy reforms in the European former socialist countries (EFSCs). It sheds light on the development pattern of their leave policies and their potential to reproduce, impede or transform traditional gender norms in employment and care.

Design/methodology/approach – The article provides a historical comparative analysis of leave policy developments in 21 EFSCs in 1970-2018. It systematically explores continuity and changes in leave policy design – generosity (leave duration and benefits level) and fathers' entitlements to leaves – as well as policy concerns and gender-equality-related implications.

Findings: Following the state-socialist commitment to gender equality, the EFSCs early introduced childcare/parental leaves. Nevertheless, they developed mother-centered leaves of equality-impeding character, in that they did not promote gender equality. The divergence of EFSCs' leave policies intensified in the period of transition from socialism to capitalism, as competing priorities and inter-related policy concerns – such as re-traditionalization, fertility incentives, gender equality and labor market participation – influenced policy design. Leave policies of the EFSCs that joined the EU gradually transformed towards more gender-equal ones. Nonetheless, the progress has been slow, and only three countries can be classified as having equality-transforming leaves (Slovenia, Lithuania and Romania).

Originality/value: The article extends existent comparative studies on maternity/paternity/parental leaves, exploring the region that has been overlooked by such research. It provides valuable insights into the implications of intersectional dimensions of leave design as well as competing priorities and concerns embedded in it. It points to the methodological complexity of evaluating the development of parental leave policies in a cross-country perspective.

Keywords Maternity leave, Paternity leave, Parental leave, Socialist countries, Europe, Gender equality, Fathers, Care

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Parenting-related leaves typically refer to maternity leave, paternity leave and parental leave (developed from childcare leave).¹ Maternity leave is primarily the mother's right (it provides health protection for the mother and infant), while paternity leave is granted to fathers (or co-parents). Parental leave is the right of both parents (to be used after the maternity/paternity leave), allowing them to provide personal care for very young children (OECD, 2011). Until the 1970s, maternity and childcare leaves were available only to employed mothers. Starting in the mid-1970s – almost at the same time as in the European Western, particularly Nordic, countries – it became possible for fathers in the European former socialist countries (EFSCs) to take (part of) childcare leave; however, mainly upon the mother's consent (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009). In the late 1970s, the transformation of childcare leave into the family right named “parental leave” began in the European Western countries. In the EFSCs, this process was only initiated during the European Union (EU) accession negotiations in the 2000s. The leave granted to fathers as their exclusive right started to be introduced relatively late (in the 1990s in the European Western countries and the 2000s in the EFSCs) and in two forms: as a non-transferrable paternity leave or the father's exclusive entitlement within parental leave (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Stankūnienė and Jasilionis, 2009; Daly and Ferragina, 2018).

These developments have aimed at both the expansion of leave rights and their diversification, with incentives for fathers and their use of leaves having been of particular importance since the 1990s (Daly and Ferragina, 2018). This trend was closely related to an increasing policy relevance of equal opportunities and work-life balance. Although there is a considerable literature addressing leave policy developments from a gender perspective (for overview, see: Ray *et al.*, 2010; O'Brien and Wall, 2017a), the discussions have been often limited to experiences of several countries (usually Nordic countries) that are seen as leaders in the field (Meil and Escobedo, 2018). Still, little is known about (de-)gendered parental responsibilities embedded in leave policy designs and reforms in other contexts, including the considerable legacies and experience of former socialist countries. There is also a lack of involvement in a systematic discussion about the evolution and the development pattern of leave policies in these countries from a gender perspective. Recent works have begun to fill up this gap (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016; Karu and Tremblay, 2018; Dobrotić and Blum, 2019); however, the empirical findings refer only to recent periods and the former socialist countries that are members of the European Union (EU). This article aims to contribute to these endeavors by providing a systematic, historical comparative analysis of parenting-related leave policies' design and developments, as well as their implications for gender (in)equality in the EFSCs, including former Yugoslav and Soviet Union countries that were mostly absent from earlier comparative studies.

The diverse experiences of the EFSCs can bring in a new perspective to discussions on the gender dimension of leave policy design and developments. From a comparative perspective, these countries quickly introduced reforms extending parenting-related leaves, which was encouraged by the state-socialist commitment to gender equality. However, as the socialist regimes' understanding of gender equality remained one-sided – limited solely to women's (secondary) participation in the labor market – parenting-related leaves were built on maternalist assumptions, and the leave policy designs remained highly gendered, with fathers being left out of the reforms (cf. Karu and Pall, 2009; Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Dobrotić, 2018). The post-socialist period brought about additional challenges for the leave policymaking in the EFSCs. While the Western European countries – driven by gender equality and involved fatherhood aims (O'Brien and Wall, 2017a) – started to increasingly extend the leave period

reserved for fathers (Daly and Ferragina, 2018), conservative parties in many EFSCs explicitly demanded the extension of the maternity leave to facilitate women's withdrawal from the labor market. Moreover, many of the EFSCs were soon faced with the obligation to align their leave policies with the 1996 and 2010 EU Parental Leave Directives² that tended to place more emphasis on gender equality than did the EFSCs' national legislations (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Saxonberg, 2015; Dobrotić, 2018). These abrupt shifts in gender assumptions behind the leave policy reforms in the period of transition from a socialist to a capitalist regime (mostly in the 1990s) with a co-current adaptation to the EU legislation (since the late 1990s) have had important implications for women's position in the EFSCs' labor markets, their position as family carers, and eventually for the leave policy designs.

This article aims to shed additional light on these developments by systematically exploring the patterns and dynamics of the parenting-related leave policy reforms in the EFSCs from a gender perspective. A theoretical discussion on (de-)gendered potential of the leave policy design is followed by the presentation of data and methodological approach. The results provide a detailed insight into the development and main features of parenting-related leaves (maternity, paternity, and parental leaves) in the EFSCs since the 1970s. Such a long period allows unravelling and better understanding of key developments in the EFSCs' leave policies induced by two critical events in time: 1) the transition from a socialist to a capitalist regime that started in 1989; and 2) the EU accession in 2004, 2007 and 2013 conditioned, among other things, by leave policy reforms based on two EU Directives. The same section also deals with the gender dimension of the leave policy design and reforms. The discussion focuses on policy concerns embedded in the leave policy design in the EFSCs, and the implications of gender (un)equal policy designs on gender (in)equalities in employment and care in the EFSCs. Finally, the conclusions sum up the main messages and suggest issues for future research.

Leave policies and gender (in)equality in a comparative perspective

It is widely recognized that welfare states are built on gendered assumptions and that the character of welfare state provision can importantly affect the equality of opportunities of men and women to engage in (un)paid work (e.g., Orloff, 1993; Fraser, 1994; Leira, 2002). In this respect, leave policies are considered as one of the rare policy instruments that can directly interfere in the private sphere and have a transformative effect on gendered parental responsibilities and employment practices (Leira, 2002; Ciccia and Verloo, 2012; O'Brien and Wall, 2017a). Still, their transformative potential depends on the leave policy design that contains distinctive elements and multiple objectives (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012), and can thus easily lead to "contradictory effects on both employment and caring practices" (Ray *et al.*, 2010, 199). For example, if demands for a more generous leave (a combination of the leave duration and benefit level) result in improved leave entitlements aimed solely at women and putting more weight on leave duration than the benefit level, the leave policy design will most likely reinforce traditional gender roles and become detrimental for gender equality (Ciccia and Verloo, 2012). Assessment of gender implications of leave policies thus needs to include the effects of each constitutive element of leave policy design (and their combined effect) on the participation of men and women in the labor market and care work.

Comprehensive literatures on gender-related effects of leave policies show that long leaves directed towards mothers³ can be harmful for women's participation in the labor market, their career prospects and (life-long) earnings (e.g., Morgan and Zippel, 2003; Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011; Akgunduz and Plantenga, 2013). Moreover, such leaves tend to maintain and strengthen the traditional gender roles in the private sphere (Leira, 2002; Morgan and Zippel, 2003; Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006). Leave provisions aimed at extending fathers' leave

entitlements (a non-transferable father's quota within parental leave, or paternity leave) can alleviate these negative effects by challenging the norms regarding good fatherhood and contributing to an equal distribution of care work within the family (see: O'Brien and Wall, 2017a). The length of the mother's and the father's leave entitlements and the benefit level have proved to be of particular importance in this respect. That is, the availability of fathers' quotas strengthen men's involvement in care work, though primarily in countries where this entitlement is combined with a relatively high earnings replacement rate (O'Brien, 2009; Huerta *et al.*, 2013; O'Brien and Wall, 2017a; Karu and Tremblay, 2018). When both conditions are met, most of the *eligible* fathers⁴ use their leave rights (O'Brien, 2009; Karu and Tremblay, 2018), which can have important positive implications and "lay a foundation for an on-going dismantling of gendered responsibilities" (Doucet, 2017, 18).

Comparative leave literature points to large cross-country differences in the leave policy design (cf. Ray *et al.*, 2010; Ciccina and Verloo, 2012; Dearing, 2016), where the EFSCs (except Slovenia) mostly belong to a group of countries still building their parental leave policies on a traditional division of gender roles. They mostly grant long periods of leave entitlements (often paid at a low flat-rate) with limited incentives for fathers (Ciccina and Verloo, 2012). As argued by Doucet (2017, 16), different moral responsibilities ("expectations and gendered norms about breadwinning and caregiving") embedded in leaves result in cross-country variations in both the leave policy design and its gender-equality-related implications. In this respect, Brighouse and Wright (2008) distinguish between three types of leave policies with different implications for gender equality: equality-impeding, equality-enabling, and equality-promoting leaves. They argue that *equality-impeding leaves* (mother-centered leaves and/or unpaid gender-neutral leaves) actively contribute to (maintaining) gendered division of care work. As argued by Saxonberg (2013, 33), these are "genderizing" policies that aim to promote "different gender roles for men and women". Mathieu (2016, 583-589) further argues that these leaves sustain the "motherization" of care work and points to an important difference between unpaid and paid leaves. While both leaves come at the cost of *gender equality* ("treating women and men alike") – because they hinder women's equal participation in the labor market – paid mother-centered leaves have at least a potential to increase *gender equity* ("recognizing and embracing the specific attributes of each gender"). According to Brighouse and Wright (2008), *equality-enabling leaves* (generous paid leaves provided to the family as a unit) may improve women's position in the labor market and enable greater fathers' involvement in care. However, they mostly have the genderizing effect (Saxonberg, 2013) as they do not put any pressure on parents to share the leave and thus result in fathers' take-up rates being much lower than the mothers' (Karu and Tremblay, 2018). Only *equality-promoting leaves* (paid individual fathers' entitlements) contain real incentives for fathers and may bring a more gender-egalitarian redistribution of care (Brighouse and Wright, 2008).

While this typology brought valuable insight into the relationship between various elements of leave policy design and their potential gender implications, recent research allows for a more nuanced elaboration of equality-promoting leaves.⁵ Namely, studies show that not all individual fathers' entitlements have the same effect on the gendered distribution of employment and care work and that only a wider scope of individual fathers' entitlements may have more visible implications on gender equality (cf. Huerta *et al.*, 2013; O'Brien and Wall, 2017b; Valarino, 2018). We thus distinguish at a conceptual level between *equality-promoting* and *equality-transforming leaves*. Both of them extend caregiving duties to fathers as well as having the potential to contribute to de-motherization of care work and "alter the gendered division of social reproductive work" (Mathieu, 2016, 577). However, this potential is stronger in the countries with *equality-transforming leaves* that rely on well-paid individual fathers' entitlements of a longer duration (including entitlements that target fathers as primary carers)

than in the countries with shorter or poorly paid fathers' entitlements (*equality-promoting leaves*). As equality-transforming leaves result in highest fathers' take-up rates (see: Karu and Tremblay, 2018), they have a higher “de-genderizing” potential, i.e., a potential to “promote the elimination of gender roles” (Saxonberg, 2013, 33) in paid work and caregiving, as well as transform moral responsibilities of parenting (Doucet, 2017; see also Doucet, 2006/2018). Following this conceptual framework, the following sections analyze the development of leave policies in the EFSCs.

Data and methodological approach

A key precondition for a systematic, historical comparative analysis of parenting-related leave policy developments in the EFSCs was the construction of dataset that captures the elements of leave policy design indicating the scope and gender-related assumptions of leaves: duration, benefits level and fathers' entitlements (see: Dearing, 2016).⁶ The collection of these data was a challenge as many of the EFSCs were not included (or became included recently) in international comparative databases (e.g., Comparative Family Policy Database (Gauthier, 2011), OECD Family Database, International Network on Leave Policies & Research – LP&R, and Mutual Information System on Social Protection – MISSOC). There is also a lack of literature in English on historical developments in leave policies in these countries, particularly detailed enough and for the socialist period. Moreover, there is a problem with information and data weaknesses (see: Lohmann and Zagel, 2018), especially weak data reliability. To avoid imprecisions, the data were cross-checked using several international databases based on relevant legislation: LP&R (2010–2019), MISSOC (2010–2019), MISSCEO (2010–2018), OECD Family Database (2019) and Dobrotić (2020).⁷ Extant literature on leave policies in the EFSCs was also consulted since the international databases started to provide reliable data on EFSCs only in 2010. In situations of weak data reliability, data were additionally cross-checked with national official web-sources and experts.

The analysis covers the period between 1970 and 2018, which allows contributing to an ongoing discussion on the extent and kinds of changes in the EFSCs family policies induced by two critical events in time: 1) the transition from a socialist to a capitalist regime in the 1990s; and 2) the EU accession conditional on alignment with the EU (leave) legislation. Eight countries (Czechia, Estonia, Hungary Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) joined the EU in 2004, Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and Croatia in 2013.

The focus here is on the leave policy development patterns and main policy concerns embedded in the leave policy design from a gender perspective. Recent findings legitimately point also to the social (i.e., class, ethnicity, new immigrant status) inequalities inherent to the leave policy design, with eligibility criteria being an important condition for take-up of paid leave by different social groups within a country (e.g., McKay *et al.*, 2016; Sainsbury, 2019; Dobrotić and Blum, 2019). However, 1) the analysis of both the gender and social inequality dimensions of leave policy design goes beyond the scope of any one article; and 2) the historical data on eligibility criteria and how these are translated into take-up rates in the EFSCs are not available and reliable. This article also does not systematically deal with the causal mechanisms behind leave policy developments.

Only statutory leave entitlements regulated at the national level are analyzed as this allows the comparative analysis of legal guarantees (Ray *et al.*, 2010). It is not common in the EFSCs to have collective agreements or regional/local provisions complementing the statutory leave provisions. Policies analyzed in this article concern dual-earner heterosexual couples; implications for same-sex families or single parents, as well as unemployed/inactive parents,

are not discussed. In the case of countries with different provisions for different groups of eligible persons (e.g., some countries provide more generous benefits in the public sector), or with periods of leave at different benefit levels, simplifying rules applied in previous research were followed (Ray *et al.*, 2010; Ciccia and Verloo, 2012) – the least generous provisions and the shortest duration of leave were considered (which is typically accompanied by higher replacement rate).

Three types of parenting-related leaves are analyzed: maternity leave, paternity leave and childcare/parental leave. Both aggregate support available to parents and (de-)gendered redistribution of rights are assessed. Using basic indicators of leaves' duration and benefit levels, the general development pattern of schemes is first analyzed. Following the article's conceptual framework (see the previous section), the EFSCs are then positioned within the four types of leave policies, which allows assessing the developments in the potential of the EFSC's leave policies to reproduce, impede or transform the traditional gender norms regarding breadwinning and caregiving. Countries are positioned using two indicators: 1) *gender equality of leave distribution* (countries where most of the leave is allocated to mothers score lower on this indicator); and 2) *father incentives* (countries offering strong incentives for fathers score high on this indicator). Only the countries that score high on both indicators are considered as having an equality-transforming leave policy design.

The “*gender equality of leave distribution*” indicator aims to assess the extent to which mothers and fathers can equally share the leave. Based on theoretical and substantive knowledge, the following leave entitlements (in full-time equivalents, FTE)⁸ were coded:

- 1) Maternity leave and childcare/parental leave aimed primary at mothers, as the mother's right,
- 2) Paternity leave and father's quota (non-transferable parental leave) as the father's right,
- 3) Earnings-related transferable parental leave as both the mother's and father's right, with a deliberate weight for the father's share in the total leave depending on the benefit level (0.5 for well-paid leaves – more than 80% of previous earnings, and 0.25 for moderately paid leaves – 60-80% of previous earnings), and
- 4) Low-paid (less than 60% of previous earnings or flat-rate) transferable parental leave as the mother's right.

We are fully aware that non-transferable fathers' entitlements are a primary element of leave policy design that influences fathers' take-up rates. However, the well-paid and moderately-paid transferable leaves may also (although to a lesser extent) increase the fathers' take-up rates (Karu and Timberlay, 2018), so that their inclusion in calculations enables more accurate positioning of countries. We assigned a share to fathers only in the case of transferable leave paid at a level high enough to encourage the uptake, as the fathers hardly take any low-paid transferable leave (O'Brien and Wall, 2017a; Karu and Tremblay, 2018). The indicator is calculated as a ratio between the father's and the mother's leave entitlement. It scores zero if the leave period is only the mother's entitlement and one if the total leave period available to the family is equally distributed between the mother and the father.

The “*father incentives*” indicator builds on the Valarino's (2018) father-care-sensitivity indicator and the theoretical assumption that only well-paid individual fathers' entitlements of longer duration provide strong incentives for fathers to utilize their leave rights and challenge the gendered distribution of care within the family (O'Brien and Wall, 2017b). Similarly to Valarino (2018), we assessed two dimensions of leave policy design: the leave reserved for fathers and the related benefit level. However, we scored the countries combining the two dimensions, because fathers are more likely to use the leave when two conditions are met concurrently: non-transferability and high payment. The following scores were assigned:

- 1) One point to the countries with quotas/paternity leaves paid less than 80% of previous earnings or for a period shorter than a week,
- 2) Two points to countries with well-paid (80-100% compensation rate) quotas/paternity leave of one to two weeks,
- 3) Three points to countries with well-paid (80-100%) quotas/paternity leave lasting between two weeks and a month, and
- 4) Four points to countries with well-paid (80-100%) quotas/paternity leave longer than a month.

The thresholds are based on previous findings, which suggest that only leaves paid at a minimum of 80% of previous earnings can be considered as well-paid (e.g., Gornick and Meyers, 2008; Valarino, 2018). Furthermore, while two weeks of fathers' entitlements may contribute to a more shared distribution of care, the effect is more visible in the case of fathers' entitlements longer than a month (O'Brien and Wall, 2017b). The higher the score, the stronger incentives the country provides for fathers to use the leaves, and their leave policy design can be considered as more gender-equality oriented.

Results

The development pattern of parenting-related leave policies in the EFSCs

Like in the Western European countries (cf. Daly and Ferragina, 2018), the first type of parenting-related leave introduced in the EFSCs was maternity leave; however, unlike the Western countries, most EFSCs have provided maternity benefits paid at the level of previous earnings (Table 1). The EFSCs have a long tradition of maternity leaves, which started to be introduced since the 1920s (e.g., in the former Yugoslav countries, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Estonia), following the 1919 ILO convention on maternity protection (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Inglot *et al.*, 2011; Karu and Pall, 2009), to be further developed in the socialist period. There are national and regional variations in leave design. All former Yugoslav countries, except Slovenia, have relied on longer maternity leaves, the trend typically not present in the CEE, Baltic countries and former Soviet Union countries (Table 1) that developed childcare leaves. These leaves started to be introduced in the 1970s (first in the CEE countries) and were extended in the transition period, particularly in the Baltic countries (Table 3).

In most of the CEE and Baltic countries, childcare leaves could be used until the child turned three. However, they came with the flat-rate payments that did not necessarily cover the whole leave period (in Poland, the benefit has also been means-tested; see Table 3). Since benefits were not regularly updated for inflation in many countries (in the transition years in particular), their real value decreased to very low levels (e.g., less than 10% of the average salary; Ainsaar, 2001). This made long leaves unaffordable for families hardly making ends meet and acted as a strong disincentive for leave uptake for those with higher earnings (Spéder and Kamarás, 2008; Karu and Pall, 2009). Among the former Yugoslav countries, only Croatia and Slovenia introduced childcare leaves in the socialist period, however, as shorter (less than nine months) and well-paid leaves. Until 1990, the total leave duration was kept at around a year in all former Yugoslav countries (cf. Tables 1 and 3). Longer leaves introduced in the transition period in Croatia, Serbia and parts of Bosnia-Herzegovina, targeted families with three or more children (Dobrotić, 2018, 2019).

Table 1: Maternity leave duration and benefits (% of previous earnings) 1970-2018 (first child, paid postnatal leave)

	1970		1980		1990		2000		2010		2018	
	Weeks	%	Weeks	%	Weeks	%	Weeks	%	Weeks	%	Weeks	%
Czechia	18	90	18	90	22	90	22	69*	22	70*	22	70*
Hungary	12	100	12	100	12	100	24	70*	24	70	24	70
Poland	12	100	16	100	16	100	20	100	22	100	20	80-100 ¹
Slovakia	18	90	18	90	22	90	22	90*	22	55*	28	75*
Bulgaria	10.7	100	10.7	100	10.7	100	12.9	90*	52.1	90	52.1	90*
Romania	8.6	50-90 [#]	8.6	50-90 [#]	8.6	50-90 [#]	9	85	18	85	18	85
Estonia	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	10	100	15.7	100	15.7	100
Lithuania	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	100*	8	100
Latvia	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	80
Slovenia	11.2	100	11.2	100	11.2	100	11.2	100*	11.2	100	11.2	100
Croatia	11.2	100	21.7	100	21.7	100	25.8	100*	25.8	100	25.8	100
Bosnia-Herzegovina	11.2	100	21.7	100	48.1	100	48.1	0-100 ²	48.1	0-100 ²	48.1	40-100 ²
North Macedonia	11.2	100	21.7	100	34.6	100	34.6	100	34.6	100	34.6	100
Montenegro	11.2	100	21.7	100	34.6	100	48.1	60-100 [#]	6.5 ³	70-100 [#]	6.5	30-100 [#]
Serbia	11.2	100	26	100	34.6	100	13.1 ⁴	30-100 [#]	13.1	30-100 ^{**}	13.1	67-100 ^{**}
Kosovo	11.2	100	26	100	34.6	100	12 ⁴	75	52.1	0-70 ⁵	52.1	0-70 ⁵
Albania	7	70-95 [#]	7	70-95 [#]	20.7	70-95 [#]	47.1	50-80 ⁶	47.1	50-80 ⁶	47.1	50-80 ⁶
Russia	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	10	100*	10	100*	10	100*
Georgia	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	8	100	16	(100)	(26.1)	(100)*
Moldova	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	100
Ukraine	8	N/A	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	100	8	100

Notes: N/A=data not available; 0=data refer to public sector; *=there is a ceiling; #=persons with longer insurance periods have higher benefits (noted only when the benefit level is explicitly defined in relation to previous employment period); presented data on maternity benefits refer to mothers who meet employment-related eligibility criteria (e.g., insurance period); 1=if the mother chooses higher benefit, the parental leave is paid at lower rates; 2=maternity benefits varies across regions; 3=2011; 4=2001; 5=6 months at 70% of previous earnings, 3 months at 50% of average salary, 3 months unpaid; 6=150 days at 80% of previous earnings, then 50%.

Sources: Ainsaar (2001); Dobrotić (2020); Dohotariu (2018); Frątczak *et al.* (2003); Gjonca *et al.* (2008); Kocourková (2002); Korintus and Stropnik (2009); Kotowska *et al.* (2008); Koytcheva and Philipov (2008); ILO NATLEX (2019); LP&R (2010–2019); MISSOC database (2010–2019); MISSCEO database (2010–2019); Muresan *et al.* (2008); OECD database (2009); Parelli-Haris (2008); Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006); Selezneva (2016); Stankūnienė and Jasilionis (2009).

Table 2: Paternity leave duration and benefits (% of previous earnings) 1970-2018 (first child, paid leave)

Country [implementation year]	2005		2010		2018	
	Weeks	% of previous earnings	Weeks	% of previous earnings	Weeks	% of previous earnings
Czechia [2018]	/	/	/	/	1	70*
Hungary [2003]	1	100	1	100	1	100
Poland [2010]	/	/	1	100	2	100
Bulgaria [2009]	/	/	2.1	90	2.1	90 ⁺
Romania [2000]	1 ¹	100	1 ¹	100	1 ¹	100
Estonia [2002]	2	flat-rate ²	2	/ ²	2	100 ⁺
Lithuania [2006]	4	100	4	100*	4	100 ⁺
Latvia [2004]	1.4	80	1.4	100 ³	1.4	80
Slovenia [2003]	12.9 ⁴	100 for 15 days ⁴	12.9 ⁴	100 for 15 days ⁴	4.3 ⁵	90–100 ⁵⁺
Kosovo [2011]	/	/	2 days ⁶	100	2 days ⁶	100
Moldova [2016]	/	/	/	/	2	100

Notes: / = no leave or benefit; * = there is a ceiling higher than average salary; 1 = paternity leave can be extended (up to 2.1 weeks until 2016, since then up to 2.9 weeks) if the father attends the infant care course; 2 = €4.2 per day; the benefit was suspended in 2009-2011; 3 = until November 2010; 4 = for the remaining 75 days, the contributions based on the minimum wage were paid; 5 = in 2016-2018 transformed into 30 days at 100% of previous earnings; from May 2012 to 2018, the benefit was temporarily 90% for fathers earning more than €763.06 per month (austerity measure); 6 = 2 weeks of unpaid leave available.

Sources: Kosovo Law No.03/L –212 on Labour (2010); LP&R (2010–2019); MISSCEO database (2010–2019); MISSOC database (2010–2019).

Table 3: Parental leave duration and benefits (% of previous earnings); 1970-2018 (first child; paid months)

	1970			1980			1990			2000			2010			2018		
	M	%	GD	M	%	GD	M	%	GD	M	%	GD	M	%	GD	M	%	GD
Czechia	/ ¹	/	/	/ ¹	/	/	30.9	FT	MR	30.9	FT	MR	18.9 ³	FR	TIR	6 ²	70*	TIR
Hungary	33.2	FT	MR	33.2	FT	MR	33.2	65-75/FT ³	(FR)	30.4	70*/FT ³	(FR)	30.4	70*/FT ³	FR	30.4	70*/FT ³	FR
Poland	/ ⁴	/	/	/ ⁴	/	/	20.3 ⁵	FT/MT	MR	19.4 ⁵	FT/MT	FR	18.9 ⁵	FT/MT	FR	19.3 ⁵	60-100/ FT/MT ⁶	FR/Q
Slovakia	/ ¹	/	/	/ ¹	/	/	30.9	FT	MR	30.9	FT	MR	30.9	FT	FR	29.9	FT	FR
Bulgaria	N/A	N/A	N/A	21.5 ⁵	FT	MR	21.5 ⁵	FT	MR	21.3	FT	MR	12	FT	MR	12	FT	MR
Romania	/	/	/	/	/	/	10	65	MR	21.9	85	FR	19.8 ⁷	75*	FR/Q ¹⁸	19.8	85*	FR/Q
Estonia	/ ⁸	/	/	/ ⁸	/	/	16.1 ⁹	FT	MR	33.7	FT	FR	32.3	100*/FT ¹⁰	FR	32.3	100*/FT ¹⁰	FR
Lithuania	/ ⁸	/	/	/ ⁸	/	/	16.1 ⁵	FT	MR	34.1	60*/FT ¹¹	FR	22.1 ⁵	75-100/ 75-90* ¹²	FR	10.1 ^{9/13}	100*	FR
Latvia	/ ⁸	/	/	/ ⁸	/	/	16.1 ⁵	FT	MR	34.1	FT	FR	22.1	70/FT ¹⁴	FR	16.1 ¹⁵	60/FT ¹⁵	TIR
Slovenia	/	/	/	4.7	100	MR	8.6	100	MR	8.6	100*	MR	8.6	100*	FR	8.6	90-100* ¹⁶	TIR
Croatia	/	/	/	7	50-90 ¹⁷	MR	7	100	MR	6	FT	MR	6	100*	TIR	8	100*	PTIR
BIH	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
North Macedonia	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Montenegro	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	10.6 ¹⁸	70-100 ⁹	FR	10.6	30-100 ⁹	FR
Serbia	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	9 ¹⁹	30-100 ⁹	MR	9	30-100* ⁹	MR	9	67-100* ⁹	MR
Kosovo	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Albania	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Russia	/	/	/	10.1 ⁹	FT	MR	16.1 ⁵	FT	MR	15.7 ⁵	FT	MR	15.7 ⁵	40*	FR	15.7 ⁵	40*	FR
Georgia	/	/	/	10.1 ⁹	FT	MR	16.1 ⁵	FT	MR	N/A	N/A	N/A	- ²¹	/	FR	- ²²	/	FR
Moldova	/	/	/	10.1 ⁹	FT	MR	16.1 ⁵	FT	MR	N/A	N/A	N/A	34.1	20/FT/MT ²³	FR	34.1	30/FT/MT ²³	FR
Ukraine	/	/	/	10.1 ⁹	FT	MR	16.1 ⁵	FT	MR	34.4	FT	MR	34.4	FT	FR	34.4	FT	FR

Notes: Table includes the leave available after the initial maternity leave (in early years, the term childcare leave or additional/extended maternity leave was used for this leave, later renamed into parental leave in most of the countries); the length of paid leave is indicated in table; where alternative combinations of length and payment exist, the alternative with higher payment presented; **M**=months; **%**=benefit level (% of previous earnings); **GD**=gender dimension; **FT**=flat-rate benefit; **MT**=means-tested benefit; **MR**=mother's right; **FR**=family right; **(FR)**=family right when child turns one; **FR/Q**=family right with quota (one-month in Romania); **TIR**=fully transferable individual right (one-month mothers' quota in

Slovenia); **PTIR**=partially transferable individual right (two-months quota in Croatia); *=there is a ceiling; #=persons with longer insurance periods have higher benefits; **N/A**=data not available; /=no leave or benefit.

1=paid leave solely for the second or higher-order child until age one (1970) or age two (1980); **2**=leave can be used until age three, at lower benefit (benefit level decreases as the number of leave months increases); **3**=18.4 months earnings-related benefit (21.2 months in 1990), then flat-rate; **4**=unpaid leave until age one; **5**=unpaid leave until age three; **6**=1.4 months at 100% of previous earnings, then 6 months at 60% or 7.4 months at 80% (depending on maternity benefit); afterwards means-tested, flat-rate benefit; **7**=if the leave is used until age one, higher ceiling; **8**=unpaid leave till age 6 months; **9**=unpaid leave until age 1.5; **10**=14.5 months at 100% previous earnings, then flat-rate; **11**=10.1 months at 60% of previous earnings, then flat-rate; **12**=in the 1st half of 2010 the benefit was 100% of previous earnings for 12 months, then 75% until 24 months (90% and 75%, respectively, in the 2nd half of 2010); from 2011 the benefit is 100% of previous earnings if leave is used one year (if leave is used 2 years the benefit is 70% of previous earnings in the 1st year and 40% in the 2nd year); **13**=alternative: leave can be used until age two, but at lower benefit (10.2 months at 70% and 12 months at 40%); **14**=10.2 months at 70% of previous earnings, then flat-rate; **15**=beside parental leave benefit (10.3 months at 60%), the parent has a right to flat-rate childcare allowance until age two years; alternative: parental leave benefit can be used until age 1.5 years, but at a lower benefit (16.3 months at 43.75%); **16**= from May 2012 to 2018, the benefit was temporarily 90% for parents earning more than €763.06 per month (austerity measure); **17**=income-tested benefit; **18**=2011 data; **19**=2001 data; **20**=unpaid, individual non-transferable right (4 months per parent); **21**=11.7 months of unpaid leave; **22**=18 months of unpaid leave; **23**=16.3 months at 20% (2010) of previous earnings (30% in 2018), then means-tested flat-rate benefit.

Sources: Ainsaar (2001); Dobrotić (2019); Dohotariu (2018); Frątczak *et al.* (2003); Gjonca *et al.* (2008); Kocourková (2002); Korintus and Stropnik (2009); Kotowska *et al.* (2008), Koytcheva and Philipov (2008); ILO NATLEX (2019); LP&R (2010–2019); MISSOC database (2010–2019); MISSCEO database (2010–2019); Muresan *et al.* (2008); OECD database (2009); Parelli-Haris (2008); Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006); Selezneva (2016); Social Security (2010–2018); Spéder and Kamarás (2008); Stankūnienė and Jasilionis (2009); Zakharov (2008).

Since the late 2000s, long childcare/parental leaves⁹ in the Baltic countries, Czechia and Poland were transformed, providing parents with earnings-related parental benefits for a part of the parental leave, or allowing them to choose among various options and take shorter leave periods with higher, earnings-related payments (Table 3). In the same period, mostly in the process of the EU accession, some CEE countries and the Baltic countries introduced paternity leaves. However, the fathers' entitlements are still underdeveloped in the EFSCs (Table 2), while some countries still provide only maternity leave (e.g., North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Hercegovina) or extended childcare/parental leave (like former Soviet Union countries; cf. Tables 1 and 3).

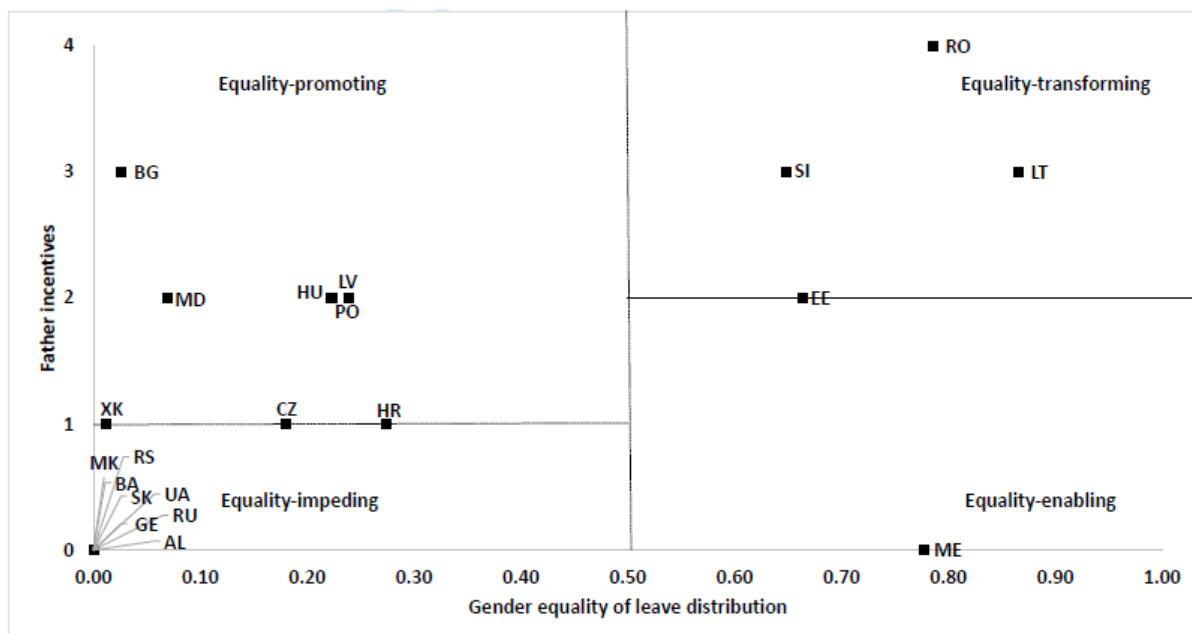
The gender dimension of the leave policy design in the EFSCs

The leave policies development was highly gendered and mother-oriented in the EFSCs, with leave policies supporting “workers with maternal responsibilities” (Orloff, 2006, 237). Childcare leaves developed in the 1970s and 1980s were designed as the mother's right that could be transferred to the father. Mothers thus had a gate-keeping role, and fathers continued to be treated as “secondary caregivers” (Hašková *et al.*, 2009, 101). It is thus not surprising that in the socialist and early transition period, all EFSCs had the *equality-impeding leaves* (Brighouse and Wright, 2008), i.e., mother-centered leaves detrimental for gender equality in the public and private sphere (cf. Tables 1-3). This policy design was a reflection of the re-familization path of family policies that started in some EFSCs in the socialist period and strengthened in the transition period, prompting the extension of paid childcare/parental leaves: in Poland (in 1982), Hungary (in 1985-1987), Slovakia (in 1985-1990), Czechia (in 1990), Baltic countries (around 1990) and Romania (in 1997). According to Kocourková (2002) and Saxonberg and Sirovátka (2006), such leaves were meant – or at least could be understood – as an encouragement for women to leave the labor market to raise children. As these reforms were implemented concurrently with cuts in nursery places, mothers had no choice and had to leave the labor market (Kocourková, 2002; Saxonberg and Szelewa, 2007).

Since the 2000s, leave policies in the EFSCs were gradually becoming more gender-equal, particularly in eight countries that joined the EU in 2004, bringing diversity in the gender dimension of their leave policy design (Figure 1). Childcare leave started to be gradually transformed into parental leave in many countries, and there had been a transformation of childcare/parental leaves from the mother's into the family right to meet the 1996 EU Directive's requirement of at least three months of parental leave to be available to each of the parents. The 2010 EU Directive requested at least one of four individual months to be non-transferrable; however, only three countries have so far introduced father's quotas (Table 3). Croatia implemented two father's (the other parent's) months (with a low benefit level) in 2013, Romania one month in 2012, and Albania four (albeit unpaid) months in 2016. In Slovenia, three-month paternity leave was gradually implemented in the 2003-2005 period. Since fathers tended to take only 15 well-paid paternity leave days (Stropnik *et al.*, 2019), it was transformed into a one month-leave with full earnings compensation in the 2016-2018 period (see Table 2). Fathers were also granted the same job protection as mothers for the leave duration, which had previously not been the case in all EFSCs. For instance, a job guarantee for men was implemented only in 2001 in Czechia (Saxonberg, 2015) and Estonia. Moreover, in Estonia, between 2004 and 2007, fathers had the right to parental leave requested by the EU directive, but not the right to parental benefit (not specified in the directive; Karu and Pall, 2009). In most of the countries that joined the EU, well-paid paternity leave was introduced (Table 2).

Still, the progress has been slow, and only three countries (Slovenia, Lithuania and Romania) with well-paid father’s quotas or the paternity leave lasting a month or longer can be classified as those with *equality-transforming* leaves. The leave policy in Estonia was also heading in a similar direction, but because of the shorter father’s individual entitlements, the country is instead a borderline case between *equality-transforming* and *equality-enabling* leave policy design. Recent reforms in other CEE and Baltic countries – which brought one to two weeks of paid paternity leave and shorter earnings-related parental leave periods available to both parents – place most of these countries among those with *equality-promoting* policies that create moderate incentives for the fathers’ involvement in care. In a few countries (e.g., Czechia, Croatia and Kosovo), despite individual father’s entitlements, leave policies still have a very limited potential to transform gender norms. This is due to shorter and poorly paid father’s entitlements and/or prolonged leave periods aimed towards mothers. Montenegro’s leave policy design is *equality-enabling* because of providing a shared right to a well-paid parental leave without any exclusive father's entitlement. Finally, most of the post-Yugoslav countries and most of the former Soviet Union countries still have the *equality-impeding* leave policy design, characterized by high mother-centeredness of leave policies (less favorable in the case of former Soviet Union countries due to long poorly-paid leave periods) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The gender dimension of leave policy design in the EFSCs in 2018



Legend: AL=Albania; BA=Bosnia-Herzegovina; BG=Bulgaria; CZ=Czechia; ES=Estonia; GE=Georgia; HR=Croatia; HU=Hungary; LT=Lithuania; LV=Latvia; MD=Moldova; ME=Montenegro; MK=North Macedonia; PO=Poland; RO=Romania; RS=Serbia; RU=Russia; SI=Slovenia; SK=Slovakia; UA=Ukraine; XK=Kosovo.

Note: Presented data reflect gender distribution of FTE leave entitlements for dual-earner heterosexual couples earning 100% of national average full-time earnings and fulfilling eligibility criteria for earnings-related leave benefits (see the Data and methodological approach section). Following the conceptual framework, the thresholds were set in such a way that an *equality-impeding* model refers to mother-centered leaves, opposed to an *equality-transforming* model that provides strong incentives for fathers to share the leave (well-paid individual and shared fathers' entitlements). An *equality-enabling* model relies on well-paid shared leaves, while an *equality-promoting* model provides fathers with shorter or poorly paid entitlements and has a high concentration of the total leave on mothers. The

results of calculations based on the 1990 data are not reported here as all the countries fitted the same model of *equality-impeding* leaves.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data presented in Tables 1-3.

Discussion: Policy concerns embedded in leave policies design and gender implications of policy design

There had been several prevailing policy concerns embedded in the EFSCs' leave policy design throughout the recent half a century, directly affecting leave policy developments in these countries and having had different implications for gender equality. The concerns behind the leave policies development were initially related to the woman's health (Karu and Pall, 2009; Korintus and Stropnik, 2009) so that the labor market regulation aimed to protect female workers around childbirth. After World War II, the equality between men and women, based on the communist ideology, came to the fore and was materialized through the women's participation in the labor market on an equal footing to men (Karu and Pall, 2009; Perelli-Harris, 2008). Full-time employment was a norm, so affordable supporting services (like early childhood education and care (ECEC)) were provided to employees (Kocourková, 2002; Gjonca *et al.*, 2008; Spéder and Kamarás, 2008; Karu and Pall, 2009) and the leave policies improved (Tables 1 and 3). The entitlement to maternity benefits was mostly limited to employed persons and was later gradually extended to the large agricultural population and the self-employed (Stropnik, 2003).

In the same period, gender-equality concerns remained limited to the public sphere (economic, social, cultural and political life; Karu and Pall, 2009), while parallel changes in gender relations did not occur at the family level (Perelli-Harris, 2008). Men were hardly mentioned in the context of children or housework (Karu and Pall, 2009) and the division of care work remained traditional (e.g., Karu and Pall, 2009; Haškova *et al.*, 2009). The leave policies did not aim to challenge this practice, and primarily women were entitled to parenting-related leaves (Tables 1 and 3) that were seen as both a work-family reconciliation measure and a measure contributing to the child development. Namely, since the 1950s, the impact on child development was increasingly stressed in discourses on leaves (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009), which led to the introduction of childcare leaves in the second half of the 1960s. These leaves, first available until the child turned one, were gradually extended until the child's age of three (except in former Yugoslav countries and Romania), targeting mothers as primary beneficiaries (Table 3). The reforms brought about (low-paid) mother-centered leaves, i.e., *equality-impeding* leave policy design (see: Brighthouse and Wright, 2008) that prevailed in all the EFSCs until 2000 (see the Results section). Mother-centered leaves were an obstacle to female professional careers (Kocourková, 2002) and increased women's economic dependency on their spouses (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009), both of which are detrimental to gender equality.

Karu and Pall (2009) argue that a newly created contradiction between the ideology of gender equality in the labor market and the increasing possibility for women to use long leaves and withdraw from the labor market for several years after each childbirth was a reflection of an emerging scarcity of jobs threatening the socialist ideology of full employment. A longer childcare/parental leave was also seen as a potential pro-natalist measure, particularly in the CEE (except Poland) and former Soviet countries (Kocourková, 2002; Spéder and Kamarás, 2008; Muresan *et al.*, 2008; Perelli-Harris, 2008; Inglot *et al.*, 2011). Already in the socialist period, leave periods were extended as the response to low (below-replacement) fertility rates, resulting in the women's years-long absence (or withdrawal) from the labor market

(Kocourková, 2002). The assumption that long leaves would enable work-family reconciliation and ensure that women would have more than one child in spite of full-time employment (which was a norm) led to the development of explicit pro-natalist leave policies in the CEE countries (e.g., see Kocourková, 2002; Sobotka *et al.*, 2008). For example, Czechoslovakia implemented “the additional maternity leave” until the child turned two in 1970, which was paid only after the birth of the second and higher-order child (Sobotka *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, in 1969, a very low fertility rate in Hungary in the 1960s led to childcare leave prolongation until the child turned three (Spéder and Kamarás, 2008; Korintus and Stropnik, 2009). In the Soviet Union, pro-natalist policies treated maternity as a social obligation of women, childlessness was taxed, and social benefits were conditioned by childbearing (Karu and Pall, 2009). Earnings-related childcare benefits were introduced in the early 1980s to decrease the cost of childbearing (Perelli-Harris, 2008).

The transition to the capitalist system that began between 1989 and 1991 had diverse implications for parenting-related leaves in the EFSCs and their (de-)gendering potential, depending on the strength of influence of various factors: decreasing employment rates, dramatic fall in real wages, falling standard of living, a sharp decrease in subsidized ECEC, very low fertility rates, prevailing moral norms in the society, the Church, etc. (e.g., Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Karu and Pall, 2009; Cruşmac and Köhler, 2016; Stankuniene and Jasilioniene, 2008). In the context of adverse socio-economic conditions, long periods of (paid) parenting-related leaves in the CEE and Baltic countries secured mothers from unemployment (Kocourková, 2002; Muresan *et al.*, 2008). However, they simultaneously reinforced the women’s roles as caregivers (“nurturers of the family hearth”; Stankuniene and Jasilioniene, 2008, 735), reintroduced the male-breadwinner model, and decreased the necessity of having public ECEC. Long absences from the labor market (e.g., in Czechia, a mother with two children can receive leave benefits for up to eight years since 1995) caused a depreciation of women’s human capital and limited their future employment prospects (Sobotka *et al.*, 2008). Though guaranteed, the re-integration into the labor market was rather difficult, and there were negative consequences for promotion opportunities and earnings (Kocourková, 2002; Korintus and Stropnik, 2009). Also, the employers’ perception and attitudes towards female employees changed with the shift to capitalism. Negative implications for women’s position in the labor market (Kocourková, 2002) became evident in the employers’ preference to hire male employees because they did not tend to take long parental leaves (Stropnik *et al.*, 2019).¹⁰ Another problem was low flat-rate payments that continue into the 21st century, providing no incentives for fathers to take the leave and maintaining women’s economic dependency (Spéder and Kamarás, 2008; Karu and Pall, 2009). A similar situation was in Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and the Baltic countries, while the post-Yugoslav countries were outliers in this respect, keeping the total length of maternity/parental leave at around a year (Table 3). Still, due to fertility concerns, the norms regarding breadwinning and caregiving were also challenged in some post-Yugoslav countries, and the policy response was seen in extended maternity/childcare leaves and mothers’ withdrawal from the labor market. That resulted in longer leaves (e.g., in Croatia) that reinforced gender inequalities, however, only for families with three or more children (Dobrotić, 2018).

The gender dimension of parental leaves was eventually strengthened with the EU accession process that had started in the late 1990s, through harmonization of the candidate countries’ legislation with that of the EU (see the Results section). Since the parenting-related leaves in EFSCs greatly exceeded the EU norms, the EU-led reforms focused on fathers’ entitlements to improve a gender-dimension of leave policies (Karu and Pall, 2009; Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Saxonberg, 2015; Dobrotić, 2018). Still, looking from a gender perspective, the transformative potential of leave policies in EFSCs remained weak, with many

of them still relying on an *equality-impeding* leave policy design (Figure 1). Although in the early 2000s, the paternity leave and father's quotas also started to develop, providing fathers with an exclusive right to leave, only the fathers in Slovenia, Lithuania and Romania are entitled to longer well-paid leave periods (around a month), which are considered to affect gendered division of care (see: O'Brien and Wall, 2009b). While some countries have implemented shorter well-paid paternity leaves (Table 2), they at the same time rely on parental leave designed as a family right or a transferable individual right (Table 3). Such parental leave results in low take-up by fathers (Karu and Tremblay, 2018) and thus a limited potential to transform gender norms. As argued by Saxonberg (2015), low flat-rate benefits remain an important barrier to greater use of parental leave by fathers in many EFSCs. The author concludes that, in practice, these leaves "have remained as 'extended maternity leaves' more than parental leaves" (*ibid*, 512).

Conclusion

The differences in parenting-related leaves in the EFSCs, policy concerns that shaped these leaves, and consequent gender implications have mainly remained under-explored in a comparative and historical perspective. This article is the first attempt to analyze and systematically compare around half a century of developments in the EFSCs. In the socialist period, the reforms followed the need to reconcile the ideologically imposed demand for women's full-time employment and the wish to reverse unfavorable fertility trends. In the CEE and former Soviet Union countries, working women became entitled to long childcare leaves that resulted in lengthy absences from the labor market, loss in women's human capital, and their economic dependency associated with (very) low leave benefits (e.g., Sobotka *et al.*, 2008). While the post-Yugoslav countries were outliers in this respect, keeping the total length of maternity/parental leave at around a year, their leave policies design remained gendered. Consequently, what was meant to be a generous provision for women, turned out to be an instrument for continuing traditional gender roles in the private sphere and a threat to gender equality in the public sphere. Interestingly, the early dynamic and patterns of parenting-related leave policy development in the EFSCs differed from those in Western European countries that did not develop long childcare/parental leaves, and these two groups of countries have not come much closer in the 21st century.

The divergence of the EFSCs' leave policies intensified in the transition period when competing priorities and inter-related policy concerns became embedded in policy design, such as re-traditionalization, fertility incentives, gender equality, or labor market participation (cf. Karu and Pall, 2009; Korintus and Stropnik, 2009; Dobrotić, 2018). Namely, after the fall of communism, the EFSCs continued to promote long leaves, but with another rationale behind: the mother's moral duty to take care of their young children rather than return to the workplace. Demographic concerns based on very low fertility rates in many EFSCs and high unemployment in the transition period additionally supported the traditional women's role. Countries, in general, attribute different attention to fatherhood, and it is still common for leave policies to promote the freedom of choice or ideal of mother-centered care rather than gender equality within the leave policy design. Fathers do not tend to use their leave entitlements, but rather transfer them to mothers, if possible. The process of EU integration had an important influence on gender equality promotion in the EFSCs by requesting non-transferable periods of parental leave. Therefore, while most of the post-Yugoslav and former Soviet Union countries still rely on *equality-impeding* leave policies, detrimental for gender equality, leave policies in the EFSCs that had joined the EU has gradually transformed towards more gender-equal policy design. Still, only a few of them have a policy design that may be

considered as *equality-transforming* and the potential to bring visible positive gender-related implications.

Future research, which would engage more systematically with the causal mechanisms behind the ECFSs leaves' development may put an additional light on how and to what degree have competing priorities (policy concerns), norms and values – in concrete historical country situations (economic, demographic, labor market, social and other) – and their inter-relation, influenced the leave policy design. Future research should also identify factors that, along with the regulation, influenced the fathers' leave uptake in the EFSCs, and investigate the consequences of fathers' behavior for various aspects of gender (in)equality. That is, it seems that more equality-oriented leave policies have not resulted in fathers' higher engagement (e.g., they often do not use well-paid leave entitlements), what may be attributed to the persistence of gendered division of care work in the family, even in countries with deep roots of a dual-earner gender regime and prevailing egalitarian gender beliefs (Stropanik *et al.*, 2019). More in-depth research on fathers' perception of structural and cultural barriers to the leave utilization in the EFSCs is thus needed.

There is also a need to engage more with eligibility criteria that need to be fulfilled to gain right on leaves and benefits, as they have an important role in translating policies into take-up rates, particularly for parents with precarious position in the labor market (McKay *et al.*, 2016; Dobrotić and Blum, 2019). If the serious limitation regarding the availability and reliability of detailed data on eligibility criteria for both mothers and fathers, particularly until the 2000s, is overcome, the impact of eligibility criteria on take-up of leaves could be investigated from a historical perspective. This would contribute to a better understanding of the father's low take-up of parental leave, that is, whether that was the consequence of eligibility or choice? However, one may also question the quality of data on take-up and the resulting comparability of take-up rates, as most countries dispose of data based on the total number of fathers and not just the eligible ones.

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¹ The term 'parenting-related leave' is used through the article when referring to all three types of leave, and specific terms – 'maternity leave', 'paternity leave' and 'childcare/parental leave' – when referring to particular kinds of leave. Since the EFSCs had introduced the so-called 'childcare leave' as an extension of the maternity leave and renamed it into 'parental leave' when also fathers became eligible, we use the term 'childcare/parental leave' for the points in time when both forms existed in the EFSCs.

² The 1996 Directive requested each parent’s individual right to at least three months of parental leave, while the 2010 Directive extended that period to at least four months, of which at least one month provided on a non-transferrable basis.

³ While there is no broad consensus on the optimal length of leave, the researchers usually argue that leaves longer than a year (as well as those shorter than six months) can be detrimental for women’s participation in the labor market (e.g., Lambert, 2008; Gornick and Meyers, 2008).

⁴ Eligibility may be conditioned by strict social security-insurance or employment-related criteria, citizenship, family type, etc. (see, for instance, McKay *et al.*, 2016; Sainsbury, 2019; Dobrotić and Blum, 2019; Wong *et al.*, 2019), influencing the leave take-up rates of different groups of parents within the country.

⁵ Brighouse and Wright (2008) recognize the need for a more nuanced elaboration of equality-promoting leaves by distinguishing between a *moderate* and a *radical* version of equality-promoting leaves, while arguing that these versions do not exist in any country. As the distinction between a *moderate* and a *radical* version of equality promoting leaves can indeed be hardly applied in the analyses of existing leave schemes, we developed the distinction between *equality-promoting* and *equality-transforming* leaves.

⁶ This article focuses on inequalities resulting from differences in leave entitlements between men and women. The intersecting patterns of inequalities and privileges – as observed through the axes of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, or class – are thus not systematically dealt with. Still, in the discussion of findings, the important role of employment-related eligibility criteria in translating policies into take-up rates, particularly for parents with less stable careers (McKay *et al.*, 2016; Dobrotić and Blum, 2019), is taken into account. The same applies to the fact that

the leave policy design may have different implications for different family types (e.g., Wong *et al.*, 2019) or immigrant/ethnic groups (e.g., Sainsbury, 2019).

⁷ Both the LP&R and the MISSOC database have gradually included the EFSCs as they joined the EU (since 2009, the LP&R has also included the Russian Federation). The MISSCEO database provides historical leave data for former Soviet Union countries (since 2004), the OECD Family Database (2019) for Central and Eastern European countries (CEE, since 1970), while Dobrotić (2020) provides leave data for five post-Yugoslav countries (since 1945).

⁸ In the cases of flat-rate benefits or income ceilings, the benefit was calculated as a percentage of the average wage in the country (see: Ray *et al.*, 2012).

⁹ Childcare leave was primarily the mothers' right, while both parents are eligible for parental leave. The shift from childcare to parental leave happened in different years, so both forms existed concurrently in the EFSCs in certain points in time.

¹⁰ For example, when discussing an unsuccessful three-year parental leave proposal in Slovenia in the 1990s, the opponents pointed to the worsening of women's employment opportunities and earnings, as well as the negative consequences for their financial dependence and social security. Even female employers declared that they would employ men rather than women (Korintus and Stropnik, 2009).