



László Vértessy

Family support policy in the EU and in Hungary

– government, challenges and society
in a changing Europe

Gazdaságelemző Intézet
Institute of Economic Analysis
Budapest, 2022



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Family support policy in the EU and in Hungary government, challenges and society in a changing Europe

By the early 21st century, the family had taken on a special significance. It is not a growing role but a changing one. The traditional family model, which has characterised our old continent for centuries and in some regions and areas for millennia, is taking on a new form. The short time that has elapsed means that we can only see the initiatives, not yet the medium- or long-term impact. The novelty of the change has surprised everyone, as it has meant and still means a new attitude, both for individuals and society. The classic family concept of earlier times is increasingly weakening and is being replaced by neoliberal versions, which means both a change in the structure of the family itself and a change in the values of the external environment, the host society. Governments are also following the changes and, depending on their orientation, are either in favour of, against, or indifferent to them. The paper attempts to trace the European mainstream and the different responses to it.

In the dynamic landscape of a changing Europe, the role and structure of family support policies play a pivotal role in shaping the well-being of societies. This comprehensive exploration delves into the intricate web of family support policies, focusing on the European Union (EU) as a collective entity and Hungary as a distinctive member state. The analysis unfolds across four key dimensions: the conceptualization of family, the role of the European Union in crafting family support policies, the specific case of Hungary, and a succinct summary synthesising the key findings. This examination aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted nature of family support policies in a continuously evolving Europe by dissecting government approaches, addressing challenges, and scrutinising societal dynamics.

The first part of this exploration delves into the conceptualization of family, recognizing its diverse forms and functions in contemporary European societies. Analysing the theoretical underpinnings and evolving definitions of family, this section sets the stage for understanding how family support policies are shaped and implemented. From traditional nuclear families

to emerging non-traditional structures, an exploration of the concept of family lays the groundwork for the subsequent discussions on policy formulation and implementation.

The second part shifts the focus to the European Union, examining its role in crafting family support policies that transcend national borders. As the EU strives to create a cohesive framework for its member states, exploring family-related initiatives, directives, and regulations becomes imperative. This section scrutinizes the mechanisms through which the EU influences and harmonizes family support policies, fostering collaboration and addressing common challenges faced by member states.

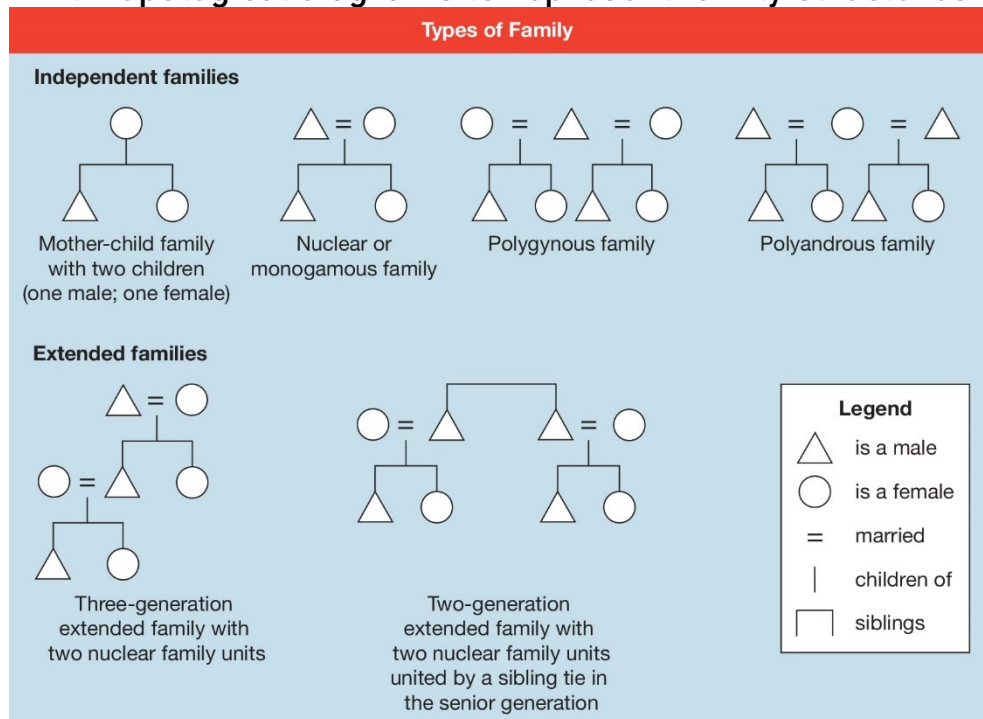
The third part narrows the lens to Hungary, providing an in-depth analysis of the nation's specific approach to family support policies. This section explores how Hungary tailors its strategies to address unique societal needs and challenges, from legislative frameworks to government programs. By examining the historical context and contemporary developments, a nuanced picture of Hungary's stance on family support policies emerges, shedding light on both successes and areas for improvement.

The short final part serves as a brief synthesis of the preceding sections, offering a comprehensive summary of key findings, trends, and overarching themes. By distilling the complexities of family support policies in the EU and Hungary, this section provides insights into the broader implications for European societies. Additionally, it highlights potential areas for further research, policy refinement, and collaboration among EU member states to address the evolving needs of families in the 21st century.

I. Concept of family

Foundations in the context of family dynamics encompass key terms that define and underpin the structures and relationships within a familial setting. Understanding these foundational concepts is crucial for navigating the complexities of family life. Concurrently, family policy plays a pivotal role in shaping societal norms and addressing the diverse needs of families. This exploration delves into the fundamental terms that lay the groundwork for familial interactions, exploring how family policy, as a societal framework, influences and responds to the dynamic nature of family structures and relationships. By examining both foundations and family policy, we gain insight into the essential elements that contribute to the well-being and resilience of families within the broader societal context.

Anthropological diagrams to represent family structures



Source: https://revelpreview.pearson.com/epubs/pearson_member_a/OPS/xhtmll/ch19_sec_28.xhtml

1. Foundations

The dynamics of family, marriage, and divorce are integral components of societal structures that profoundly influence individual lives. The intricate interplay between these elements shapes the fabric of family relationships, impacting personal well-being and societal norms. This dual exploration navigates through the complexities of family life, examining the dynamics of marriages and divorces as key milestones within the broader familial context.

Additionally, the juxtaposition of family versus individual perspectives provides insights into the tensions and harmonies that exist within this delicate balance. Understanding the interdependence of family dynamics and individual aspirations is essential for fostering healthy relationships and formulating responsive policies that acknowledge the diverse needs and experiences within the broader societal framework.

1.1. Family, marriage, divorce

It has long been believed in our culture, and still is by most people, that there are three major stages in our existence on earth: birth, marriage and death. The middle one is the birth of the family, a turning point in the life of the individual and the community.

What is **family**? The **family** is the basic unit of society, where people live in a small community with a lasting relationship between members by descent, marriage, adoption or cohabitation. The members of a family are usually like-minded people who help each other.¹ This definition is not exhaustive, as there are many other links, some of which may be missing, as is increasingly the case today. There is no ideal family; life inevitably brings conflicts. Most of the world's governments have recognised the value and importance of the family, so support systems are in place almost everywhere, but there is a significant difference in scale and form.

¹ Levin, Irene, and Jan Trost (1992): Understanding the concept of family. *Family relations* (1992): 348-351. and Weigel, Daniel J. (2008): The concept of family: An analysis of laypeople's views of family. *Journal of Family Issues* 29.11 (2008): 1426-1447.

According to the dictionary, "A basic unit of social life, a historically evolving form of relationships between the closest relatives. Its most important function is to provide for the upbringing of these children."² A family is defined in statistics as the narrowest group of people living together in a spousal, common-law or blood relationship. The two main types of family are the couple-based family with or without a child and the single parent raising a child. The classification of family status indicates each person's role in the family or household. A family can be based on a couple (married or cohabiting) with or without unmarried children or a single parent (father or mother) with unmarried children. Moreover, **family policy** is about helping, supporting and guiding them in the right direction.

The European historical background on the family is based on the **Greek** and then the **Roman Empire**, where the head of the family (*pater familias*) was the leader and the authority; it included the wife (who was given particular respect), the children and even the slaves.³ They were a close-knit unit, bound together by blood or legal ties, with a common goal: to live better, to get on better. With the advent of **Christianity** in Europe - initially only Catholic - the Church had a monopoly on the institution of marriage, which in practice could only be dissolved only in exceptional cases and with great difficulty. The **Jewish** conception⁴ was also tightly closed on the issue, although levirate⁵ was a common practice in Eastern churches, and

² Új Magyar Lexikon Akadémia Kiadó, Budapest, 1959. Vol. 1. p. 478

³ Brockhaus Konversations-Lexikon Berlin und Wien, 1893, vol. 6, p. 557.

⁴ A marriage sanctified "under the Law of Moses and Israel" can only be dissolved "under the Law of Moses and Israel". Hala has a strict biblical prescription for divorce. See <https://zsido.com/fejezetek/a-valoper/>

⁵ in Deuteronomy, Section 25.5-10 elevated the levirate to the level of a law:

Family Marriage. If brothers are living together, and one of them dies without having a son, then the widow of the deceased is not to marry outside of the family. Her husband's brother will take her as his wife and thus perform the duty of her husband's brother. ⁶ The first son will bear the name of the deceased brother, so his name not be extinguished in Israel. ⁷ However, if the man does not want to marry his brother's wife, let the brother's wife go to the elders of the town at the gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to ensure the continuance of his brother in Israel. He will not perform the duty expected of a husband's brother." ⁸ Then the elders of the town will summon him and speak to him. If he continues to say, "I will not marry her," ⁹ then the brother's widow will come up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his shoes from his feet, and spit in his face saying, "This is what a man deserves who will not build a house for his brother." ¹⁰ His family will be known as "the family of the unsandaled one" in Israel.

This custom was also known in medieval Hungarian peasant society.

marriage by in-laws⁶ was considered natural and legal. With the rise of the **Muslim** world, Islam became dominant in many southern and eastern Europe areas. Although multiple wives are religiously permissible, Islam still considers marriage to be the most appropriate form of relationship between men and women, and today, polygamy is becoming increasingly rare⁷, especially as there is a maintenance obligation in addition to pleasure.

In Judeo-Christian societies, the family is defined by direct descent. In today's Europe, this means, on the one hand, consanguinity, in its original version, marriage, and not typically, but permissibly, adoption. It is a matter of blood and legal ties, rarely even dominated by a closer relationship based on earlier custom. The former exists in particular in the Orthodox Jewish conception: a Jew is one whose mother is Jewish, which is almost a metaphor for the Roman legal principle of *mater certa – pater semper incertus*⁸ (Remember: the genetic revolution, and thus proof of descent, only appeared in the 20th century.)

The **classic family model** is father, mother and children. This clearly defined the family in the past, but now it is necessary to add that the father is male and the mother is female.⁹ The Hungarian Fundamental Law states that Hungary protects the institution of marriage as a community of life between a man and a woman, based on voluntary consent, and the family as the basis for the nation's survival. The family relationship is based on marriage and the parent-child relationship.¹⁰

The term "**family of origin**" pertains to relatives linked by blood or established legal relationships such as marriage or adoption. This category encompasses parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, nieces, and nephews. On the other hand, "**family of orientation**" refers to individuals who cohabit and share a connection through blood or legal ties or those who behave and live as though connected by either. Unlike the family of origin, this definition specifically focuses on individuals who reside in the same household and signifies the family composition we actively choose. For instance,

⁶ It is a duty of gratitude and care in place of a dead brother, not the same as a duty of mercy

⁷ Maximum 4 wives and concubines

⁸ Praesumptio iuris et de iure has force, i.e. there can be no counter-proof against this principle.

⁹ Gring-Pemle, Lisa M. (2003): Legislating a "normal, classic family": The rhetorical construction of families in American welfare policy. Political Communication, 20.4 (2003): 473-498.

¹⁰ Article L of the Fundamental law of Hungary

while young individuals may not have the autonomy to choose their living arrangements, as we mature, we have the agency to select a spouse or partner and may also choose to have or adopt children.¹¹

The concept of family has also changed in recent decades. Traditionally, it was defined as a group of people who belonged together by blood or marriage, spanning several generations. The definition currently used in the EU statistical system is that a **family** is made up of at least two people living in the same household who are married or in a civil partnership, and, if they are not childless, their children or the children of one of them by blood, foster care or adoption, are also members of the family, as is the single parent-child(ren) relationship.¹²

The definition of family in statistics (**KSH**) is somewhat narrower: only parents (or single parents) and their unmarried children living with them are counted as families. On this basis, it distinguishes between three types of family:

- a **married couple** (formerly known as a 'nuclear family'),
- a **married couple with children** or children (traditional family), and
- a **single parent with children** (broken family).

In today's Europe, in addition to the traditional family, the **compound family** is becoming more common, described as a nuclear family, and people who have blood ties to only one member of the couple (for example, the children of another couple). There is also the **extended family**, which is formed with other family members, such as uncles, grandparents, and cousins, but nowadays, the same term is used for families with at least three children. In fact, the extended family used to mean three generations living together, but it is no longer common outside the Mediterranean countries (where it is still over 30%, but in Spain, it is over 40%). In the Scandinavian world, it has almost completely disappeared: between 1954 and 1994, the prevalence of three-generation families in Denmark, for example, fell from 30% to 3%,¹³ and there is no state support for it, even though it makes sense:

¹¹ Segrin, C. and Jeanne Flora (2015): Family Communication. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 5–11.

¹² Eurostat, 2015

¹³ <https://www.vhf.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentumok/rendezvenyek/2013/surjan-laszlo.pdf>

care for the elderly within the family is cheaper than institutional care (nursing homes, retirement homes, etc.). **Broken family** or single-parent family:¹⁴ consists of one of the two parents (father or mother) and their child/children. It is typically the result of death, divorce, abandonment or the decision of the child to give birth on his or her own, and is nowadays increasingly common in all European countries. **Mosaic families**: parents with adopted children. The most recent trend is the **homoderm family**: a family in which the parents are a homosexual couple, either male or female. It is typically accepted and supported by neoliberal governments. Lastly, the **polygamous family**: a plurality of husbands or wives in the family. Its support is not accepted anywhere in Europe, nor is its prevalence.

Transnational families are characterized by members who live in different countries, creating a unique dynamic shaped by global migration patterns. These families often navigate the complexities of maintaining relationships across borders, dealing with challenges and enjoying opportunities their transnational status presents. Transnational families highlight the interconnectedness of our globalized world, showcasing how families adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by international migration. As individuals and families move across borders, they contribute to the evolving fabric of global societies, fostering cultural exchange and diversity.¹⁵

The concept of the family has, therefore, become a sticky one, although it has retained a conservative approach in some areas, such as right-wing parties and other organisations, and very strongly in the churches and the social strata that are based on them.¹⁶

It is important to note that family structures are diverse, and these categories may overlap or evolve over time. The descriptions provided here are generalizations, and individual families may exhibit unique characteristics.¹⁷

¹⁴ In other words, an atomic family, because the word truncated means loss. See <https://kep-mas.hu/hu/a-media-csalad-felnott-es-gyerekkepe>

¹⁵ Bryceson, D. F., & Vuorela, U. (2020). Transnational families in the twenty-first century. In *The transnational family* (pp. 3-30). Routledge.

¹⁶ Shirley Zimmerman (2001): *Family Policy: Constructed Solutions to Family Problems*, Sage Publications.

¹⁷ Bozhkova, Galina, Olga Shatunova, and Elena Shastina (2020): Influence of the family on the process of forming a child's personality: types of families: a case of modern youth prose." *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 11.3 (2020): 220-241.

Types of families:

Family Type	Description
Nuclear Family	Consists of parents and their children living together in one household.
Extended Family	Includes parents, children, and other relatives like grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins living together or in close proximity.
Single-Parent Family	Comprises one parent and their children. This can result from divorce, separation, or raising children independently.
Blended Family	Arises when parents with children from previous relationships come together to form a new family unit. Also known as stepfamilies.
Childless Family	A family without children, either by choice or due to circumstances.
Same-Sex Family	Consists of same-sex couples with or without children, challenging traditional family structures.
Grandparent-Headed Family	Grandparents are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, often due to parental absence or inability to care for the children.
Foster or Adoptive Family	Families that include children not biologically related to the parents, either through foster care or adoption.
Communal or Collective	Multiple families live together, share responsibilities, and form a collective unit. Often seen in intentional communities or certain cultural settings.
Long-Distance Family	Family members live far apart, relying on technology and occasional visits to maintain connections.
Matrifocal Family	Centered around a female head of the household, with children and possibly other relatives.
Patrifocal Family	Centered around a male head of the household, with children and possibly other relatives.

Source: own compilation

The last idea of the topic is the **newest type of family approach**, which really became trendy in Western Europe after the turn of the millennium in America and is now spreading in Hungary, too, mainly supported by the bal-

liberal circles. The relevant movement is the **LGBTQ**, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer movement, which includes so-called non-traditional families.¹⁸

LGBTQ families contribute to the diversity of family structures, fostering a more inclusive and representative societal landscape. Research suggests that the stability and support within these families are comparable to those in heterosexual families, challenging stereotypes and promoting positive family outcomes. They contribute to increased visibility and acceptance of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, fostering a more inclusive society. Studies indicate that children raised in LGBTQ families fare as well emotionally, socially, and academically as their counterparts in heterosexual families, challenging misconceptions about the impact of family structure on children.¹⁹ The existence and visibility of LGBTQ families contribute to the advancement of LGBTQ rights, challenging discriminatory policies and fostering legal recognition and protection.

On the other hand, LGBTQ families may face societal prejudice and discrimination, leading to challenges in social acceptance, legal recognition, and access to various rights and benefits.²⁰ Some critics argue against LGBTQ families based on religious beliefs, asserting that such family structures go against traditional religious teachings. In some jurisdictions, LGBTQ families may encounter legal barriers related to adoption, marriage, or parental rights, limiting their legal recognition and protection. Critics may argue that children in LGBTQ families may lack role models of both genders or traditional family dynamics, potentially impacting their development. It is essential to note that opinions on LGBTQ families vary widely, and the

¹⁸ Goldberg, Abbie E., and Kristin K. Sweeney (2019): LGBTQ parent families. and Goldberg, Abbie E., and Katherine R. Allen (2018): Teaching undergraduates about LGBTQ identities, families, and intersectionality." *Family Relations* 67.1 (2018): 176-191. *Families: Innovations in Research and Implications for Practice* (2020): 471-489.

¹⁹ Gabb, Jacqui, and Katherine R. Allen (2020): Qualitative Research on LGBTQ-Parent Families. *LGBTQ-Parent Families: Innovations in Research and Implications for Practice* (2020): 471-489.

²⁰ Kleven, H., Landais, C., Posch, J., Steinhauer, A., & Zweimüller, J. (2020). Do family policies reduce gender inequality? Evidence from 60 years of policy experimentation (No. w28082). National Bureau of Economic Research.

above points reflect some common arguments.²¹ Societal attitudes are evolving, and ongoing efforts seek to address challenges and promote understanding and acceptance of diverse family structures.

In America, the number of children living with same-sex parents is already between 1 and 3 million²². In Europe, too, and in Hungary, the number of families of this type is negligible, below 1%, so the study does not deal with this issue separately. What is mentioned is the trend: it is becoming more and more widespread and increasing, especially in terms of political and social repercussions, i.e. outweighing its weight (see Pride parades, etc.). The experience of couples who also have children - increasingly common in the West - is mixed. There is already a movement in Hungary, the Hungarian LGBT Association, which works for a Hungary where everyone is free to express their sexual orientation and gender identity, where everyone is entitled to the protection of human rights, equality before the law and a life free from discrimination."²³

1.2. Family vs. individual

The state has a duty of care to its citizens. Almost everything falls under this heading, from defence to economic organisation and public administration. This essay is about the situation of society's smallest cell or unit, its management and support. However, the form and manner in which this is done – whether the **family or the individual** – varies from country to country (and possibly from territorial unit to territorial unit within a country) and from government to government. Depending on which administration considers it more appropriate, arguments for or against it will be made. A review of the domestic and international literature does not allow a clear-cut view of which is more successful, but there are examples of both. Each has advantages and pitfalls. Obviously, the most successful is some combination of the two. The devil is in the detail, i.e. the proportion.

²¹ Kraler, A., & Kofman, E. (2010). Civic stratification, gender and family migration policies in Europe. Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

²² <https://kepmas.hu/hu/a-media-csalad-felnott-es-gyerekkepe>

²³ <https://lmbtszovetseg.hu/szovetsegunk/jovokep-es-kuldetes>

The comparison between family and individual focuses on contrasting aspects related to personal identity, social dynamics, and the balance between collective and individual needs. Here are some key considerations.²⁴

Family vs. individual	
Family	Individual
<div><div></div></div>	<div><div></div></div>
<div><div></div> Interdependence</div>	<div><div></div> Independence</div>
<div><div></div> Shared Responsibilities</div>	<div><div></div> Personal Responsibility</div>
<div><div></div> Social Support System</div>	<div><div></div> Self-Expression</div>
<div><div></div> Identity and Roles</div>	<div><div></div> Flexibility and Adaptability</div>
<div><div></div> Long-Term Connections</div>	<div><div></div> Potential for Isolation</div>

Source: own compilation

The **families** are typically characterized by interdependence, where members rely on each other for emotional, financial, and practical support. Family units often involve shared responsibilities such as caregiving, household chores, and financial contributions, emphasizing a collective approach to managing daily life. They provide a built-in social support system, offering emotional assistance, advice, and companionship, contributing to overall well-being. Roles and relationships within the familial structure often shape individual identities within a family. Cultural and societal expectations may influence these roles. Family connections tend to be enduring and last throughout one's lifetime, providing a sense of continuity and shared history.

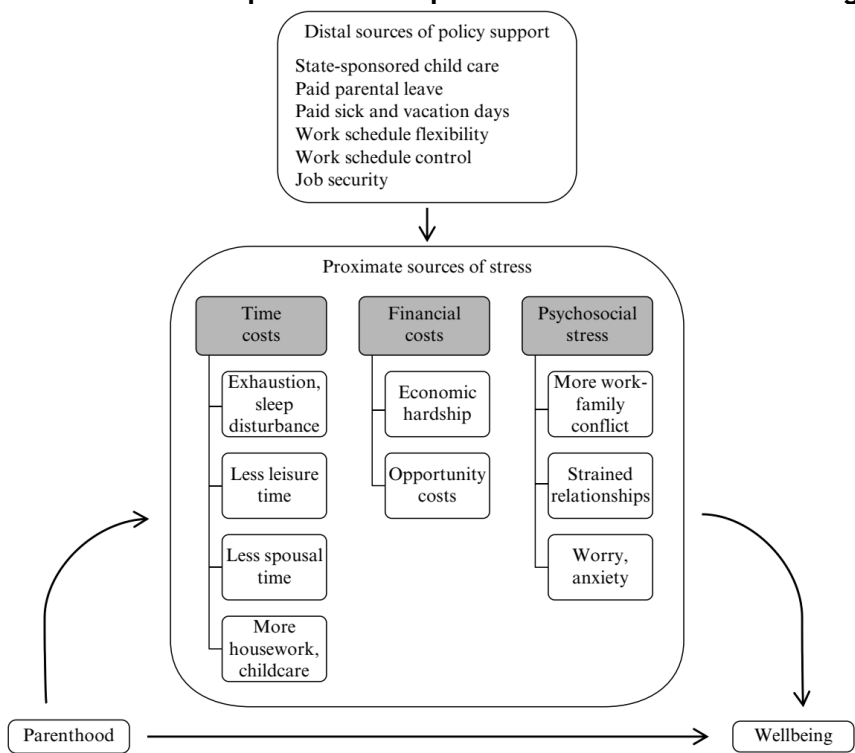
The **individuals** prioritize personal autonomy and independence, making decisions based on individual goals, preferences, and needs. They are responsible for their well-being, financial stability, and decision-making, without relying on others for support. Personal identity and self-expression are crucial for individuals, allowing them to pursue their interests, passions,

²⁴ Izon, Emma, et al (2018): Expressed emotion (EE) in families of individuals at-risk of developing psychosis: A systematic review. *Psychiatry research* 270 (2018): 661-672.

and personal development. Individuals have the flexibility to make life choices, change career paths, and explore personal growth without the constraints of familial expectations. While independence is a strength, individuals may face periods of isolation or loneliness, particularly without a built-in support system, as in the case of family.

The question can be transformed into the relationship between parenthood and wellbeing is influenced by various factors, including distal supports and proximate stressors. Distal supports refer to external factors that provide a broader context of support, while proximate stressors are immediate challenges and pressures faced by parents. These elements mediate the complex interplay between parenthood and wellbeing.

Distal supports and proximate stressors that mediate the relationship between parenthood and wellbeing



Source: Collins, Caitlyn and Jennifer Glass (2018): Effects of work-family policies on parenthood and wellbeing. In: In Eydal, Guðný Björk; Rostgaard, Tine (2018): Handbook of Family Policy. Edward Elgar Publishing. 341.

Distal supports encompass social, economic, and cultural factors that contribute to the overall welfare of parents. Examples include social networks, community resources, access to quality healthcare, and supportive government policies. Strong distal supports can act as buffers, enhancing parental wellbeing by providing a conducive environment for raising children.

Proximate stressors, on the other hand, are more direct challenges experienced in the day-to-day life of parents. These stressors may include financial difficulties, work-life balance issues, parenting demands, and interpersonal conflicts. Proximate stressors can negatively impact wellbeing by creating emotional strain and practical difficulties for parents.

The mediating factors between parenthood and wellbeing operate in a dynamic interaction. Positive distal supports may mitigate the effects of proximate stressors, acting as protective factors for parents. Conversely, weak distal supports can amplify the impact of proximate stressors, contributing to diminished wellbeing.

Understanding the interplay between distal supports, proximate stressors, and parental well-being can inform interventions and policies aimed at promoting positive parenting experiences. By addressing both the broader support systems and immediate stressors, efforts can be made to enhance the overall wellbeing of parents as they navigate the challenges and joys of parenthood.

The **balance** between family and individual priorities can vary significantly based on cultural, societal, and personal factors. Some cultures emphasize collectivism and family ties, while others prioritize individualism. Striking a healthy balance between the two is often a dynamic process influenced by changing life stages, personal development, and evolving societal norms. Ultimately, the interplay between family and individual dynamics contributes to the complexity and richness of human relationships and societies.²⁵

The purpose of this study is not to compare the two. What matters a lot is the starting point, the resources available, the goal, and what we want to achieve. Since the choice has already been made, at least for the last 12 years, this type of analysis would be unnecessary.

²⁵ MacArthur, G., Caldwell, D. M., Redmore, J., Watkins, S. H., Kipping, R., White, J., ... & Campbell, R. (2018). Individual-, family-, and school-level interventions targeting multiple risk behaviours in young people. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews*, (10).

Over the past decade, Europe and Hungary have opted for a family-centred support system, the main aim of which is to slow population decline and the means of which is to support **families with children**. In other words, it is a partial family policy, with those who do not have children being excluded from the benefits, regardless of whether they live in a family or not. It is also true that the resources are finite and that the way they are distributed at most (or at least?) should be changed. In other words, since it is a demographic approach, families without children are excluded, even if they have not had children through no fault of their own, nor are those who care for a family member who requires care equivalent to, or in some cases exceeding childcare. Nor do individuals who are without a family, even though some of them could not live in one (physical or mental problems, monastic life, etc.). From a demographic point of view, the latter are the so-called singles since they do not engage in social reproduction.

It should be said at the outset that the Hungarian family policy is among the best in the European Union. It is obviously not as resource-rich as its Western European counterparts, but it is one of the best-spending (over 5% of GDP) and most well-managed systems. The rate is, therefore high, but unfortunately, the development of the national economy limits the opportunities. This should also be taken into account in future proposals because the public purse is finite, and if the government spends more in one area, it must also find the resources to do so. It is a joyful but sad fact that the Hungarian economy is very late catching up with the EU; our backlog is growing, and we are already ahead of our regional peers. Furthermore, family support resources are based on the state of the economy. The well-being of families as a whole is essentially the well-being of society.

2. Family policy in the society

In the literature, the term family policy can be traced back to the 1950s/1960s, (e.g., Coser²⁶ and Schorr²⁷) and became more routinely used from the 1970s (e.g., Kamerman and Kahn²⁸). Prior to this, the specific components of family policy (e.g., family allowances) were the subject of study. However, its French-language equivalent *politique familiale* had been used much earlier: a reflection of the early interest in this topic in academic and political circles in Belgium and France (e.g., Bonvoisin²⁹ and Vulhopp³⁰).

Family policy faces many challenges in contemporary society, shaped by dynamic shifts in family forms and practices. These challenges encompass a range of issues, including transnational family practices, reproductive health, violence, poverty, and the right to property and home security. Rapid societal transformations have led to diverse family structures and practices. Non-traditional family forms, such as single-parent households, same-sex families, and cohabiting couples, challenge conventional policy frameworks.

- **Transnational Family Practices.** Globalization has facilitated increased mobility and transnational connections among families. Policy challenges arise concerning immigration, dual citizenship, and the need to recognize and support families that span across borders. These practices require international cooperation and a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved.
- **Reproductive Health.** Reproductive health policies play a crucial role in family policy, encompassing issues such as family planning, access to contraceptives, and maternal healthcare. Striking a balance between reproductive rights, healthcare accessibility, and cultural sensitivities poses ongoing challenges for policymakers striving to ensure the well-being of individuals and families.

²⁶ Coser, L.A. (1951), 'Some aspects of Soviet family policy', *American Journal of Sociology*, 56 (5), 424–37.

²⁷ Schorr, A.L. (1962), 'Family policy in the United States', *International Social Science Journal*, 14 (3), 452–67.

²⁸ Kamerman, S.B. and A.J. Kahn (eds) (1978), *Family Policy: Government and Families in Fourteen Countries*, New York: Columbia University Press

²⁹ Bonvoisin, G. (ed.) (1942), *La politique familiale du marechal*, L'Actualite sociale.

³⁰ Vulhopp, Tilla (ed.) (1928), *Une politique des familles nombreuses en Belgique*, Louvain: Éditions de la Société d'études morales, sociales et juridiques.

- **Violence.** Domestic violence and abuse within families present significant challenges for family policy. Effective prevention, intervention, and support mechanisms are required to address the complex dynamics of family violence. Policies must focus on ensuring the safety of all family members and breaking the cycle of violence through education and awareness.
- **Poverty.** Economic disparities contribute to family challenges, with poverty affecting the well-being of parents and children. Family policies must include measures to alleviate poverty, such as social assistance programs, affordable housing initiatives, and access to quality education and healthcare. Breaking the cycle of poverty requires a comprehensive approach that considers the interconnectedness of family and socio-economic factors.
- **Right to Property and Home Security.** Ensuring families have secure and stable living conditions is a fundamental aspect of family policy. Property rights, affordable housing, and protection against eviction are critical components. Policies safeguarding the right to property and home security create a conducive environment for family stability and well-being.

The family policy of the developed world can be summarised in six goals, says Olivier Thévenon, Head of the Child Welfare Institute of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).³¹ These are:

- **Reducing poverty and maintaining incomes.** It is typical of Anglo-Saxon and southern European countries, where special support is given to low-income families with children. They may differ in the extent to which the level of support depends on income and the increase in the number of children.
- **Direct compensation for child-related costs.** It aims to reduce the gap between the living standards of families with and without children. It does not consider income and is mainly intended to support large families.
- **Support for employment.** Three main tools help women into work: entitlement to a child allowance after birth while maintaining income and employment; the provision of childcare during working hours; and a tax and benefit system that encourages employment.

³¹ Children's Well-Being Unit at the OECD

- **Improving gender equality.** Promoting equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between parents (including childcare). Fathers should be encouraged to stay at home with the child for a certain period of time so that mothers can return to work earlier. In terms of taxes, for example, tax rates could be differentiated for breadwinners and second earners.
- **Supporting development in early childhood.** Significant differences exist between countries in the minimum age at which institutionalised childcare starts.
- **Increasing birth rates.** Increasing fertility as a family policy goal has emerged recently in Europe. Two phenomena are important to consider: the gap between the planned and actual number of children should be reduced; female employment is not necessarily a barrier to increasing fertility; and many countries with high fertility rates also have high female employment rates.³²

Although the perception and values of the family in European societies have changed, the number of families is decreasing, and their number is shrinking sharply; therefore, governments are taking different measures - with different approaches, strengths and particular effectiveness - to create and support families and to encourage childbearing, which exists in all European countries. It should be emphasised that **family support is not a competence of the European Union** and that the approach in the individual Member States is, therefore, different. However, Brussels can and does legislate the reconciliation of family life and work, equal opportunities for women and men at work, and the protection and development of children, and this legislation applies to all Member States. Typically, EU and national funding do not conflict.

Family policy is a multifaceted domain that intersects with various societal institutions, each playing a unique role in shaping the landscape of family life. This triad explores the interplay between family policy and three influential forces: the Church, Media, and Migration. The relationship between family policy and the Church delves into the religious dimensions and moral frameworks that often influence policy decisions, reflecting the values and beliefs of a community. Examining family policy through the lens of

³² Thévenon, Olivier (2011): Family Policies in OECD Countries: A Comparative Analysis - Population and Development Review. 2011. vol. 37. No. 1. pp. 57-87.

Media explores how media narratives and representations shape public discourse and perceptions of family life, impacting societal attitudes and policy directions. Lastly, the dynamic interaction between family policy and Migration explores the challenges and opportunities presented by the movement of people, addressing the evolving needs and structures of families in the context of global mobility. Understanding these intersections is crucial for crafting effective family policies that resonate with diverse social, cultural, and demographic contexts.

2.1. Family policy and politics

Family policy and politics play a crucial role in shaping the societal landscape, influencing individuals' well-being, and reflecting a nation's values and priorities. Within the realm of family policy, different political ideologies – such as liberal, social democratic, and conservative perspectives – offer distinct approaches to addressing issues related to families, parenting, and social support systems. Each political ideology brings its unique philosophy regarding the state's role, individual responsibility, and the design of social programs aimed at supporting and nurturing families.

For the two decades of the century so far, the birth rate in none of the EU Member States has reached the level needed to replenish the population, even if France and Ireland are close to it, albeit not, it may be added, through a population movement of indigenous people. The fertility rate in the United States of America is almost at that threshold, while the average fertility rate in the European Union is around 25% lower. The EU Member States face similar demographic problems: a decline in the number of women of childbearing age, stagnation or decline in the number of births, and a fertility rate below the minimum of 2.1 needed for the population to reproduce simply³³. In Hungary, this figure will be 1.51 in 2021, and no drastic increase is expected because even the so-called Ratkó-grandchildren³⁴ have already fallen out of childbearing age (women aged 15-49).³⁵

³³ The basic demographic assumption about this latter value, known as the total fertility rate (TFR), is that it must exceed two in the medium term for a population to maintain, or reproduce itself.

³⁴ The literature refers to the children of the Ratkó children, born between 1970 and 1979. Anna Ratkó was Minister of National Welfare and later Minister of Health from 1949-53, and is credited with the complete ban on abortion and the childbirth tax.

³⁵ <https://g7.hu/adat/20210811/a-legmeglepoobb-dolgot-tette-a-magyar-gyermekevallalasi-kedvvel-a-jarvany-semmit/>

Overview of a selection of family policy typologies based on OECD countries

Source/ indicators-dimensions	Family policy or welfare state regime/cluster		
<i>Esping-Andersen 1999</i>	<i>liberal/ non-familialist</i>	<i>conservative/ familialist</i>	<i>social-democratic/ de-familialist</i>
stratification	Australia	Finland	Austria
decommodification	Canada	France	Belgium
defamilialization	Ireland	Germany	Netherlands
	New Zealand	Japan	Denmark
	United Kingdom	Italy	Norway
	United States	Switzerland	Sweden
<i>Korpi 2000</i>	<i>market-oriented</i>	<i>general family support</i>	<i>dual-earner</i>
childcare	Australia	Austria	Denmark
maternity-paternity leave	Canada	Belgium	Finland
elderly care	Japan	France	Norway
family benefits	New Zealand	Germany	Sweden
	Switzerland	Ireland	
	United Kingdom	Italy	
	United States	Netherlands	
<i>Bambra 2004</i>	<i>low defamilization</i>	<i>medium defamilization</i>	<i>high defamilization</i>
female labour force participation	Australia	Austria	Denmark
maternity leave	Japan	Belgium	Finland
	New Zealand	Canada	Norway
	United States	France	Sweden
		Germany	
		Ireland	
		Italy	
		Netherlands	
		Norway	
		Switzerland	
		United Kingdom	
<i>Korpi, Ferrarini, and Englund 2013</i>	<i>market-oriented</i>	<i>traditional family</i>	<i>earner-carer</i>
family benefits	Canada	Austria	Denmark
childcare	United States	Belgium	Finland
maternity and paternity leave	United Kingdom	France	Norway
	Australia	Germany	Sweden
	New Zealand	Italy	
	Ireland	Netherlands	
	Japan		
	Switzerland		

Source: Gauthier, Anne H. and Judith C. Koops (2018): The history of family policy research. In Eydal, Guðný Björk; Rostgaard, Tine (2018): Handbook of Family Policy. Edward Elgar Publishing. ISBN: 9781784719333, 1784719331. 15.

Comprehensive family support in the developed world includes, with different weightings in different countries, mainly:

- tax measures (reliefs, exemptions, tax refunds, child tax, etc.)
- family allowances (cash and in-kind)
- working benefits (reduced working hours, more days off, one shift, flexible working hours, working from home, light work)
- actions to promote equal opportunities between women and men in the workplace (equal pay, but also, for example, the increasingly prominent option of men staying at home with young children)
- services to care for and look after children and other dependants (support for involving grandparents, relatives, social workers, au pairs, external carers, etc.)
- family rights related to pension schemes (recognition of years worked at home, early retirement)
- health insurance benefits (staying at home with sick child, subsidised holidays, health cures)
- opportunities to reconcile family life and work (working from home, flexible working hours, parental leave, voluntary part-time work)
- poverty reduction (providing money and services to promote equal opportunities, organising donations)
- discounts for children (funding for extra lessons, sports facilities, psychological training, school bus, textbooks, laptop, internet subscription, indoor meals, etc.)
- general credit and purchase discounts (housing, renovation, furniture, cars, etc.)
- increasing the number of places in nurseries and kindergartens, upgrading the existing ones, strengthening special activities (especially developing existing skills, language learning, swimming, etc.)
- social, not material, recognition of having children. Respect for motherhood. The ideal of the family.
- supporting related social organisations and civil initiatives
- appropriate, effective and well-organised propaganda to increase family value.

We have only mentioned the most important ones. The **form of support** can be in cash, in kind or in the form of various benefits. The emphasis is typically on equity and social assistance, but the approach varies.

Comparison of the two main types of social investment approaches

Type	Liberal approach	Social democratic approach
<i>Commonalities</i>	Reinforcement of the investment features of social policies (increased investment in human capital) Consolidation of social and economic policies Expansion of citizens' employment prospects	
<i>Origin</i>	Third Way, United Kingdom (1990s)	Initial stage of the welfare state, Sweden (1930s)
<i>Redistributive social expenditure</i>	Unproductive	Synergy of redistributive and productive social expenditure
<i>Benefit generosity</i>	Negative work incentive	Positive work incentive
<i>Entitlement for benefits</i>	Targeted, means-tested benefits	Universal benefits
<i>Citizenship</i>	Emphasis on duty	Emphasis on rights
<i>Equality</i>	Equality of opportunity	Reducing inequality
<i>Role of social policy</i>	Investment in human capital Workfare	Capability approach Activation

Source: Lee, Sophia Seung-yoon and Seung-ho Baek (2018): The social investment approach in the productivist welfare regime: the unfolding of social investment in South Korea and Japan in Eydal, Guðný Björk; Rostgaard, Tine (2018): Handbook of Family Policy. Edward Elgar Publishing. 115. Based on Lister, R. (2004), ‘The Third Way’s social investment state’, in R. Surender and J. Lewis (eds), Welfare State Change: Towards a Third Way, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 157–81. and Esping-Andersen, G. (ed.) (2002), Why We Need a New Welfare State, New York: Oxford University Press.

The **liberal** and **social democratic** types of **social investment approaches** represent distinct philosophies regarding the state's role in social policy and welfare provision. The liberal (United Kingdom and United States if America) approach emphasizes individual responsibility and self-sufficiency. It favours limited state intervention, viewing social programs as a safety net rather than as mechanisms for extensive redistribution. The social democratic approach emphasizes social solidarity and reducing inequalities. It supports a more active role for the state in providing comprehensive welfare services and social safety nets. The six key differences are in philosophy, the state's role, the social safety nets, the education and training, the labour market policies, and the inequality.

In the liberal model, the state's role is often minimal, focusing on ensuring a basic safety net for those in need. There is an emphasis on individual

choice and market-driven solutions. The social democratic model envisions a more active role for the state, with comprehensive welfare programs and public services to address social inequalities and promote social cohesion.

Social safety nets in the liberal model are typically designed to assist those facing extreme hardship rather than addressing broader social issues. Means-testing is common, targeting assistance to the most vulnerable. Social safety nets in the social democratic model are often more universal, seeking to address systemic issues such as income inequality and access to education and healthcare.

The liberals emphasize market-oriented education and training policies, often encouraging individuals to invest in their own skills and education for employability. The social democrats advocate for state-supported education and training programs to ensure equal access to quality education and skill development, contributing to a more equitable society.

Liberalism tends to focus on flexible labour markets and reducing barriers for businesses. May prioritize job creation through market-oriented policies. Social democratism emphasizes job security, workers' rights, and collective bargaining. It aims to create a balance between market flexibility and social protection.

The liberal model acknowledges inequality but tends to address it through targeted interventions, emphasizing individual opportunities for upward mobility. The social democratic model seeks to actively reduce income and social inequalities through progressive taxation, robust social programs, and policies promoting economic equality.

The **conservative welfare states** (Germany, Austria, Switzerland) in the early 1990s, these countries primarily supported women's caregiving roles at home with limited backing for labour market integration. However, from the mid-1990s to 2015, Germany and Austria underwent significant changes, emphasizing women's employment and gender equality.³⁶ Both countries introduced comprehensive public childcare for children aged 3 to 6, enhancing parental leave benefits to encourage fathers' participation. From 2007, the family policy of the German welfare state has also offered generous parental leave based on the Act on Childcare Allowance and Parental Leave

³⁶ Behning, U. and S. Leitner (1998), 'Zum Umbau der Sozialstaatssysteme Österreichs, der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Schweiz nach dem "care"-Modell', *WSI-Mitteilungen*, 11, 787–99. and Mätzke, M. and I. Ostner (2010), 'The role of old ideas in the new German family policy agenda', *German Policy Studies*, 6 (1), 119–61.

(Bundeselterngeld- und Elternzeitgesetz or BEEG). In contrast, Switzerland maintained a conservative stance with limited advancements in family policies, making it a 'developing country' in this regard.

The **Nordic welfare model** (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) is defined by its extensive social provision, where eligibility for benefits and various services is tied to citizenship or residence. It is marked by generous benefit levels, funding through taxation rather than individual contributions, and a commitment to egalitarian redistribution. This characterization is consistent in the comparative literature on family policies, typically grouping the five Nordic countries together under the same model. However, there are exceptions, particularly in the realm of care policies for young children.³⁷

While contemporary authors have tried to point out a range of differences, the Central-European **post-communist welfare states** have been selectively enhancing state provisions, but the influence of their historically established pathways remains evident.³⁸ The shifts towards increased reliance on fiscal measures, such as the reinforcement of tax credits for families with children, the promotion of greater gender equality through parental leave options for fathers, subsidies encouraging mothers' early return to work, and the expansion of childcare choices, varied in emphasis and timing across the three countries. The majority of reforms tended to benefit middle-class families, particularly in the post-crisis years, as these measures reinforced ties to earnings and fiscal welfare.

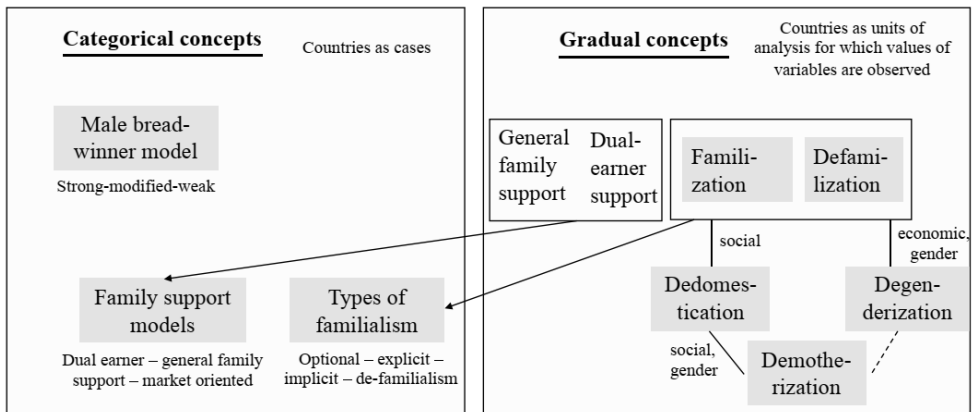
Another two conceptual approaches, **categorical and gradual family policy** research, focus on typologies as conceptual devices. The categorical approach critiques mainstream welfare state typologies for neglecting gender inequality and suggests two responses: integrating gender and family into mainstream theories or dismissing country groupings and forming typologies solely based on gender and family. The gradual approach introduces the concepts of the male breadwinner model and family support models.

³⁷ Eydal, Guðný Björk, Tine Rostgaard and Heikki Hiilamo (2018): Family policies in the Nordic countries: aiming at equality. In: Eydal, Guðný Björk; Rostgaard, Tine (2018): *Handbook of Family Policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing. ISBN: 9781784719333. 195-208.

³⁸ Saxonberg, S., & Sirovátka, T. (2020). Failing family policy in post-communist Central Europe. In *Regional Comparisons in Comparative Policy Analysis Studies* (pp. 193-210). Routledge.

Examples of categorical and gradual concepts in comparative family policy research

Analysis of institutions and policies



Source: Zagel, Hannah and Henning Lohmann (2020): Conceptual Approaches in Comparative Family Policy Research. In: Rense Nieuwenhuis · Wim Van Lancker (2020): The Palgrave Handbook of Family Policy. Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 978-3-030-54617-5. 125.

The **Male Breadwinner Model**, developed as a response to Esping-Andersen's typology, characterises welfare regimes by assessing the extent of women's economic dependence on a male earner. It categorises states into strong, modified, and weak breadwinner models when implemented and analyzed across four countries (Britain, Ireland, France, and Sweden). Over time, this model has evolved and been juxtaposed with the "adult worker model," which prioritizes individuals' employability over traditional gender roles.

Moving on to **Family Support Models**, Korpi introduced this concept to address gender and class inequalities concurrently.³⁹ It distinguishes three types of family support – general, market-oriented, and dual-earner support. Viewed from a social rights perspective within the state-market-family triangle, this model underscores the impact of policies on the gendered division of labour. Korpi's multidimensional approach recognises the need for family

³⁹ Korpi, W. (2000). Faces of inequality: Gender, class, and patterns of inequalities in different types of welfare states. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 7, 127–191. and Korpi, W., Ferrarini, T., & Englund, S. (2013). Women's opportunities under different family policy constellations: Gender, class, and inequality tradeoffs in western countries re-examined. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 20, 1–40.

policy to consider more than one dimension, including support for women's employment and unpaid family care.

In the realm of **defamilization**, various definitions coexist, emphasizing economic independence or policies affecting diverse family dependencies. Originating from the feminist critique of Esping-Andersen's decommodification concept, defamilization has been subject to critiques. Some scholars argue for a multidimensional understanding, considering both social and economic outcomes of policies. They caution against framing defamilization as the opposite of familization, highlighting the nuanced interplay between these concepts in comparative family policy research.

2.2. Family policy and the Church

Covenant with God,⁴⁰ Magnum mysterium (great mystery),⁴¹ one flesh,⁴² etc. - there are many interpretations of the Judeo-Christian concept of family, all of them strongly family-centred; the problem is only with the mapping.⁴³ In one or two small communities, the ecclesiastical unification of families works successfully, but at the societal level, it is not implemented in any of the countries.

⁴⁰ Book of Proverbs 16-17. ¹⁶ You will be saved from the wife of another, from the adulteress with her seductive words, ¹⁷ who forsakes the partner of her youth and forgets her sacred covenant with God.

⁴¹ St Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians on marriage. Eph 5:25-32. ²⁵ Love One Another in Christ. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ in order to sanctify her by cleansing her with water and the word, ²⁷ in order to present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such flaw, but holy and without the slightest blemish. ²⁸ In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. The man who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hates his own body; rather, he nourishes it and cares for it, even as Christ does for the Church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. ³² This is a great mystery. Here I am applying it to Christ and the Church. ³³ However, each one of you should love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife should respect her husband.

⁴² Mark 10:6-9 ⁶ "But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' ⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

⁴³ Bardis, P. D. (1964). Early Christianity and the family. *Sociological Bulletin*, 13(2), 1-23.

Given its prestige, current weight and role in society, the Church could/have an important role in family policy. Due to the predominant religious affiliation, this section approaches the issue only concerning the Roman Catholic Church, as the family value approach of the Christian churches is very similar. Hence, there is no need to emphasise the differences, and the vast majority of the believers in Hungary are Catholic. It should be mentioned that most of the countries' population more strongly favouring migration (Nordic, German, Benelux) is Protestant, including Evangelical.

"Reforms aimed at strengthening social life must start working on improving the social cells: the family." - wrote Bishop Tóth Tihamér a hundred years ago.⁴⁴ In the 20th century, the Popes' general, theoretical and practical advice on the family and its social situation, such as the collection of family wealth by fathers for the family, etc., appeared in successive editions.⁴⁵

The first major step in the modernization of the Catholic Church in relation to the family was the thematic treatment of the family as one of the most important areas of human life by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) in its pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*. According to the Synod, marriage is a lifelong union of love between a man and a woman, a sacred covenant of life whose author and source is God himself.⁴⁶

Pope John Paul II has made the situation of families a priority, joining the United Nations International Year of the Family in 1994, and in his inaugural letter,⁴⁷ he stresses that in marriage, man and woman are so closely united that they become, in the words of Genesis, "one flesh". Rome launched the Year of Families on its own in 2011, but its proposals at that time failed to make a breakthrough. Pope Francis has also dedicated 2021 to the Year of the Family, saying: "The family is a country's greatest treasure. Let us all work to protect and strengthen this cornerstone of society."⁴⁸ . Like

⁴⁴ Tóth Tihamér: *Szekularizáció*. Szent István Társulat Budapest, 1935. Jubileumi kiadás. 203.

⁴⁵ Sanctissima naturae lex est ... In: Pope Leo XIII: *Ecycl*. Leo XIII. Vol. 23.

⁴⁶ Lukács László: A család az egyház szíve *Vigília* 2014/5 elérhetőség: http://real.mtak.hu/24078/1/Lukacs_Laszlo_Vigilia_2014_5_u.pdf and Kiely, G. (1986). Church, State and Family Policy. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 75(298), 150-156. and Minkenberg, M. (2003). The policy impact of church–state relations: family policy and abortion in Britain, France, and Germany. *West European Politics*, 26(1), 195-217.

⁴⁷ Letter to families, *Levél a családokhoz*. In: <https://regi.katolikus.hu/konyvtar.php?h=81>

⁴⁸ https://mandiner.hu/cikk/20210916_tenyleg_atirja_ferenc_papa_a_csaladrol_szolo_tanitast

its European counterparts, the Hungarian Catholic Bishops' Conference has set up a special Commission for the Family, signalling the importance of the issue, but support initiatives are weak and have not yet reached the faithful. The Protestant churches are not doing well either. There are no successful examples from Western Europe. There are one or two salutary exceptions in several places, but unfortunately, it is not possible to generalise from this.

The **traditional Christian views** on family are often based on the belief that God created families as the foundation of society. These views emphasize the importance of marriage between one man and one woman, the role of parents in raising children, and the need for families to provide a stable and loving environment for their children.

Christians believe that government should support traditional marriage and family structures, such as a married couple with children.⁴⁹ They may support policies that provide tax benefits for married couples, promote adoption by married couples, and limit government funding for same-sex marriage and adoption. According to religious life begins at conception, often oppose abortion and support policies that restrict or ban abortion. They support policies that provide support for women who choose to carry their pregnancies to term, such as prenatal care and adoption services.⁵⁰ Christians support policies that allow parents to choose religious schools for their children and that allow public schools to incorporate religious teachings into their curriculum.

Several **governments** have enacted policies that reflect Christian values and principles. These policies aim to support families, promote healthy marriages, and protect the well-being of children. Here are a few examples:

- **Tax benefits for married couples:** Many governments provide tax benefits to married couples, such as lower tax brackets or exemptions for dependents. This policy is often justified on the grounds that marriage is a stable and supportive environment for raising children.
- **Maternity and paternity leave:** Governments are implementing paid maternity and paternity leave programs. These programs aim to support working parents and encourage them to stay home with their newborns and young children.

⁴⁹ Dollahite, D. C. (2016). Christianity and families. *Encyclopedia of Family Studies*, 1.

⁵⁰ Witte Jr, J., & Hauk, G. S. (Eds.). (2017). *Christianity and family law: an introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

- **Child care subsidies or tax breaks** to families who use child care services. These subsidies aim to make child care more affordable for working parents and reduce the financial burden of raising children.
- **Food stamps and other nutrition programs:** Government-sponsored food assistance programs provide essential food and nutrition to low-income families, helping to ensure that all children have access to healthy meals.
- **After-school programs:** provide supervised activities and learning opportunities for children whose parents work late. These programs aim to provide a safe and stimulating environment for children after school and help to reduce the risk of juvenile delinquency.

Regarding practical implementation, pastoral care typically gets off to a difficult start and progress is slow. Both in Hungary and abroad. The clergy has difficulty in finding contact with the faithful on this issue.

It is important to note that we did not find a strong correlation between religiosity and the institution of marriage/child rearing. As an example, Italy, the most Catholic country in Europe, has one of the lowest marriage rates as a percentage of the population but also one of the highest divorce rates and one of the highest childbearing countries.

Migration and church family policy. As mentioned above, the Church is very much in favour of strengthening the role of the family in society, but at the same time, it is also very much in favour of importing and supporting new families. In a way, the Christian command is also about welcoming, and the head of the Catholic Church, Pope Francis - himself the child of migrant parents - is very pro-migrant despite his very conservative view of the family. There is no Roman dependency in the Protestant churches, but no clear pro-inclusion family policy exists in either the Lutheran (Nordic states, Germany) or Calvinist (Benelux, Switzerland) churches. All churches, however, are characterised by relatively close cooperation with the authorities, not so much for ideological reasons as for economic ones, since most of the church's income comes from the state.

2.3. Family policy and Migration

All this clearly justifies the need for demographic measures, i.e. population replacement. There are two possible ways of doing this: replacing the depopulation through immigration or increasing the domestic population. The Hungarian government has not chosen the migration option, but wants to solve the problem from within, i.e. through the domestic population. Family policy is the main instrument for this.

Migrant policy is an alternative to domestic family policy in many countries. Its undoubted advantage is that it can lead to rapid population growth, with spectacular numbers even within a year. Its disadvantage is that it does not necessarily bring in the number of people that the country needs.⁵¹ Typically, there is a shortage of young people from the same culture who are professionally qualified, able to assimilate, and speak the same language, and there are very few of these among migrants. The effectiveness of family policy is questionable in their case because the story is fine until the young person is followed by his relatives (family reunification). The reproduction rate of these families is far higher than that of the indigenous population, but the problems begin when a significant proportion of them want to live on benefits, are unable to assimilate, do not learn a language or a trade, and do not want to integrate socially or culturally.⁵² In many large cities in Western Europe, social segregation has created almost ghettos.

In general, family policy can play a role in promoting and mitigating the negative impacts of migration. For example, family policy can help to integrate migrants into society by providing them with language classes, job training, and other support services. Family policy can also help reduce social tension by promoting tolerance and understanding between different groups. However, family policy must be carefully designed and implemented to be effective. For example, a family policy that is overly generous to migrants may simply encourage more people to migrate, which can exacerbate the negative impacts of migration. On the other hand, a family policy that is too restrictive may alienate migrants and make it difficult for them to integrate into society.

⁵¹ Kraler, A., & Kofman, E. (2010). Civic stratification, gender and family migration policies in Europe. Vienna: International Centre for Migration Policy Development.

⁵² Bonjour, S., & Kraler, A. (2015). Introduction: Family migration as an integration issue? Policy perspectives and academic insights. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36(11), 1407-1432.

The main advantage of a **family policy without migrants** is that the population reproduction is essentially homogeneous. In other words, children who follow the pattern of their parents are essentially born who do not differ significantly from the national average in terms of perception, race, culture, or other aspects. A serious drawback, however, is the slowness with which a truly reproductive age group grows up - a good 20 years, i.e. at least 5 government terms. Who guarantees this continuity?

The two together? Yes. In countries where there is migrant admission, the principles of modern democracy do not allow for the selection of population groups, so migrants benefit from the same advantages as the native population in terms of family policy support. If Hungary chooses this path, so should Hungary here. In other words, there is no dual-family support system; obviously, the families that benefit more from it have more children.

There are two important comments on this topic. In Europe in general, there is a growing trend towards a migrant-led approach to population growth. The Christian teaching is similar, most Christian churches favour it, and the corporal works of mercy are essentially about it. If Hungarian society and/or the political leadership adopt this, a new approach to family policy is needed.

In February 2022, the Ukrainian-Russian war started.⁵³ The outcome is not yet clear, but the expected large number of migrants arriving at the border creates a new situation. It can be estimated in the hundreds of thousands. It seems likely that many of them will have left for good, and many of them will stay in Hungary. Concrete figures are not yet available. Most of those who arrived in the first wave have Hungarian documents, so their admission is not questioned. Some of them, like their Ukrainian counterparts, will return to their country of origin. Some will continue to the West, and some will stay in Hungary – all of them in the tens of thousands, if not more. What seems inevitable is that this will give the Hungarian demographic situation a one-off - and hopefully non-recurring - major boost. Its likelihood can be confirmed by the fact that Hungarians suffered a great deal of humiliation in the Ukrainian era, and they hoped that the Russians would behave better towards them. We qualify this by saying that whatever new formation there is in Ukraine will not favour the Hungarians, even in the medium term, so it seems certain that many Hungarian families coming over, mostly with children, will not return.

⁵³ The writing of this part of the manuscript was completed in March 2022.

The new development needs to be addressed, especially as it also concerns the fate of the nearly 100,000 Hungarians still (?) living in Transcarpathia (the last estimate based on 2017 data was still around 130,000,⁵⁴ which has undoubtedly decreased further over the past 5 years.) Among the 230,000 refugees who crossed in the first week, almost 30,000 are Hungarians, most of them young with children. The war situation has resulted in a large number of broken families, with a significant number of them living on both sides of the border. Those arriving with children are already in need of family support, literally. This needs to be reflected in the initial support provided from the outset, and the good news is that both the state and charities are making efforts to do this. We hope that this will continue.

2.4. Family policy and Media

Since the last century, technological progress has increased the role of mass media in all areas, including the perception of the family. It is the number one influencing factor after the example of the immediate environment. The majority of people can be very well influenced by the relevant propaganda, which can also profoundly affect their values. This is how, alongside the traditional written press, the role of radio, TV and, more recently, the Internet in shaping the social perception of the family has grown.⁵⁵

In particular, the media has a big responsibility in the issue of **having children**. A life of comfort, moral freedom, the importance of acquiring wealth, crass egoism, and a specific interpretation of career are all factors that can hinder children, especially when the media regularly and systematically suggest them. At the extreme, we have come across more than one Internet site that explicitly suggests that we should not have any more children because this will destroy the Earth even sooner. It is not too dissimilar to saying that we should stop eating beef because the gases emitted from the animals seriously pollute the atmosphere, etc.⁵⁶

The media's portrayal **of the family** does matter. This is a particular concern for young people, with positive or negative examples, as the case may be, being reported here. It is not necessarily the sensationalism or the

⁵⁴ HVG 2022. March 3. 21.

⁵⁵ Hoover, S. M., Clark, L. S., & Alters, D. F. (2012). Media, home and family. Routledge.

⁵⁶ Extreme environmentalism is particularly prevalent in the Nordic world (see: 16-year-old Swedish Greta Thunberg et al.)

number of clicks that determines the success of a communication.⁵⁷ For example, the initiatives taken so far by the Családbarát Magyarország Központ Nonprofit Közhasznú Kft⁵⁸ do not really reach the stakeholders, even though it is involved in the implementation of governmental tasks related to the development of family and population policy instruments and family support, the reconciliation and combination of work and family, the monitoring of women's rights and the strengthening of intergenerational cooperation.

In the Hungarian **printed** press, no organs dealing specifically with the family, apart from a few rare publications, foundation material, and little-read portals. Even the long-established Családi Lap, the monthly magazine of the Red Cross, only deals with the topic in name and in a tangential way, because it covers everything from health care and environmental protection to light reading material.

We are looking for best practice: What could the Hungarian press empire adopt from successful international examples? As all countries face depopulation problems, we cannot recommend a model to follow. Increasing the number of women of childbearing age, even with well-developed propaganda, will not provide immediate or even medium-term results. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the issue is worth exploring in more detail, even if only partial results are guaranteed.

The subject is almost on the ground: examples of happy large families, how to get out of marriage crises, advice for young people on how to find their way... so many ways and opportunities to get ahead. The issue is also very relevant to the media activities of the relevant NGOs, whether it is to develop or, where already in place, to strengthen cooperation with the government. Slowly but surely, it can be effective.

⁵⁷ Miller, J., Davis, R. C., Henderson, N. J., Markovic, J., & Ortiz, C. W. (2004). Public opinions of the police: The influence of friends, family and news media. New York: Vera Institute of Justice. and Huston, A. C., Zillmann, D., & Bryant, J. (2013). Media influence, public policy, and the family. In *Media, children, and the family* (pp. 3-18). Routledge.

⁵⁸ <https://csalad.hu/rolunk/>

II. European Union

The European Union (EU) family support policy stands as a comprehensive framework designed to address the diverse needs of families across member states. Rooted in acknowledging families' central role in societal well-being, the EU family support policy aims to foster social cohesion, gender equality, and the overall welfare of individuals within familial structures. This policy encompasses a range of initiatives, including financial assistance, legal frameworks, and social services, all tailored to enhance the resilience and inclusivity of various family types.

Family policy changes from 1990 to 2010

LME/Liberal							CME/Conservative					CME/Social Democratic					
	M	AUS	NZ	UK	USA	IRE	M	BEL	AUT	FRA	DE	NL	M	NOR	SWE	DEN	FIN
Work/family Index																	
1990							0.25	0.02	0.22	0.65	0.26	0.12	0.59	0.38	0.72	0.50	0.74
2000	0.22	0.26	0.30	0.21	0.11	0.20	0.45	0.20	0.38	0.78	0.59	0.28	0.53	0.34	0.55	0.50	0.74
2010	0.24	0.29	0.33	0.30	0.11	0.18	0.51	0.27	0.48	0.80	0.68	0.33	0.63	0.45	0.67	0.61	0.77
Degendering Index																	
1990							0.27	0.66	0.55	0.13	0.00	0.00	0.42	0.17	0.59	0.73	0.18
2000	0.16	0.11	0.19	0.16	0.21	0.15	0.42	0.71	0.57	0.58	0.04	0.17	0.70	0.63	0.71	0.89	0.57
2010	0.30	0.20	0.22	0.65	0.26	0.18	0.59	0.73	0.58	0.70	0.54	0.77	0.81	0.93	0.81	0.82	0.66
Gendering Index																	
1990	0.25	0.36	0.27	0.15	0.14	0.35	0.61	0.55	0.59	0.79	0.65	0.45	0.27	0.45	0.17	0.09	0.35
2000	0.30	0.56	0.21	0.19	0.15	0.37	0.54	0.40	0.70	0.53	0.79	0.30	0.27	0.37	0.20	0.10	0.40
2010	0.24	0.44	0.23	0.12	0.15	0.27	0.45	0.32	0.62	0.41	0.58	0.30	0.15	0.17	0.13	0.11	0.20
Family Income Protection Index																	
1990	0.07	0.05	0.08	0.12	0.01	0.11	0.42	0.66	0.54	0.48	0.25	0.19	0.30	0.24	0.30	0.22	0.43
2000	0.11	0.24	0.08	0.13	0.00	0.12	0.44	0.74	0.56	0.43	0.30	0.16	0.31	0.31	0.27	0.24	0.42
2010	0.17	0.22	0.23	0.12	0.01	0.28	0.36	0.35	0.50	0.37	0.35	0.22	0.32	0.35	0.34	0.21	0.36

Note: AUS: Australia; AUT: Austria; BEL: Belgium; DE: Germany; DEN: Denmark; FIN: Finland; IRE: Ireland; NL: the Netherlands; NZ: New Zealand, SWE: Sweden; UK: United Kingdom; USA: United States. M indicates the average score of countries within each regime. All indexes are scaled from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating greater provision. Liberal market economies (LMEs) and coordinated market economies (CMEs). The work/family and degendering index score in 1990 in LMEs/Liberal welfare states is not presented due to limitations in terms of compatibility of data and because of the issue of missing data.

Source: Kang, Ji Young and Marcia K. Meyers (2018): Family policy changes across welfare and production regimes, 1990 to 2010. In Eydal, Guðný Björk; Rostgaard, Tine (2018): Handbook of Family Policy. Edward Elgar Publishing. ISBN: 9781784719333, 1784719331. 75.

The data serves as an approximation of policy endeavors within each country concerning both the country's efforts in other time periods and the efforts of other nations. Overall, a discernible trend of family policy expansion is evident. However, upon comparing patterns across policy dimensions,

notable differences emerge in the focal points of these changes. Specifically, 12 out of the 14 countries expanded policies supporting work/family balance through job-protected leave and public childcare provisions. Additionally, all 14 countries enhanced policies anticipated to have a degendering effect, either by promoting fathers' participation in parenting leave or by providing public care for children under 3. These changes were often substantial in comparison to previous efforts.

Yet, a mixed pattern emerged when assessing the potential gendering impact of policies emphasizing traditional gender roles, such as generous cash benefits, extended job-protected leave, and limited public childcare. Little to no change was observed in nine countries, while six countries (Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Norway, and Finland) exhibited substantial reductions in potentially gendering policy efforts. Similarly, the direction and magnitude of change varied in policies supporting families' income security through wage replacement for family leave, tax credits, and family allowances. Despite calls for austerity in many welfare states, the index's value declined significantly only in France, while the generosity of family benefits seemingly increased substantially in four countries (Ireland, and Norway).

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union declares the following principles and freedoms:⁵⁹

Article 7 - Respect for private and family life

Everyone has the right to respect for his or her private and family life, home and communications.

Article 9 - Right to marry and right to found a family

The right to marry and the right to found a family shall be guaranteed in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of these rights.

Article 33 - Family and professional life

1. The family shall enjoy legal, economic and social protection.

2. To reconcile family and professional life, everyone shall have the right to protection from dismissal for a reason connected with maternity and the right to paid maternity leave and to parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child.

⁵⁹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>

Article 7 encapsulates a fundamental principle of human rights, particularly regarding privacy and family matters. This articulation is often associated with Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and is echoed in various international and national legal instruments. At its core, this provision recognizes individuals' inherent dignity and autonomy, affirming their entitlement to a sphere of privacy and family life free from unwarranted interference. It underscores the importance of safeguarding personal space, familial relationships, and communication channels as integral components of human well-being.

The right to respect for private and family life is not absolute, and certain limitations may be permissible under the law, provided they are proportionate and necessary in a democratic society. For instance, national security, public safety, or crime prevention considerations may justify interference with these rights, but such measures should be carefully balanced to avoid undue infringement.

Article 9 emphasizes the importance of guaranteeing individuals the fundamental right to marry and establish a family. The provision underscores the significance of these rights and emphasizes that their exercise should be in accordance with the national laws governing such matters. This recognition acknowledges the diversity of legal systems across nations while affirming the universal importance of protecting the right to marry and form a family.

The provision not only recognizes the inherent individual right to marry but also acknowledges the broader societal interest in the establishment of families. By grounding these rights in national laws, the provision allows for flexibility, enabling states to tailor legal frameworks that reflect cultural, social, and legal nuances specific to their jurisdictions.

Article 33 extends legal, economic, and social protection to the family unit. This provision reflects a commitment to the holistic well-being of families, recognizing that legal safeguards alone are insufficient without accompanying economic and social protections. Subsection 2 addresses the delicate balance between family and professional life. It acknowledges the challenges individuals face in reconciling these aspects and, in response, grants the right to protection from dismissal for reasons connected with maternity. This protection aims to shield individuals from discriminatory practices related to pregnancy and maternity, recognizing the vulnerability of employees during these significant life events. Furthermore, the provision grants the right to

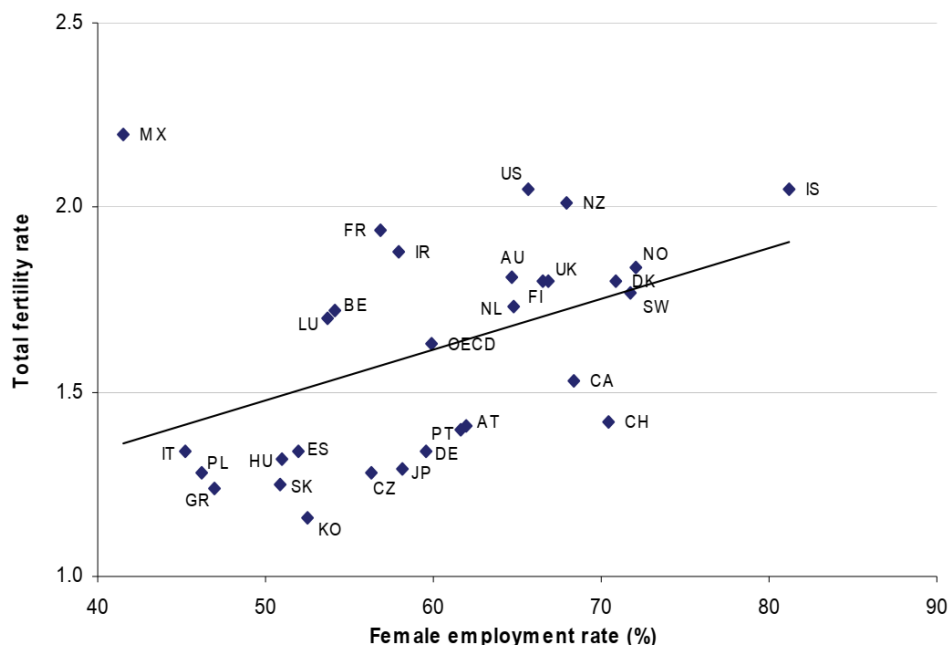
paid maternity leave and parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child. This recognizes the need for individuals to actively participate in the care and upbringing of their children without compromising their professional standing. The inclusion of parental leave and maternity leave signifies a commitment to gender-neutral policies that promote shared responsibilities in child-rearing.

Overall, Articles 9 and 33 collectively underscore the importance of family life and its harmonization with professional pursuits. By delineating these rights and protections, the legal framework seeks to establish a balance that supports the individual's right to marry and form a family while safeguarding the well-being of families and individuals in the realm of work and employment. The provisions exemplify a commitment to social justice and gender equality, recognizing the multifaceted nature of individuals' lives and the need for legal protections that reflect these complexities.

With a commitment to promoting work-life balance, gender equality, and child well-being, the EU family support policy reflects a dynamic response to the evolving nature of family structures and societal expectations. This exploration delves into the key components and principles that underpin the EU's approach to family support, highlighting the collaborative efforts undertaken to ensure the positive impact of family policies on the lives of EU citizens.

Each country has different goals and specific priorities for promoting fertility and work/family balance, reducing inequalities in living standards or family poverty, providing health care for children or supporting their education. Despite the many differences, there is some consistency: all EU Member States' family policies have failed in the sense that they have not been able to stop population decline on their own. As for external aid, the management of migration, which is very relevant to the subject, is not the subject of this study.

Total fertility rates and female labour force participation rates in OECD countries



Source: Thévenon, Olivier (2009): Family policies in Europe: available databases and initial comparisons Vienna Yearbook of Population Research 2008, pp. 165-177 (DATA & TRENDS)

The two main goals of **increasing women's labour market participation and raising fertility** have long been seen as contradictory. However, the negative correlation observed between women's employment and fertility rates in the early 1980s no longer exists - it even became positive in the 2000s. In fact, the countries with the highest fertility rates are those with the highest female labour force participation rates. This is because public policies play a role in reconciling these seemingly incompatible goals. However, the resources available to families to integrate work and family life vary from country to country. The types of public support vary according to the emphasis placed on the family, the division of labour between men and women and the labour market.

The immigration wave of today is substantially different from the subsidised immigration of the mid-20th century because the low welfare opportunities of that time meant that only those who really wanted to work came to Western Europe. The radicalisation of Islam was not intense, so in fact,

the immigration experienced by previous generations can be considered successful. Today is far from being successful. In liberal states, it appears as an alternative to the classic family policy/reproduction policy. Since it is not country-dependent but party-dependent, it is also conceivable that it could appear in Hungary after the possible electoral defeat of the conservative forces.

3. General surveys

Understanding the landscape of family policies in European countries involves navigating through various data sources and analyses. Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, provides key insights into the expenditure and structure of social benefits, including those directed at families and children. Meanwhile, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) offers a broader international perspective, allowing comparisons between European nations and other regions.

To delve specifically into family policy rankings and assess the comprehensiveness of measures supporting families across European countries, the Kopp Mária Intézet a Népesedésért és Családokért (KINCS) presents its European Family Policy Ranking.

This ranking sheds light on the diversity and effectiveness of family-oriented policies, providing valuable context for policymakers and researchers seeking to understand the nuances of family support systems across the continent.

3.1. Eurostat

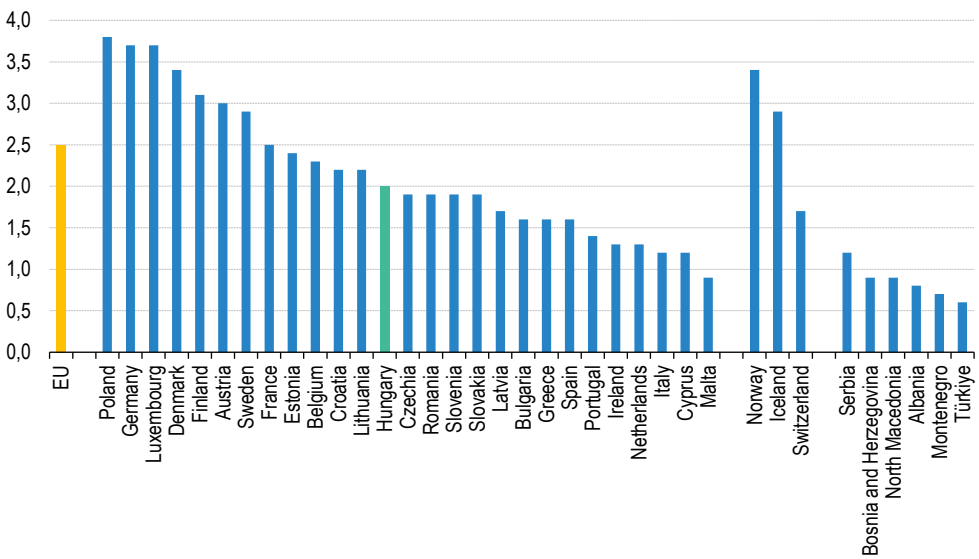
Social protection benefits encompass transfers, whether in monetary or non-monetary forms, designed to alleviate households and individuals from the challenges posed by various social risks or needs. This article provides statistics on social protection benefits specifically aimed at addressing risks and needs related to families and children. The European System of Integrated Social Protection Statistics (ESSPROS) gathers the data annually.

A recent EU study (2019) looks at specific family policy measures in some countries,⁶⁰ which can be supplemented with the Eurostat figures. It shows that in recent years, many Member States have decided to increase the support already provided to children and families by increasing and/or extending the value of existing child benefits and child or family tax credits. These include Bulgaria, Germany, Slovenia, Romania in 2018 and the Neth-

⁶⁰ Recent Trend in Child and Family Policy in the EU. Brussels, 2019

erlands in 2019. A birth grant was introduced in Italy, Lithuania and Luxembourg in 2018. Eligibility criteria for the allowance have also been extended in the Netherlands and Croatia.

Family/child support expenditure, 2020 (% GDP)



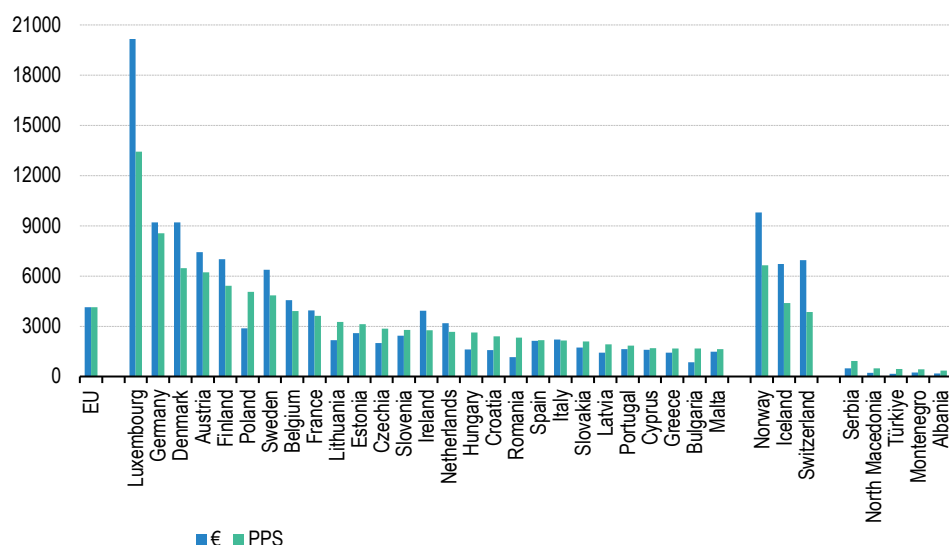
Source: Eurostat (2021): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Social_protection_statistics_-_family_and_children_benefits

In 2020, family and children benefits expenditure within the European Union (EU) totalled €337 billion, constituting 2.5% of the GDP. Spending levels varied among EU Member States, with highs of 3.8% of GDP in Poland and 3.7% in Germany and Luxembourg, contrasting with a low of 0.9% in Malta.

The EU's expenditure on family/children benefits in 2020 represented 8.3% of the total spending on social benefits. The significance of family/children benefits relative to total social benefits spending exhibited variations across EU Member States. In Poland, it accounted for 16.2% of all social benefits expenditure, while in Luxembourg, the figure stood at 15.7%. Double-digit shares were also observed in Estonia, Germany, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary, Denmark, and Sweden. Conversely, in Malta, the Netherlands, and Italy, less than 5.0% of total social benefits expenditure was allocated to

family/children benefits. Among non-member countries, the share of family/children benefits in total social benefits spending ranged from 11.2% in Norway to 3.4% in Montenegro in 2020.

Expenditure on family/children benefits per child, 2020 (€ and PPS per child)

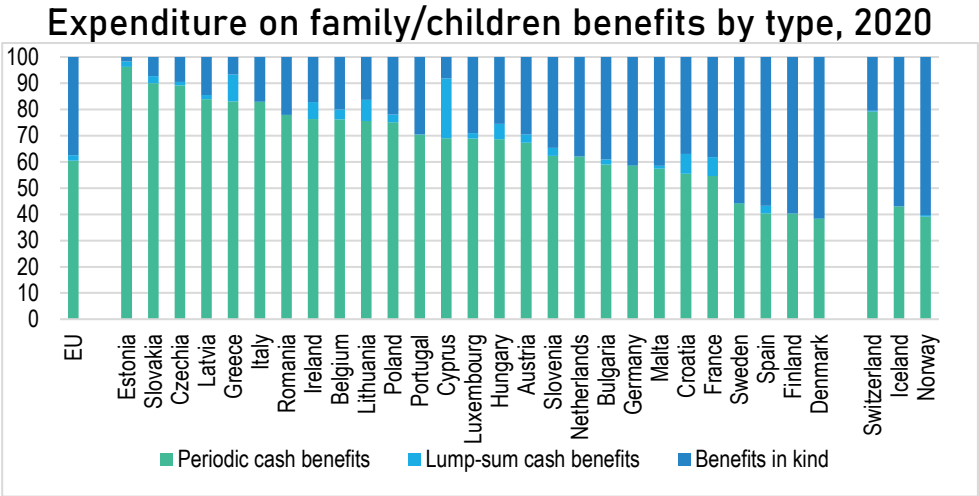


Source: Eurostat (2021): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Social_protection_statistics_-_family_and_children_benefits

The upward trajectory in EU expenditure on family/children benefits was supported by increases across all EU Member States with available data (incomplete data for Bulgaria and Croatia). From 2000 to 2020, expenditures on family/children benefits more than doubled (in constant price terms) in Czechia, Latvia, Luxembourg, and Cyprus. Estonia, Lithuania, and Romania experienced a more than threefold increase, while Poland recorded an eight-fold rise in 2020 compared to 2000.

Family/child support expenditure in the EU-27 averaged PPS 3795 per child in 2017, but there were significant differences between EU countries. The average level of expenditure was exceptionally high in Luxembourg (11,518 PPS per child), which has relatively high expenditure on family benefits regardless of need. However, non-residents receive a significant share of these benefits (more than a quarter), and Eurostat also suggests that this figure is likely to significantly overestimate the actual amount. Elsewhere in

the EU, family/child benefit expenditure levels ranged from 7,595 PPS per child in Germany to 1,147 PPS per child in Romania. When making comparisons, users should be aware that some countries' figures may be overstated as expenditure includes amounts paid for dependent children aged 18 and over and/or relatives other than children.



Source: Eurostat (2021): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Social_protection_statistics_-_family_and_children_benefits

In 2020, the disbursement of family/children benefits in the EU revealed a breakdown where three-fifths (60.4%) of the expenditure took the form of periodic cash benefits, just under two-fifths (37.4%) were benefits in kind, and a relatively small share (2.2%) constituted lump-sum cash benefits.

Throughout the EU, with the exception of Denmark, Finland, Spain, and Sweden, where benefits in kind surpassed periodic cash payments, periodic cash benefits constituted the majority of family/children benefits expenditure in 2020. Lump-sum benefits constituted less than 10.0% of spending in all EU Member States except Cyprus (22.8%) and Greece (10.3%). In Cyprus, over 90% of lump-sum payments were directed towards financially assisting families with limited resources whose children were in education.

In the EU-27, just over three-fifths (61.7%) of family/child support expenditure was paid in the form of regular cash benefits, just over a third (36.1%) in kind and a relatively small proportion (2.2%) in lump sums. Regular cash benefits accounted for the majority of family/child support expenditure in all but four EU Member States: Denmark, Spain, Sweden, and Finland recorded higher expenditure levels for benefits in kind than for periodic cash

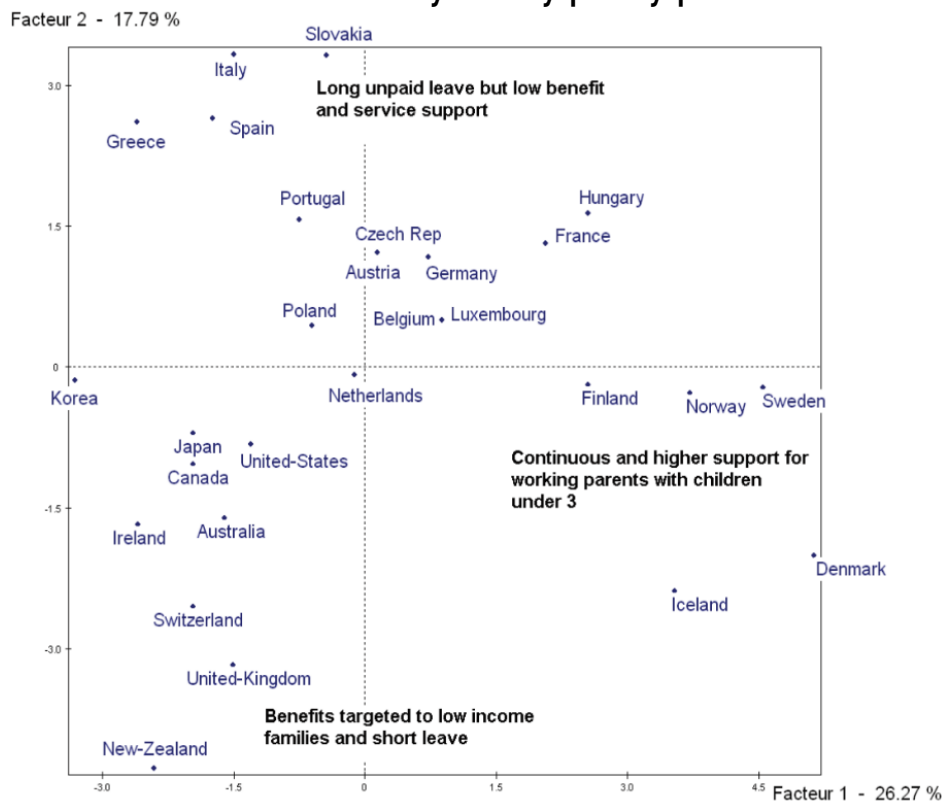
benefits. Lump-sum benefits accounted for less than 5% of family/child benefits expenditure in all but four Member States: Greece (39.6%), Cyprus (23.5%), Ireland (7.2%) and France (6.5%). In Cyprus, for example, more than 90% of these lump-sum payments relate to financial support for families with limited resources whose children receive education.

ESSPROS further categorizes benefits in kind into four types: (1) child day care; (2) accommodation; (3) home help; (4) other benefits in kind. Child day care, representing 22.6% of EU expenditure on family/children benefits, emerged as the largest type of benefit in kind and the second largest overall (following family/child allowances). Child day care constituted the primary portion of total family/children benefits expenditure in six EU Member States (Denmark, Finland, Spain, Sweden, Slovenia, and Croatia). The category of other benefits in kind, encompassing activities like access to leisure centres or price reductions for children, accounted for a notable 9.9% of total family/children benefits expenditure in the EU, reaching its highest share at 28.5% in Bulgaria.

3.2.OECD comparison, context

Another meaningful family support summary is from Olivier Thévenon, Head of the OECD Institute for Child Welfare.⁶¹

OECD countries by family policy patterns



Source: Thévenon, Olivier (2009): Family policies in Europe: available databases and initial comparisons Vienna Yearbook of Population Research 2008, pp. 165-177

The author divides the states studied into five groups.

1) Nordic countries: significant support for families with young children. Parental leave is more extended in the Nordic countries than in other countries: 53 weeks at the full-time equivalent of average wage in Sweden and 47 weeks in Denmark, compared to an average of only 27 weeks in all OECD countries. The difference is due to relatively high compensation in

⁶¹ Thévenon, Olivier (2009): Family policies in Europe: available databases and initial comparisons Vienna Yearbook of Population Research 2008, pp. 165-177 (DATA & TRENDS)

the Nordic countries, where the length of leave is limited. The full-time equivalent leave specifically reserved for fathers is also longer than in other countries: 13 weeks in Iceland and 11 weeks in Sweden, compared to an OECD average of just one week. Overall, expenditure on leave is much higher in the Nordic countries, averaging 57% of GDP per capita per child, compared with 25% in other countries and only 4.7% in the Anglo-Saxon countries. The proportion of children in formal childcare is also much higher in the Nordic countries. The amount invested per child is also much higher: an average of USD 5758 in PPP terms in the Nordic countries, compared to an OECD average of USD 2520. However, cash benefits to families are below average and clearly target low-income families.

2) Denmark and Iceland: a model for a comprehensive family policy. These two countries stand out from the other Nordic countries, partly because they have a much higher proportion of children under three. The level of spending on childcare services is also higher in Denmark (2.3% of GDP). The effective tax rate, the aggregate percentage of tax levied on labour income, is also much higher in Denmark and all Nordic countries than in other countries. This can be seen as a trade-off between the relatively high operating subsidies in the form of paid leave and childcare services to reconcile work and childbearing. Denmark is probably the most advanced model, based on strong public intervention, providing high and continuous support for parents to reconcile work and family life. The system provides relatively high financial security during parental leave. Consequently, fertility rates are among the highest, with exceptionally high female employment rates (full-time equivalent). However, the high participation of women in the labour market also blunts the pronounced occupational segregation between men and women.

3a) Anglo-Saxon countries: support for pre-school children and poor households. The Anglo-Saxon countries, Japan, Korea and Southern European countries are in a similar situation, where support for reconciling work and children under 3 is generally lower. There is little or no compensation during the leave period after a child's birth. The provision of childcare and education services is also generally lower. Public investment is also clearly targeted at pre-school education. However, the Anglo-Saxon countries, as well as Switzerland, Japan and Korea, differ from southern Europe in several respects. First, family support through family allowances and tax credits is much higher. In fact, this is the main form of intervention in countries where such support amounts to 1.9% of GDP, compared with 1.6% of

the OECD average (the US is an exception, with only 0.8%). This support is also clearly targeted at low-income families and aims to reduce poverty. Nevertheless, slightly more than one in four children (28%) are in formal childcare, often private, compared to an OECD average of slightly less than one in four (23%).

3b) Work/family balance based on labour market flexibility. In other words, Anglo-Saxon countries are characterised by limited public support for reconciling work and children under three. The main aim is to ensure pre-school education to ensure equal opportunities for all children. In this context, the reconciliation of work and family life relies quite heavily on the adaptability made possible by labour market flexibility, e.g. the possibility of changing jobs without being unemployed for too long and, in particular, the increase in part-time employment for women with young children. The work/family balance is thus based on a strong asymmetry between the labour market position of men and women and implies that families with young children are deprived of some income that is not compensated by public support. Therefore, Family incomes are often inadequate, and poverty rates are among the highest in these countries. In contrast, adjustment through the labour market allows these countries to maintain high fertility rates.

4) Southern Europe: more limited assistance. Fertility and female labour force participation rates are generally lower, especially when poverty rates are higher. These countries are characterised by a "policy deficit", whichever aspect is taken into account. The volume of cash benefits provided to families is very low. Parental leave may be relatively long but unpaid or poorly paid. Portugal stands out from the rest of this group with slightly shorter parental leave, more targeted cash benefits for low-income families, and a much higher share of formal childcare for children under three. Spain has almost the same low take-up of childcare services but much longer unpaid parental leave.

5) Eastern Europe: at the intersection of diversity. Compared to the other three CEE countries (Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia), Hungary offers more comprehensive support to parents with young children through a balanced combination of policy support: higher parental leave payments (70 weeks with full leave, compared with 39 in Poland and 35 in the Czech Republic); public spending on childcare services is also higher, and coverage of pre-school children is higher (87% of children) than in Poland (36%); Families are also supported through relatively generous financial benefits, amounting to 2% of GDP compared with only 1% in Poland. However, the

poorest families receive a relatively small share of this support compared with households earning two average wages. Slovakia is also in a remarkable position with a rather limited period of paid parental leave, while unpaid leave can be extended to three years. As in Hungary, the level of family allowances as a share of GDP is relatively high, but does not seem to be specifically targeted at low-income families. Thus, the long unpaid leave and the limited availability of other types of subsidies make Slovakia comparable to most southern European countries. However, this situation is still rather specific in a geographical area where family and childcare policies have been developed at different paces and following different patterns.

Characteristics of family policy in some European countries

	DE	DK	ES	US	FI	FR	IT	HU	JP	IS	NZ	NL	PL	PT	UK	SW	Average
Spending for maternity and parental leave per child (in % of GDP per capita)	22	49	15	n.a.	57	28	20	89	13	50	4	17	30	15	7	64	30
Total length maternity and parental leave (in weeks)	170	50	172	12	200	172	57	180	12	26	12	40	172	41	52	66	83
Full-time equivalent period of maternity and parental leave ^a	25.4	46.8	16.0	0.0	42.9	56.2	20.4	69.8	8.4	20.8	6.0	16.0	38.7	17.0	12.0	52.8	27
Full-time eq. period of paternity leave	0.0	2.0	0.4	0.0	3.0	2.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	10.4	0.0	0.4	2.0	1.0	0.5	9.2	1
Spending on child care services (% of GDP)	0.8	2.3	0.7	0.6	1.4	1.6	0.7	1.5	0.4	1.8	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.9	0.8	1.9	1
Spending per child on child care services for children under 3 (US \$ PPP)	3084	8009	1234	1803	4186	4009	2761	n.a.	1252	3408	672	2025	n.a.	1289	1850	5530	2522
Spending per child on services for preschool children (US \$ PPP)	4865	4824	4151	7755	4069	4744	6116	3985	3766	6781	4325	5497	3269	4489	7153	4091	4614
Coverage rate of child care services (0-2 years)	9.0	61.7	20.7	35.5	22.4	28.0	6.3	6.9	15.2	58.7	32.1	29.5	2.0	23.5	25.8	39.5	23
Coverage rate of preschool (3-5 years)	80.3	89.7	98.6	62.0	46.1	100.0	100.0	86.9	86.4	94.7	92.7	70.2	36.2	77.9	80.5	86.6	77
Net child care costs for dual earner family ^b	8.4	7.8	n.a.	19.4	7.2	11.3	n.a.	6.5	14.2	14.9	27.5	11.5	4.6	4.2	32.7	6.2	13
Net child care costs sole parent ^c	6.8	8.5	n.a.	6.2	4.1	8.8	n.a.	0.0	14.0	13.5	14.3	3.0	12.7	2.0	14.4	4.8	12
Benefits and tax breaks for families (% GDP)	2.19	1.62	0.47	0.76	1.59	2.20	0.59	2.06	0.78	1.51	1.91	1.22	0.99	0.92	2.54	1.59	2
Degree of targeting support at low income families ^d	0.9	2.9	2.5	2.8	2.2	1.4	0.0	0.6	5.0	2.4	11.2	1.0	7.4	3.9	2.7	1.7	3
Effective tax rate of a transition to employment (jobless to one-earner couple) ^e	66	82	47	44	84	63	11	62	66	74	74	71	63	60	74	79	62
Effective tax rate of a transition to employment (one-earner couple to two-earners) ^f	51	57	21	39	37	27	42	42	21	48	37	37	44	23	38	33	35
Effective tax rate for sole parent transition to employment ^g	78	85	52	39	64	75	-4	48	76	74	78	78	75	58	70	66	61

Source: Olivier Thévenon (2009) Family policies in Europe: available databases and initial comparisons Vienna Yearbook of Population Research 2008, pp. 165-177 (DATA & TRENDS) and <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm>

Brussels clearly supports migration as an alternative to traditional family policy. In its view, allowing and facilitating immigration will solve the problem of depopulation, which is the key to uninterrupted economic development. It strives for a uniform European acceptance, and most Member States agree.

3.3.KINCS - European Family Policy Ranking

The Kopp Maria Institute for Demography and Families (KINCS) released the family policy ranking of European countries for the first time in 2019 on World Population Day (July 11). The ranking, which applies 12 criteria of family-friendliness, illustrates how diverse and extensive the range of measures supporting families is in each country. The results reveal whether a country's social policy prioritizes families and the complexity of its family policy. Hungary and France topped the ranking, while the United Kingdom, Spain, and Denmark were among those in the middle of the list, offering slightly fewer family support options. The upper third of the list is typically composed of EU countries, while non-EU countries are found in the lower third.

The Kopp Maria Institute for Demography and Families published its European Family Policy Overview at the end of April 2019, presenting the family policy institutional systems of 45 European countries. Based on the data collected in 2018 by Eurostat, MISSOC, and MISSCEO, KINCS established the European Family Policy Ranking in 2019. The ranking aims to provide insight into the complexity of family measures available in European countries the abundance of family support benefits and services accessible to families. The ranking also offers insight into which countries place special emphasis on the role of the family as a social unit and where the autonomy of family policy is more pronounced.

The ranking includes the 28 member states of the European Union and an additional 17 European countries. The analysis compares the family policies of individual countries based on 12 types of measures: support for housing for families, family-oriented taxation, family allowances, as well as benefits for maternity, infant care, and child care, parental and child care leaves, the proportion of children attending nursery and kindergarten, and the possibility of counting the childcare period towards retirement. The classification was done on a scale of 0-1 for each family policy measure, indicating the

absence (0), presence, compliance, or exceeding of European directives (1 or above).

European Family Policy Ranking

Country	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	SUM	Rank
France	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	1	1	1	1	1	1	10,5	1.
Hungary	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	10,5	1.
Belgium	1	0	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	1	1	10	2.
Estonia	0	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	1	0,5	1	1	1	10	2.
Poland	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	10	2.
Luxem- bourg	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	1	1	10	2.
Russia	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0	0,5	1	1	10	2.
Czech Re- public	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	9,5	3.
Finland	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	0	1	9	4.
Ireland	1	1	1	1	0	1	0,5	1	0,5	1	0	1	9	4.
Moldova	1	0	1	1	1	0,5	1	1	0	0,5	1	1	9	4.
Italy	0	0	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	1	9	4.
Sweden	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	9	4.
Slovakia	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0,5	0,5	1	1	9	4.
Ukraine	1	0	1	1	1	0,5	1	1	0	0,5	1	1	9	4.
Austria	1	0	0	1	1	0,5	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	8,5	5.
United Kingdom	1	1	0	1	0	1	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	8,5	5.
Norway	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0,5	1	1	8,5	5.
Belarus	1	1	1	1	0	0,5	1	0	0	0,5	1	1	8	6.
Bulgaria	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	0	1	8	6.
Latvia	0	1	1	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	0	1	8	6.
Lithuania	0	1	0	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	8	6.
Portugal	0	0	0	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	1	1	8	6.
Croatia	0	0	1	1	1	1	0,5	0	0,5	0,5	1	1	7,5	7.
Germany	1	0	0	1	1	0,5	0,5	0	0,5	1	1	1	7,5	7.
Spain	0	0	0	1	0	0,5	1	1	1	1	1	1	7,5	7.
Azerbaijan	0	0	1	1	1	0,5	1	1	0	0,5	0	1	7	8.
Denmark	1	0	0	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0	0	7	8.
Armenia	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0,5	0	1	6,5	9.
Cyprus	0	0	1	1	0	0,5	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	0	1	6	10.
Romania	0	0	0	1	1	0,5	1	0,5	0,5	0,5	0		6	10.
Switzerland	1	0	0	1	0	0,5	0	0	1	0,5	1	1	6	10.
Greece	0	0	0	1	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	5,5	11.
Nether- lands	0	0	0	1	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	1	0	5,5	11.
Malta	0	0	0	1	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,5	1	1	5,5	11.
Serbia	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0	1	5,5	11.

Slovenia	0	0	0	1	1	0,5	0,5	1	1	0,5	0	0	5,5	11.
Albania	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0,5	0,5	0	1	5	12.
North Macedonia	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0,5	0,5	0	1	5	12.
Turkey	0	0	1	1	0	0,5	0,5	0,5	0	0,5	0	1	5	12.
Montenegro	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0,5	0	1	4,5	13.
Bosnia and Herzegovina	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	0,5	0	0,5	0	0	4	14.
Iceland	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	4	14.
Georgia	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0,5	0	0	3,5	15.
Kosovo	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0,5	0	0	2,5	16.

Source: <https://www.koppmariaintezet.hu/hu/ecsr2019>

A) Housing assistance for families (1 = if any, 0 = if none)

B) Whether the family allowance is payable at source (1 = if yes, 0 = if no)

C) Maternity benefits (1 = if any, 0 = if none)

D) Infant care benefits (1 = if any, 0 = if none)

E) Childcare period (0 = if none or unpaid, 1 = if paid)

F) Length of maternity leave (0 = if none 0.5 = if less than 140 days, 1 = if over 140 days)

G) Childcare leave (0 = if none 0.5 = if up to 1.5 years of age, 1 = if child over 1.5 years of age)

H) Paternity leave after birth (0 = if none 0.5 = if less than 10 days, 1 = if more than 10 days)

I) Percentage of children aged 0-3 attending nursery (0 = if no nursery, 0.5 = if less than 33%, 1 = if over 33% of children aged 0-3 attend nursery)

J) Percentage of the population aged 3-6 years attending kindergarten (0 = if no kindergarten, 0.5 = if below 90%, 1 = if above 90%)

K) Family type taxation (1 = if any, 0 = if none)

L) Does the pension include the childcare period (1 = if yes, 0 = if no)

4. Family support policies in the EU Member States

The chapter presents different options from the support systems in each country. The aim is the same; the instruments are sometimes different, but only the future will prove their effectiveness. Let us not forget that a decision taken now to increase the population will not have a real impact for biological reasons until two decades later – some typical family policy measures in each country.⁶²

Europe's diverse geographical regions bring forth unique cultural, historical, and socio-economic characteristics that shape the identities and lifestyles of its nations. In this context, Northern Europe, Southern Europe, Central Europe, and the Visegrad countries represent distinct subregions, each with its own set of attributes and influences.⁶³

Northern Europe, marked by nations like Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, is characterized by progressive social policies, high living standards, and a strong emphasis on gender equality. In contrast, Southern Europe, encompassing countries such as Spain, Italy, and Greece, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, Mediterranean lifestyle, and unique familial and societal structures. Central Europe, including countries like Germany, Austria, and Poland, is a region where historical legacies meet modern advancements, resulting in a blend of traditional values and progressive developments. The Visegrad countries, comprising the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia, share a distinct historical and political context, often collaborating closely within the Visegrad Group to address common challenges and opportunities.

This exploration offers a brief overview of the characteristics that define each of these European subregions, providing a foundation for understanding the diverse tapestry of cultures and societies across the continent.

The best-known **family allowance** is a basic benefit in 13 of the 27 EU countries, but in 14 countries, it is conditional on parental income. In Austria,

⁶² Mihaela Robila (2013): Handbook of Family Policies Across the Globe. Springer. 77-239.

⁶³ February 2021 developments in child and family policy in EU member states - <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=1251&furtherNews=yes&newsId=9945>

for example, the amount ranges from €64 to €92 per child per month, depending on the age of the child, plus two one-off allowances per year (Kinderabsetzbetrag⁶⁴ €32, schoolstart €56). The Kinderfreibetrag, which reduces the tax base, amounts to €440 per year.⁶⁵ In Germany, the Kindergeld is €204 per child per month.⁶⁶

Maternity allowances are part of family support in 19 out of the 27 EU countries (in several countries, they are also paternity allowances). The most common are maternity leave and maternity allowances; in some countries, they are also given at adoption (e.g. Poland). There are state and municipal forms, even within a single country (e.g. Italy⁶⁷). There are many variations, even within a single country, e.g. German: Mutterschaftsgeld, Mutterschaftsleistung, Kinderfreibetrag, Elterngeld, Kinderbetreuungsbeihilfe, Kinderbetreuungsgeld⁶⁸, etc. Several do not even have a Hungarian equivalent.

Paid parental leave positively impacts family income in the short and long term. In high-income countries, each additional period of paid parental leave is associated with a 4.2 per cent lower chance of single mothers living in poverty. Paid parental leave provides parents with the time they need to bond with their young children, whether born or adopted and to meet their children's critical health, nutrition and developmental needs.

Paternity leave: the 2019/1158 EU directive introduced the right for fathers to take paternity leave, a short paid leave of at least 10 working days, to help balance work and private life. Member States, including Hungary, have until 2 August 2022 to bring into force the legal provisions necessary to comply with this Directive. According to a study by UNICEF, fathers who take paternity leave are more involved in early childcare, share household work more equally and can support mothers to breastfeed - all of which help reduce post-natal depression.⁶⁹

Housing/housing subsidies are less common in EU countries. The reason is that the majority of Member States have a high proportion of rented housing, with the high average number of owner-occupied dwellings in the

⁶⁴ Supplementary allowance

⁶⁵ <http://infoausztria.com/csaladi-potlek-gyakori-kerdesek/>

⁶⁶ <https://zsebremegy.hu/rendszeres-ellatasok/nemet-csaladi-potlek-osszege-igenylese/>

⁶⁷ http://szociologiaszak.uni-miskolc.hu/segedanyagok/eu_tamogatas.pdf

⁶⁸ The latter is the equivalent of GYES

⁶⁹ UNICEF (2019): Family-Friendly Policies - A Policy Brief - Redesigning the Workplace of the Future

EU being mainly in the former socialist countries, with all their disadvantages. The benefit is not automatic, and its availability and amount depend on income, housing costs, the location of the home and the number of children. There is also a relevant EU programme, albeit indirectly, because it mainly supports the retention of the rural population, in our case, young people living in villages and small settlements, in local housing. In Hungary, the proportion of owner-occupied or directly related dwellings is 90%, and the minimum equity required to buy is typically 20%, but the MNB is considering 10%.

Support for **large families** varies across the EU. Some examples.⁷⁰ In Austria (Mehrkindzuschlag), the family allowance rises by €10 for the third child and €18 for each additional child, plus an additional €87 top-up. In Latvia, a "3+ family card" was introduced in 2016, providing a range of benefits for families with three or more children, followed by a subsidy to cover public transport travel costs for large families in 2017. In 2018, Latvia extended the additional child benefit to families with two or more children. In the same year, state family allowances for families with three or more children were increased in Estonia, and Lithuania introduced them for the first time. Estonia also introduced a new monthly allowance for parents with three or more children. Italy has taken the initiative to allow parents with three or more children to receive state-owned agricultural land and be eligible for a zero-interest loan to buy their first home between 2019 and 2021, but with the condition that they live in or near their residence.

In the developed European countries, the amount spent on **family support** is above the OECD average, but their policies can be considered "conservative": gender equality and reconciliation of work and family life are generally not among the main objectives. In most cases, the primary objective of support is to 'compensate' families with children for the disadvantage of those without, regardless of their financial situation. The tax system does not favour two-earner families and, in France and Germany, puts them at a disadvantage. The high prevalence of **institutional childcare** is most marked in Belgium, Luxembourg and France.

⁷⁰ <https://iranynemetorszag.com/forum/csalad/29735-nagycsalados-kedvezmenyek.html>

4.1. Northern Europe

Scandinavian countries pay particular attention to equal opportunities for mothers and fathers at work and home. They have implemented social and vocational training policies to reconcile work and family life better and make it easier to return to work after parental leave. In most Scandinavian countries, shorter eligibility periods accompany higher support levels. Gender equality is also an important element of Nordic family support policies, with fathers entitled to paternity pay for a certain period. In addition, the system includes a so-called paternity quota, i.e. only fathers are entitled to a certain share of the child benefit (except in Denmark). In terms of taxation, two-earner households are in a more favourable position, with the same income.

In **Sweden**, 77% of children under three years of age receive childcare from the state.⁷¹ If the parents are working or studying, parents of children over one year of age are entitled to childcare. Parents have to pay €137 per month for the child to attend nursery school, but one year of pre-school is free. Significant reforms have underpinned these policies in the areas of parental leave, public services for the care of young children, special family taxation (joint taxation was abolished in 1971) and family law. There are three aspects to the family policy applied:

- support for the families themselves,
- support for working parents in the form of paid parental leave and
- sharing the right to paid parental leave between the father and the mother.

The results are high female employment rates, greater involvement of fathers in caring for young children, fertility rates above the EU average, and a reduction in child poverty.

A home care allowance was established in **Norway** in 1998 to recognise and provide income for parents who raise their children full-time. High

⁷¹ Tallås Ahlzén, M. (2022). Essays in Swedish Family Policy (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Economics, Stockholm University) and Blomqvist, P., & Palme, J. (2020). Universalism in welfare policy: The Swedish case beyond 1990. *Social Inclusion*, 8(1), 114-123. and Michailakis, D. (2019). Swedish family policy—facts and prospects. *Επιστήμη και Κοινωνία: Επιθεώρηση Πολιτικής και Ηθικής Θεωρίας*, 39, 78-94.

income taxes characterise the Scandinavian world in general, but large, predictable and reliable social redistribution, especially for families.⁷²

In **Finland**, an allowance for carers was introduced as early as 1988. Other Nordic countries are also characterised by a relatively high level of assistance for parents to stay at home and the availability of institutional childcare for children under 3 years old. There is no family tax allowance. Family allowance (*lapsilisä*) is paid to parents until the child is 17 years old. If the child runs his or her own household, it can also be paid to the child by special agreement. Parents who look after a child under 3 at home may receive home childcare allowance (*lasten kotihoidon tuki*). The period of maternity leave is 105 consecutive calendar days, excluding Sundays. Of these, 30-50 days must be taken before the birth of the child. The length of childcare leave (*vanhempainvapaa*) is 158 working days.

At one extreme are **Iceland and Denmark**, where, in addition to relatively high income taxes, the state provides stable and high levels of support for working parents and institutional childcare is widespread. However, parents have little freedom to choose between different forms of childcare. In Denmark, additional childcare support is provided if the municipality decides to subsidise the parents who care for the child instead of institutional care (*Tilskud til pasning af egne børn*) or to subsidise the financing of private care (*Tilskud til privat pasning*).⁷³ Both subsidies are available from the age of 24 weeks until the child starts school.

At the other extreme is **Finland**, which - compared to the Nordic countries - can benefit from lower subsidies for longer periods. However, institutional childcare is not the only option here, with home care support available up to the age of 3.⁷⁴

In **the Netherlands**, increasing part-time employment is the most important element to allow more time for raising children. Moreover, part-time

⁷² Brandth, B., & Kvande, E. (2019). Workplace support of fathers' parental leave use in Norway. *Community, Work & Family*, 22(1), 43-57. and Chzhen, Y., Rees, G., & Gromada, A. (2019). Are the world's richest countries family friendly? Policy in the OECD and EU (No. inorer1032).

⁷³ Bredgaard, T., & Ravn, R. L. (2021). Denmark: From integration to repatriation. *Between and between: Integrating refugees into the EU labour market*, 67-82.

⁷⁴ https://www.ksh.hu/statszemle_archive/2012/2012_04/2012_04_354.pdf and Sihvonen, E. (2018). Early interventionist parenting support: the case study of Finland. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 7(1), 123-139. and Helve, H. (2021). Finnish family. *Families and Family Values in Society and Culture*, 97.

work is chosen by far more fathers here than anywhere else in the EU. However, while 73.2% of men work full-time, the proportion for women is only 45.9%. 19% of fathers take up the option of part-time parental leave, which is much higher than in the rest of Europe, with 41% of mothers. This option is available up to the age of eight and comes with a monthly tax reduction of €704. Parental leave can be taken at 26 times the number of hours worked per child per week, so the period is cumulative. Therefore, childcare services can be taken on a part-time basis, typical of the Netherlands.

In **Belgium**, the family allowance is made up of a basic benefit and additional components (based on marital status, income situation, education of a disabled child), so the amount is calculated according to a highly differentiated system.⁷⁵ The system of family allowances is the same in the two parts of Belgium, but the amount of the benefit is slightly different. Personal income tax is calculated considering the spouse's income and the number of dependent children. Tax is declared on the basis of a common tax number for both spouses. In the Brussels Region, there is a relocation allowance (allocation de relogement/allocation déménagement) and a rent supplement (allocation loyer) for people in need. The aim of the relocation allowance is to enable people on low incomes in need to move from an unhealthy, overcrowded neighbourhood to a healthier area. All parents who work full or part-time are entitled to childcare leave until the child is 12 years old.

In the **Baltic states** experienced the most rapid population decline throughout the 1990s and 2000s in Europe. They faced a critical demographic situation, prompting their governments to prioritize family policy issues more intensely than their European counterparts. This paper aims to scrutinize the evolution of family policy in the Baltic countries, examining the factors that shaped it amidst the 2009 economic crisis. The analysis also sheds light on the consequences in terms of child poverty and fertility. The findings underscore that economic resources and fertility rates significantly impacted family policy in the Baltic states. Consequently, providing economic support to families not only directly alleviated poverty but also exerted an indirect influence on fertility.⁷⁶ E.g. **Estonia** pays a family allowance (lapsetoetus)

⁷⁵ Merla, L., Izaguirre Valdivieso, L., & Murru, S. (2020). Do family policies support multi-local, post-separation families practicing shared custody arrangements? A comparative view from Belgium, France, and Italy. In *Services and policy making in multi-local living*, 4th meeting of the European Network for Multi-locality Studies.

⁷⁶ Ainsaar, M. (2019). Economic crisis, families, and family policy in the Baltic states, 2009–2014. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 50(1), 59–77.

for each child from birth until the child's 16th birthday. A maternity allowance of €320 (maternity allowance) is paid for each child born. For triplets, €1,000 is paid for each child. For every second, third or additional child under 17 years of age, an annual tax credit of €1,848 is paid. One reason for the low employment rate for women with young children is Estonia's generous childcare leave scheme: parents are entitled to 100% of their average monthly income in the previous calendar year for 435 days during the childcare leave period.⁷⁷

In **Ireland**, parents are entitled to Child Benefit up to the age of 16 or 18 if they are in full-time education or have a severe disability. The hospital where the expectant mother gives birth pays €10.16 (Maternity Grant) directly to each mother. Low-income working families are also entitled to an additional regular tax-free weekly cash benefit (Family Income Supplements). There is no general family tax allowance, only single-parent families are entitled to a tax allowance of €1650. The rate of the homeownership allowance depends on the location of the rental property and the composition of the household.⁷⁸ There is a wide range of public assistance to help reconcile family life and work, with both free and paid options. This can be done through childcare facilities and au-pairs.

*Although the **UK** is no longer part of the EU, here is a brief description.⁷⁹ Child Benefit is payable until the child reaches the age of 16, or 20 if they continue their education. Childcare Grant is available to full-time students with a child under 15 or under 17 with special educational needs. There is no maternity grant for a wide range of mothers. Statutory Maternity Pay is paid to mothers who have been employed by an employer for at least 26 weeks up to at least the 15th week before giving birth and whose average income in 2018 was GBP 113 (€127) per week. Child Tax Credit is paid until the child is 16 years old, or 20 if they are in education. It is available for up to two children. Local authorities pay the rent allowance, and there are precise rules on what is a reasonable size for a given household and what is a

⁷⁷ Unt, M., Kazjulja, M., & Krönström, V. (2020). Estonia. *Extended Working Life Policies: International Gender and Health Perspectives*, 241-249.

⁷⁸ Churchill, H., Baena, S., Crosse, R., Jiménez, L., & Millar, M. (2019). Developing family support services: A comparison of national reforms and challenges in England, Ireland and Spain. *Social Work and Social Sciences Review*, 21(2), 58-83.

⁷⁹ Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2021): Policy paper - Supporting Families - 2021-22 and beyond (Applies to England)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/supporting-families-2021-to-2022-and-beyond/supporting-families-2021-22-and-beyond>

large enough size to qualify for no compensation or less. The total monthly amount of social benefits to which an individual is entitled is capped. To support families across the UK, the UK government has set up Sure Start Children's Centres, which provide early years services for parents, prospective parents, and carers from pregnancy to the child's starting school. Services available include: family support, health care, advice and support for parents, information services, childcare, training, and employment. There are more than 3,000 such centres in England.

4.2. Southern, Mediterranean Europe

In **Southern Europe** (Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain), support is short and institutional childcare is less extensive. Portugal is an exception in the latter respect, which explains its relatively higher female employment rate. The most striking feature of this group is the relatively low proportion of cash support. Tax policies are used to encourage parents to work while having children, and two-earner households also benefit from significant tax breaks.

In **Italy**, the family allowance (*Assegno per il nucleo familiare*) is a benefit that depends on income level and family composition. The maternity allowance (*Bonus mamma domani*) is a one-off benefit of €800, payable from the seventh month of pregnancy until the birth. Mothers with low incomes or who are unemployed can claim state and municipal baby care benefits (*Assegno di maternità dello Stato*; *Assegno di maternità dei comuni*). A Baby Bonus (*Assegno di natalità - Bonus Bebé*) was introduced on an experimental basis for all children born or adopted between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2017. Mothers received €80 per month until the child was 1 year old (in the case of adoption, until 1 year after the adoption) if the annual household income did not exceed €90,000 (except for families with 5 or more children). The Childcare Voucher (*Voucher baby sitter*) can be claimed within 11 months after the end of maternity leave to provide childcare (e.g. babysitting). It is up to €600 per month and can be received by the parent for up to 6 months. An additional nursery allowance (*Bonus asilo nido*) is available for working mothers who are not exempt from paying nursery fees. The amount is €1000 per year, paid monthly for 11 months, up to a maximum of €90.91 per month. A parent can receive a family tax allowance for a dependent child if the family's monthly per capita income does not exceed

€2,840.51.⁸⁰ Law No. 46 of 2021 established in Italy the General Family Allowance—GFA (in Italian *Assegno Unico Universale*), aiming to promote the birth rate, supporting parenthood and promoting employment, especially for women.

In **Spain**, family allowances (*prestaciones por hijo a cargo*) are paid up to the age of 18 and are income-related.⁸¹ If the mother has not paid any social security contributions, she receives the minimum wage for 6 weeks after the birth of her child (*subsidio por maternidad de naturaleza no contributiva*). No cash benefit is paid during childcare leave (*excedencia por cuidado de hijo*). The tax base is reduced for each dependent child under 25 years of age. Families with 3 or more children are also entitled to an additional tax credit of €1,200 per year for the 3rd and 4th child and €2,400 for the 5th and each additional child. For children aged 0-3, there is also an annual tax credit of €2,800 to cover the cost of nursery care or paid childcare. In addition, working mothers are entitled to another tax credit for children aged 0-3 years of €1200 per family per year (€100 per month). Part-time work is relatively common among women in Spain - around a quarter of women work part-time, making it easier to combine childcare responsibilities with work. However, for many parents, the state only provides a high level of childcare benefit for 5 months at the rate of earnings, and many children do not have places in nurseries. Thus, caring for a child from the age of 6 months to 3 years is a difficult task for a significant proportion of parents. The lack of qualified staff is a problem, with an average of 30 children per nursery teacher.

In **France**, family policy has a long history and is characterised by a high degree of stability over time, regardless of the government majority. This policy combines financial benefits, fair tax conditions for families, labour law provisions introducing different forms of special paid leave in pension schemes, and free nursery care from 0 to 3 years of age and free kindergarten from the age of 3. Its importance is also enhanced by involving both the state and the counties and cities, irrespective of their political affiliation. The counties and cities complement national policy with a range of local

⁸⁰ <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-02-06/italy-single-and-universal-allowance-for-dependent-children-established/>

⁸¹ Morero-Mínguez, A., & Ortega-Gaspar, M. (2022). A Change in Work-Family/Life or a Return to Traditional Normative Patterns in Spain? Systematic Review. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 7, 807591. and OECD (2022): *Evolving Family Models in Spain. A new national framework for improved support and protection for families.*

family policies on nursery care or family support. Family allowances are intended to compensate for the costs borne by the family for each child, benefit families with many children, and are not dependent on income, in line with the principle of universality. It is the benefit of the child that distinguishes family policy from social policy. As a result, France is one of the European countries with the highest female employment rate and fertility index.⁸² The first pillar of support for families with children is early childhood support, which takes two forms. One is a maternity allowance, and the other is a basic allowance. Freedom of choice in the way childcare is provided is an essential element of French family policy, but in order to have freedom of choice there must be real choice, i.e. sufficient supply of childcare. Families benefit from a wide range of public benefits, including post-natal allowances, tax credits and various family allowances. Financial support includes, for example, housing allowances and special support for single parents. In France, babies can be taken to nurseries from the age of two months. These benefits are available to all concerned, at a rate close to the average wage, and it is no coincidence that they are particularly popular among former migrants, almost replacing a job.

In **Greece**, the system of subsidies for the care of young children is based on three main types of subsidy: infant care, supplementary infant care, and special infant care.⁸³ There is a special lump-sum maternity benefit (βοήθημα τοκετού) for women who give birth outside the hospital (under licensed, controlled conditions). The first and second child reduces the annual tax base by €2,000 each, and the third and each additional child by €3,000 each. The current leave system does not support parents' participation in the labour market and does not promote gender balance.

⁸² Karita, K., & Kitada, M. (2018). Political Measures against Declining Birthrate-Implication of Good Family Policies and Practice in Sweden or France. *Nihon eiseigaku zasshi. Japanese journal of hygiene*, 73(3), 322-329. and https://www.cleiss.fr/docs/regimes/regime_france/an_4.html

⁸³ Konstantinidou, Danai, Antoinetta Capella – European Social Policy Network (2020): Greece introduces a “Childbirth Benefit” and changes the eligibility criteria for other benefits - ESPN Flash Report 2020/16.

4.3. Central Europe

Germany, which has a critical demographic situation, introduced a grandiose policy a few years ago to reconcile work and family life in practice and certainly in social thinking, because previously it was looked down upon to have children and work. More advanced and better-scheduled nursery care and 14 months' parental leave at two-thirds of salary have been introduced. These measures were accompanied by specific targeted income support to combat child poverty. In Germany, families who provide day care for their children under 3 years old at home benefit from a childcare place as a matter of right and a special allowance. Since 2018, there is a Federal Foundation for Early Childhood Intervention, which aims to help children grow up in a world free of violence.⁸⁴ In December 2020, the Federal Cabinet (Bundeskabinett) adopted a bill to strengthen the participation of children and young people with special educational needs and to promote equal opportunities. The law (Das Kinder- und Jugendstärkungsgesetz) consists of five parts:

- improving child and youth protection
- support for children growing up in a foster family or in a foster home
- consolidating child and youth welfare support for children with special needs
- providing assistance and support to parents of children with special educational needs
- strengthening the participation of children, young people and their families.

Also, in December 2020, the Federal Parliament (Bundestag) approved an increased budget for the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend). The ministry was given a budget of €13.1 billion for 2021 spending. The funds will be used to increase child allowances, support the

⁸⁴Reagin, Nancy (2022): The Family in Modern Germany. 592-593. and Wang, H. (2019). Fertility and Family Leave Policies in Germany: Optimal Policy Design in a Dynamic Framework (Vol. 1, No. 3). Working paper. and Leitner, S., Ostner, I., Schmitt, C. (2008). Family Policies in Germany. In: Ostner, I., Schmitt, C. (eds) Family Policies in the Context of Family Change. VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-531-90895-3_9

alimony system, and implement programmes to promote democracy and prevent extremism.⁸⁵

Austrian law requires children to attend nursery school for at least one year from age 5, but this is free of charge.⁸⁶ Austrian family allowances are paid as a differential or continuous benefit if one parent has a registered employment relationship (social security) in Austria and 75% of his or her total income from employment comes from Austria. Persons who are self-employed in Austria are also entitled if they do not have an employment relationship in another country. The rate of the nursery and kindergarten allowance is at the discretion of the provincial government and varies between €0 and €90/month..⁸⁷ Federal, however, is the school starting allowance for children aged 6 to 15 years, with a one-off payment of €56.20 indexed. The family allowance is normally paid until the child reaches the age of 18. If the child is in vocational or adult education, it can be claimed until 24 if the child's income does not exceed €9,000 per year.

Amount of family allowance in Austria

Child's age	Monthly amount
from birth	114,00 €
from 3 years	121,90 €
from 10 years	141,50 €
19 years and over	162,00 €

This amount is in addition to the siblings' allowance, which is paid monthly per child: €7.10 for two children, €17.40 for three, €26.50 for four, €32.00 for five, €35.70 for six and €52.00 for seven or more.⁸⁸ Some important points:

- a claim for family allowance is made by a blood or adoptive parent who is legally resident in Austria; the claimant must live in the same household as the child and must be able to prove this;

⁸⁵ Bartusek, N. (2021). Family Policies in the Czech Republic and Austria: Responses to New Social Risks in Concepts and Policy Measures/Author Bartusek Nikola (Doctoral dissertation, Universität Linz) and <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=9893&furtherNews=yes>

⁸⁶ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:218:0007:0013:HU:PDF>, with own additions

⁸⁷ https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/kinderbetreuung/2/Seite.370130.html

⁸⁸ https://www.oesterreich.gv.at/themen/familie_und_partnerschaft/geburt/3/2/2/Seite.080714.html

- the family allowance is paid by the Austrian Tax Authority (Finanzamt);
- In Austria, family allowances are generally paid up to the age of 18. If the child is studying in a vocational institution or adult education, it can be claimed until the age of 24 (if the child's income does not exceed €9,000).
- for children aged between 6 and 15 years, a one-off payment of €56.20, indexed to the family allowance, is made in September each year, together with the family allowance. This amount does not have to be claimed, it is paid automatically in the event of eligibility.⁸⁹

From March 2017, the childcare allowance includes a so-called "partner bonus". If both parents share the duration of the childcare allowance almost equally (50:50 or 40:60), they can each receive a bonus of €500. If the family's total income is below the minimum set by the province, a bonus of 25% of the housing costs may be claimed.

4.4. Visegrad countries

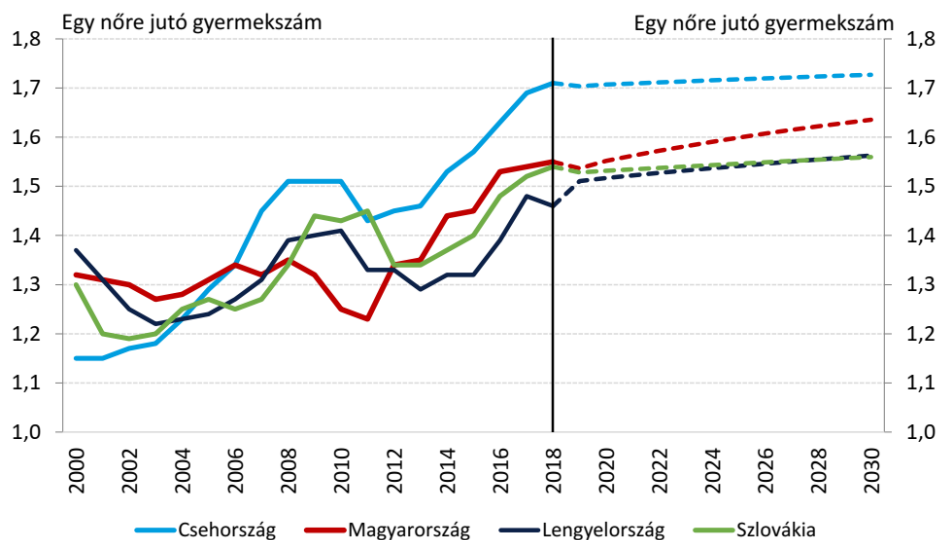
In the four Visegrad countries in our immediate region, fertility rates have risen somewhat over the last decade, despite women having their first child at an increasingly older age. The age profiles of the Visegrad countries suggest that the decline in the number of women of childbearing age will continue in the coming years.⁹⁰

As a result of Hungarian and Czech family policies, the Hungarian **fertility rate** has risen from 1.25 to 1.55 and the Czech fertility rate from 1.51 to 1.71 over the past decade. Family policies in both countries are sound, targeted, complex and flexible, i.e. they adapt to changing needs. The Czech support system has more elements linked to income limits, which are not available above a certain income level.

⁸⁹ <https://www.osztrakugyek.com/Csaladipotlek>

⁹⁰ Saxonberg, S., & Sirovátka, T. (2020). Failing family policy in post-communist Central Europe. In *Regional Comparisons in Comparative Policy Analysis Studies* (pp. 193-210). Routledge. and

Fertility rate trends and projected trends



Blue: Czech Republic, Red: Hungary, Black: Poland, Green: Slovakia
 Source: Kreiszné Hudák Emese (2020): Mi kell a demográfiai fordulathoz? 4.

In **Poland** the Child Benefit (Rodzina 500+) is one of the key components of Poland's family support policy,⁹¹ which was introduced in 2016. This program provides financial support to families with two or more children. Eligible families receive a monthly payment for each child, which increases with each subsequent child. Poland has implemented various tax relief measures aimed at supporting families. These measures may include tax deductions, exemptions, or credits for families with children, helping alleviate parents' financial burden. The country offers parental leave to both mothers and fathers, allowing parents to take time off work to care for their newborn or adopted children. Some financial allowances may be provided during parental leave to support the family. The state established Family Assistance Centers (Centra Pomocy Rodzinie) to support and assist families in need. These centres may offer counselling, information on available benefits, and assistance in accessing social services. Families in need may receive support through housing benefits or subsidies. This assistance aims to ensure that families have adequate and affordable housing.

⁹¹ Dryjanska, L. (2021). Families and family values in Poland. Families and family values in society and culture, 329-344. and <https://www.gov.pl/web/family/important-changes-for-families-since-january-2022>

Slovakia provides child allowances (Rodinný Prídavok) to families with dependent children. This financial support aims to assist families in covering the costs associated with raising children. Parents in Slovakia are entitled to parental allowance during the period of parental leave taken after the birth of a child. This allowance is designed to partially replace income and support parents financially during the early stages of a child's life. Families with children who require special care due to health conditions or disabilities may be eligible for childcare allowances (Výška Príspevku na Starostlivosť o Dieťa). These allowances are intended to support families in meeting the additional costs associated with caring for a child with special needs. Some family support policies may include housing benefits or subsidies to assist families in securing suitable and affordable housing. The country provides various social services to needy families, including counselling and support. Social service centres may offer assistance and guidance on accessing available benefits and support programs.

In the **Czech Republic**, the Child Allowance (Dávka na Dítě) is provided to families with dependent children.⁹² This financial support aims to assist families in covering the costs associated with raising children. Parents are entitled to parental allowance (Rodičovský Příspěvek) during the period of parental leave taken after the birth of a child. This allowance is designed to partially replace income and support parents financially during the early stages of a child's life. The Czech tax system includes provisions for family-related tax benefits. These benefits could take the form of tax deductions, exemptions, or credits to alleviate the financial burden on families with children. Families may receive support for education-related expenses, such as textbooks, school supplies, or assistance with school fees.

For comparison in the Czech Republic, **family allowances** are awarded on the basis of a family's income not exceeding 2.7 times the family subsistence minimum, which also varies according to the child's age and increases in line with the child's age. The Polish family allowance focuses on low and medium-low income families. The allowance amount, like the Czech family allowance, depends on the child's age. From January 2016, the Polish government extended the family allowance to higher income groups under its 'Zlotyit zlotyi' scheme and introduced a new family support element called

⁹² Bartusek, N. (2021). Family Policies in the Czech Republic and Austria: Responses to New Social Risks in Concepts and Policy Measures/Author Bartusek Nikola (Doctoral dissertation, Universität Linz). and Stanković, B. (2018). Czech family policy. Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke, (167), 457-466.

the '500 Plus' allowance to encourage child-rearing. The grant of PLN 500 (€ 117) per child does not depend on the age of the child or the family's income. Until July 2019, the Polish family allowance, known as "500 plus", was only available for the second, third or more children, but from July 2019 it will also be available to families with one child. In Slovakia, the family allowance is a universal benefit to which all households with children are entitled, irrespective of the family's income or the age of the child.⁹³

For maternity allowances, the payment of the allowance is also income-linked in Poland and the Czech Republic. In Poland, maternity allowance is available for families with a net per capita income of less than PLN 1922 (€ 452). In the Czech Republic, maternity allowance is available for families with a family income of less than 2.7 times the family subsistence minimum.

Childcare leave in the Czech Republic is unpaid leave to which both parents are entitled until the child is 3 years old. The mother can take childcare leave after maternity leave and the father after the birth of the child. Although the leave is only granted until the child is 3 years old, childcare benefits are paid until the child is 4 years old.

Paternity leave in the Czech Republic is one week, which can be taken within 6 weeks of the birth of the child. By contrast, in Poland fathers are entitled to 2 weeks' paid leave, which can be used up to the age of 2. During this period, fathers receive the full amount of their salary. In Slovakia, there is no statutory paternity leave.

As for the **personal income tax deduction**, in Slovakia, the tax deduction per child is €22.72 per month up to the age of six and €45.44 per month for children over six. Among the Visegrad countries, the **family tax allowance** applied in the Czech Republic in 2018 was as follows on an annual basis: - CZK 15 204 (€ 595) for one child - CZK 19 404 (€ 760) for two children - CZK 24 204 (€ 948) for three or more children. In Poland, the annual personal income tax allowance for the birth of the first child is PLN 1112 (€262), the lowest and still subject to an income threshold of PLN 112 000 (€26350), but all families are entitled to it on the birth of the second child, regardless of family income, and amounts to PLN 2 000 (€470) for 2-3 children and PLN 2 700 (€635) for the fourth child and above.

⁹³ Hungarian National Audit Office, Állami Számvevőszék (2021): Családpolitika. 28-31.

In the Czech Republic, **infant care allowance** is 100% of income and paid for 24 weeks, in Slovakia 75% and 28 weeks; and in Poland 100% and 34 weeks.

In Poland, as of 2014, adults under 35 years of age are eligible for **state support** to buy their first home under the "Housing for young people" scheme. Families with three or four children can also apply for additional state support for loan repayments. Those building their first home are also entitled to a VAT refund, as in Hungary. In the Czech Republic, housing benefit is linked to the family's total income. If 30% of the family's total income (35% in Prague) is not enough to cover housing costs, they can claim the difference.

In Hungary, **other tax and contribution benefits** include family-type taxation, tax relief for first-time married couples, personal income tax exemption for mothers of four, car purchase scheme for large families, baby allowance, Family Home Building Allowance and student loan waiver. To help reconcile work and family life, Family and Career Centres operate across the country and a Family Friendly Workplace competition is launched every year. The Elizabeth of the Carpathian Basin Foundation for Children helps with daycare for older children, including camps and holiday camps.

According to calculations based on Eurostat data and population projections, the Czech and Slovak fertility rates will stagnate over the next decade with unchanged family policies, while the Hungarian and Polish rates could increase but will remain below the 2.1 needed to maintain population in all four countries. Further stimulus measures would, therefore be needed in all four Visegrad countries to halt population decline.

III. Hungary

One of today's key issues. Although always relevant in modern societies, it is of particular importance at the beginning of the 21st century. Unlike previous political administrations, since 2010 the Orbán governments have prioritised family care, which in short means thinking in terms of the family rather than the individual, and providing primarily work-based rather than social-based support. The downside is that this has led to complete cuts or reductions in support in other areas. This part analyses the successes and failures, the benefits and pitfalls of current family policy, and the opportunities, changes and changes that could be made.

In medieval Hungary, the family was also the stable foundation of society, and its protection was the duty of the reign. The Hungarian Catholic Church, which was the custodian of the institution of marriage until the Reformation, was the mainstay of the family. In the 19th century, the changing spirit of the times also reached the Carpathian Basin, and the secularisation of this area announced and implemented by the Wekerle government⁹⁴, meant that from 1894 it was sufficient to have a civil marriage, which could be dissolved relatively easily at any time. The consequence was the emergence of a large number of divorces, in fact the first step towards the breakdown of the classical family model. The liberal civil behaviour, which had abandoned the moral order of religion, made divorce legally possible, and the primacy of individual pleasure replaced the importance of the reproductive function in the perception of sexuality.

The beginning of family support in Hungary dates back to 1912 when János Teleszky was Minister of Finance, and he was at the forefront in Europe, ahead of many countries that were already more developed than us (Belgium, France, etc.). "The social measures have the express purpose ... of enabling the public authorities to influence the distribution of the means-tested fund in the direction they consider appropriate."⁹⁵ The first measure of this kind was the partial introduction of the family allowance, which was given specifically for social purposes to civil servants and state employees to strengthen the new Hungarian middle class being formed. The population policy objective was not even considered at the time, as it was not justified

⁹⁴The Masonic prime minister, Sándor Wekerle, felt so strongly about the change that he resigned over the rejection of the bill on compulsory civil marriage.

⁹⁵ Teleszky János: *Közgazdaságtan Magyar Tudományos Akadémia*, Budapest 1941. 437.

by the high number of children (the total fertility rate was between 2.5 and 3.0).⁹⁶

The man of our time has become familiar with and has made the term pregnancy commonplace instead of childbearing, and has deployed a plethora of means to avoid it, including the right to destroy foetuses, so to speak", says László Surján in his lecture on Hungarian Christian Family Policy and the European Union.⁹⁷

The Fundamental Law of Hungary declares the following principles and freedoms:

We hold that the family and the nation constitute the principal framework of our coexistence, and that our fundamental cohesive values are loyalty, faith and love.

Article L) (1) Hungary shall protect the institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman established by voluntary decision, and the family as the basis of the survival of the nation. Family ties shall be based on marriage or the relationship between parents and children. The mother shall be a woman; the father shall be a man. (2) Hungary shall support the commitment to have children. (3) The protection of families shall be regulated by a cardinal Act.

Article VI (1) Everyone shall have the right to have his or her private and family life, home, communications and good reputation respected.

Article XV (5) By means of separate measures, Hungary shall protect families, children, women, the elderly and those living with disabilities.

The National Avowal begins by asserting a fundamental premise that the family and the nation are pivotal elements in the coexistence of society. It further identifies loyalty, faith, and love as the foundational cohesive values binding this framework. This assertion reflects a particular socio-political philosophy, emphasizing the interconnectedness of family and nationhood

⁹⁶ Tárkányi János: Európai családpolitikák: a magyar családpolitika története In: Demográfia 1998 41. évf. 2-3. szám

⁹⁷ <https://www.vhf.hu/sites/default/files/dokumentumok/rendezvenyek/2013/surjan-laszlo.pdf>

and underscoring the significance of loyalty, faith, and love as guiding principles.

Later in Article L, the legal framework in Hungary provides a clear and distinct stance on the protection of marriage and family, emphasizing traditional values. The provision begins by articulating Hungary's commitment to safeguarding the institution of marriage. Additionally, it underscores the family's role as the foundation for the survival of the nation, signalling a belief in the societal importance of traditional family structures. The explicit statement that family ties shall be based on marriage or the relationship between parents and children reinforces a specific vision of family formation within the legal framework. This delineation reflects a traditional understanding of family rooted in heterosexual marriage as the foundational structure, thereby excluding alternative family formations from legal recognition.

The assertion that the mother shall be a woman and the father shall be a man reinforces a binary and biological definition of parenthood. This language is indicative of a specific ideological perspective on gender and parenthood, aligning with a traditional understanding of family roles. It may be viewed as a reflection of societal norms and values prevalent at the time of drafting, though it may also draw criticism for not accommodating diverse family structures and gender identities.

In subsection (2), the provision takes a proactive stance by stating that Hungary shall support the commitment to have children. This articulation signals a policy preference for population growth and family-building, aligning with demographic considerations that may have implications for national development and sustainability.

Subsection (3) specifies that a cardinal Act shall regulate the protection of families. This designates a cardinal law, often considered a higher-level legal instrument, to govern the comprehensive legal framework for the protection of families. Such a provision indicates the importance of family protection within Hungary's legal system, elevating it to a level of significance requiring a specific and substantial legislative enactment.

While this provision reflects Hungary's commitment to a specific vision of family and marriage, legal interpretations may evolve over time in response to societal changes, international legal standards, and evolving perspectives on family, gender, and individual rights. Legal discussions and debates may continue to shape the application and impact of this provision within the broader legal landscape.

Moving to Article VI (1), which states, "Everyone shall have the right to have his or her private and family life, home, communications, and good reputation respected," the legal framework recognizes and safeguards the essential rights associated with private and family life. This provision aligns with internationally recognized human rights standards, emphasizing the intrinsic value of personal privacy and the family unit. The legal framework acknowledges the importance of shielding individuals from unwarranted intrusion and interference by explicitly protecting the right to privacy, family life, home, and communication.

Article XV (5) focuses on Hungary's commitment to protect various vulnerable groups through separate measures. The explicit mention of families, children, women, the elderly, and those living with disabilities signals a targeted approach to safeguarding the rights and well-being of these specific demographics. By adopting separate measures, Hungary acknowledges the diverse needs and challenges faced by these groups and seeks to address them through tailored interventions.

The commitment to protect families aligns with the earlier assertion regarding the centrality of the family in the national framework. By extending protection to children, women, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities, Hungary recognizes its population's varying degrees of vulnerability and underscores the state's responsibility to ensure their well-being.

While the principles outlined in these provisions align with the values espoused by the legal system, the application and interpretation of these rights may evolve over time, subject to societal changes, legal developments, and evolving human rights standards. Legal scholars and practitioners may engage in ongoing dialogue to ensure the effective protection of individual rights and the promotion of a just and inclusive society within the parameters set forth by Hungary's legal framework.

The cardinal act CCXII of 2011 on the Protection of Families states that the family, originating as an independent community preceding the evolution of law and the state throughout human history, is grounded in moral principles. Functioning as Hungary's paramount national asset, the family, being the cornerstone of society, ensures the nation's continuity and acts as the inherent milieu for the development of individual personalities, a facet that the state must respect.

Child rearing within the family is deemed safer when compared to alternative options. The cornerstone for establishing a family lies in marriage,

a commitment founded on love and mutual respect, deserving of continual reverence. The family fulfils its role when the enduring and robust bond between parents is fully manifested in their responsibilities toward their children.

Sustainable development and economic growth are contingent upon children's birth and families' expansion. Childbearing must not lead to the financial impoverishment of the family.

A well-functioning society is contingent upon the presence of harmonious families. Inter-generational relationships, particularly those between grandparents and grandchildren, bear special significance in family life.

The state actively supports the harmonization of employment and family life. Ensuring the protection of families and the improvement of family well-being falls within the purview of the state, local governments, civil organizations, media entities, and participants in economic activities. Religious communities also devote special attention to realizing these objectives.

In recognition of inherent dignity and value, safeguarding the institution of family and marriage, with a particular focus on the parent-child relationship forming the foundation of family ties, is paramount. This pertains to situations where the mother is a woman and the father is a man. Preserving physical, mental, and spiritual health places particular importance on protecting well-ordered family relationships and ensuring the right to self-identity based on the birth gender of children.

To secure the nation's continuity through demographic processes outlined in separate laws, support is provided for childbirth and assisting parents in realizing their intentions to have children. With the aim of having every child raised in a family, backing for adoption is extended, and efforts are made to establish swift, fair, and child-centric adoption procedures. Protection, respect, and support for the life of the fetus, beginning from conception, are defined by provisions in separate laws.

Promoting a family-friendly approach in all social and economic domains is encouraged. Parents raising minors benefit from special labor law protection during employment, along with benefits ensuring the alignment of parental roles and work and the protection of family life, as outlined in separate laws. Working parents are entitled to assistance for the placement of their child during working hours. The state advocates for part-time and other atypical forms of employment to facilitate the compatibility of family and employment.

Under separate laws, a parent is entitled to unpaid leave for the home care of their child for (i) at least the child's third year of life or until reaching the age specified for the care of a chronically ill or severely disabled child, especially in the case of raising twins, (ii) the care of the child until at least the child's twelfth year of life or beyond, based on the justification of the necessity for personal care. When determining the tax burden on income earned by families raising children, the state considers the costs associated with childbirth and upbringing. Additionally, the state contributes, whether in monetary or in-kind form, to expenses related to pregnancy, childbirth, the care and upbringing of the child up to at least three years of age, and education.

Various forms of assistance play a primary role in contributing to the responsible upbringing of children. Ensuring suitable housing conditions for families raising minors is a focal point.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the media service providers are mandated to deliver services while respecting the institution of marriage, family, and the value of child-rearing, with legal consequences for infringements regulated by separate laws.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Zimanyi, E. (2020). Family b/orders: Hungary's Campaign for the "Family Protection Action Plan". *Feminist Media Studies*, 20(2), 305-309.

5. General considerations

What is the aim of the Hungarian family policy? In general, family policies set out a number of objectives, which are not mutually exclusive, but do not necessarily include all of them (the list does not reflect any order of importance or logic):

- strengthen family ties, increasing the internal stability of the family,
- help family members, especially growing children, to become useful members of society,
- reducing income inequalities and the risk of poverty,
- support families to care for their members in need because of their age, health, etc,
- promoting childbearing.

Writes István Szilas, the State Audit Office's comptroller and auditor.⁹⁹

Hungarian family policy has a demographic approach. Hence – as we have already written – the focus is on families with children. What about other families? Even in the case of the classic type of cohabitation, the order of life is that children grow up and leave the parental home, so families with children are left without children. This is true even if grandparents take care of the new arrivals in many places more than their parents. There are no special forms of family support for such cases, but we would add that there is no similar practice in other developed countries.

There are several arguments in favour of a **demographic approach to family policy**. (Of course, we could make arguments for the others.) The main ones - the list is not a ranking of importance because we believe that all of them are fundamental - are:

- the **population** of Hungary has been steadily **declining** since the early 1980s, with the last peak being the "age of the Ratkó"¹⁰⁰ grandchildren" (born between 1970-79), the active-retention ratio has been problematic since the 2010s and the most critical situation will be in the second half of the 2030s when there will be a mass retirement,

⁹⁹ Szilas István (2015): Sikeres-e a magyar családpolitika? Pénzügyi Szemle 2015. május

¹⁰⁰ Anna Ratkó was Minister of Welfare and then Minister of Health from 1949-53. She was responsible for the universal ban on abortion

- **fertility is at an all-time low**, and no turnaround is conceivable in the short to medium term, not only because of the low number of women of childbearing age, but also because a successful demographic policy would require at least two decades (not only maturity, but also social maturity) to achieve sufficient numbers for social reproduction,
- **mortality is very high**; we are only ahead of the Balkans in terms of mortality at the EU level, and added to that, we are also leading in mortality from Covid, and in 2021 we had the highest population loss (40 000 people last year, more than the entire population of a Salgótarján county seat!), if we could push this out (life expectancy in Western and Southern Europe is 5 years more), population loss would slow down,
- **the demographic ageing will accelerate** in the near future, this is typical for all developed countries; more than a quarter of the Hungarian population is retired, their share will increase, because of the low mortality rate it is not realistic to raise the retirement age (currently 65 years), the main economic problem is to support the elderly, already visible in today's middle-aged, but for the very old the lack of savings during the active period is a particular problem,
- the number of **marriages is falling** (except in 2021, when the number of marriages will reach a 35-year high of 72,000 couples), cohabitation is also unstable, cohabitation outside marriage is spreading rapidly, gender and LGBTQ attitudes have recently become more popular, and the number of couples is falling overall,
- **the stability of classical families has declined**, with separation and divorce becoming more common. The number of single parents is close to half a million and rising, with around 20,000 divorces a year (down slightly in recent years), and there is a growing lack of respect for families.

5.1. Facts and figures

The 2020-21 census and its data are sorely lacking, even though it is required by law to be conducted every 10 years. It was cancelled due to lack of public funds and the unexpected occurrence of the pandemic, so we refer to the 2016 fractional census data. To produce the Microcensus 2016 - 6.

Household and family data,¹⁰¹ the Central Statistical Office surveyed some 440,000 households in 2,148 municipalities across the country, so the picture is relatively accurate but not up-to-date. We quote from the main figures of the survey.

At the time of the 2016 microcensus, the number of private households was 4 million 21 thousand, 84 thousand fewer than in 2011. This was mainly due to a drop of almost 100,000 in the number of single persons. In 2016, at the time of the microcensus, 2 million 743 thousand families were living in Hungary, 30 thousand more than 5 years earlier. In 2016, there were 283 persons per 100 families on average, compared to 287 in 2011.

Number of households with children, without children and single person households and persons

Title	Households with children					total
	an adult with one or more children	two adults			other	
		with 1 child	with 2 children	with 3+ children		
2010						
Multiplied number of households	173 006	386 245	353 414	128 040	283 349	1 324 054
Multiplied number of persons	441 232	1 158 735	1 413 656	706 626	1 405 074	5 125 323
Average number of households	2,6	3	4	5,5	5	3,9
2015						
Multiplied number of households	172 461	372 504	308 463	130 314	236 401	1 220 143
Multiplied number of persons	440 012	1 117 512	1 233 852	720 264	1 194 494	4 706 134
Average number of households	2,6	3	4	5,5	5,1	3,9
2020						
Multiplied number of households	168 185	390 088	341 185	145 401	189 337	1 234 196

¹⁰¹ Mikrocenzus 2016.6. A háztartások és családok adatai Budapest, 2018.

Multiplied number of persons	400 698	1 170 264	1 364 740	786 580	960 160	4 682 442
Average number of households	2,4	3	4	5,4	5,1	3,8

Title	Households without children				
	single person	two adults		other	total
		both under 65 years of age	at least one of them is aged 65 or over		
2010					
Multiplied number of households	1 201 833	626 126	482 980	380 193	2 691 132
Multiplied number of persons	1 201 833	1 252 252	965 960	1 260 016	4 680 061
Average number of households	1	2	2	3,3	1,7
2015					
Multiplied number of households	1 400 048	653 062	499 011	377 247	2 929 368
Multiplied number of persons	1 400 048	1 306 124	998 022	1 258 954	4 963 148
Average number of households	1	2	2	3,3	1,7
2020					
Multiplied number of households	1 307 906	653 995	584 295	332 793	2 878 989
Multiplied number of persons	1 308 135	1 307 990	1 168 590	1 080 558	4 865 273
Average number of households	1	2	2	3,2	1,7

Title	Single person households				
	total	Of which:			
		Men	Women	under 65 years	65 years and over
2010					
Multiplied number of households	1 201 833	420 467	781 366	640 086	561 747
Multiplied number of persons	1 201 833	420 467	781 366	640 086	561 747
Average number of households	1	1	1	1	1

2015					
Multiplied number of households	1 400 048	578 879	821 169	759 466	640 582
Multiplied number of persons	1 400 048	578 879	821 169	759 466	640 582
Average number of households	1	1	1	1	1
2020					
Multiplied number of households	1 307 906	531 345	776 561	679 978	628 157
Multiplied number of persons	1 308 135	531 345	776 790	679 978	628 157
Average number of households	1	1	1	1	1

Source: KSH (2022): 14.1.1.12. A gyermekes, a gyermek nélküli, valamint az egyszemélyes háztartások és személyek száma

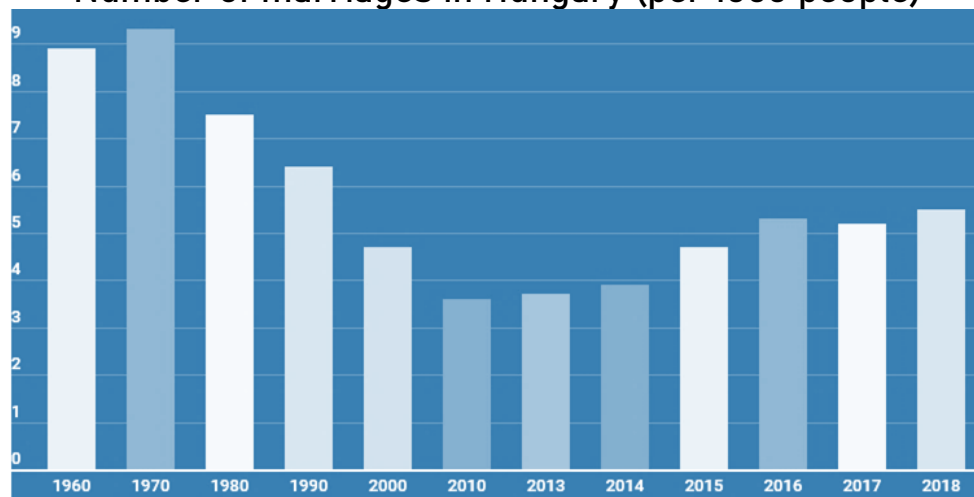
According to a paper published by the Christian Democratic People's Party in 2020 at¹⁰² Our Future is the Child, the current birth rate of around 90,000 would have to be replaced by 130-140,000 newborns a year to maintain the current population in Hungary. They add that if there is no turnaround in the next 1-2 years, the chance of halting the population decline will be lost for good. The study points out that Hungary is "among the 20 fastest declining countries in the world" and that "if a coherent strategy is not implemented, a further 20-25% decline in the birth rate is expected in the next ten years". The think-tank said a Ministry for Family and Community Development should be set up, and family policy measures should focus on the over-35s this year and next, as previous research has shown that a quarter of 35-44 year olds still want to have children. A career model for professional parents would be introduced, with childcare from the third child onwards counting as a working life, for which a fair income would be paid. Child-rearing would be recognised in pensions, a national housing programme based on leasing would be launched to help young people to get a home, and a parental bond would be introduced, with the state contributing money from the birth of the child until the age of 18 as the basis for a supplementary pension. The money accumulated in the bond account would be paid to the mother 15 years after retirement. Personal income tax and VAT would be reduced, and a social security bond would be introduced, which could be bought by all in their working years as early savings in case the mother temporarily loses her job

¹⁰² https://nepszava.hu/3067610_hibas-csaladpolitika-fogyo-nepesseg--gyermeket-hozna-az-adocsokkentek

after the birth of the children. The social insurance policy would provide seniority and health insurance coverage at the minimum wage level.

What can we add to this? It is not up to the ministry to succeed; finding the resources is currently very problematic, but not impossible. The ideas are good and are known elsewhere (e.g. the Botos couple have been pushing for changes to the family background of pensions in several of their writings), but their detailed development is delayed everywhere.

Number of marriages in Hungary (per 1000 people)



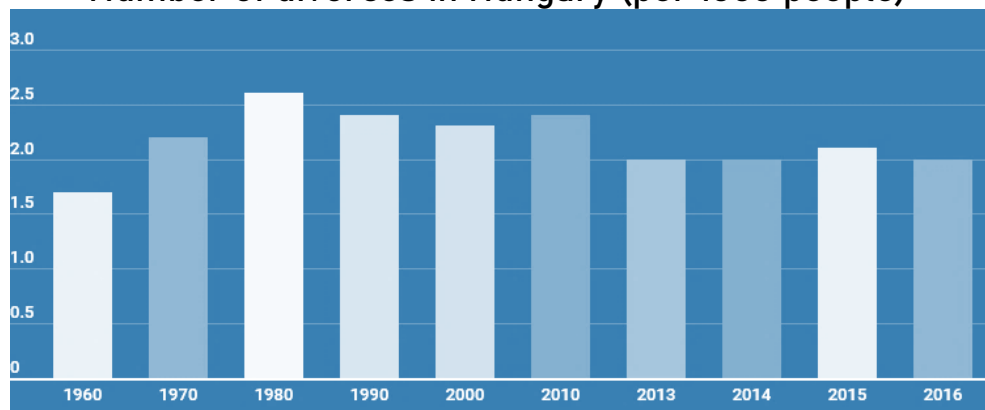
Source: <https://www.hellovidek.hu/csalad/2019/08/26/itt-el-a-legtobb-hutlen-magyar-brutalisan-sok-a-valas-ezeken-a-telepuleseken>

Hungary had almost 9 marriages per 1,000 people in 1960, and at its peak in 1970 the ratio was 9.3. The number of marriages in Hungary is about 45,000/year. Today, there are just over half as many marriages as in the 1980s. By contrast, the number of divorces has been rising dynamically by an average of 5% per year in recent years. There are about **24-25 thousand divorces** a year in Hungary. 2000s: 562 divorces per 1000 marriages.¹⁰³ In other words, more than half of all marriages end in divorce, typically after 5 years. This is a lot, but our statistics are not the worst in Europe, but not the best either, and we can say that we are in the middle of the pack. By the way, we are not the winner in Europe: the divorce rate is highest in Belgium, where **three-quarters of marriages** end in divorce.

¹⁰³ <https://valasinfo.hu/valas/valasok-szama-magyarorszagon-egy-kis-valas-statisztika>

Communism, whose idea of family was dominant in the eastern countries of Europe for nearly half a century, was also lax on the institution of marriage, and sexual freedom was not only allowed but also desirable. It is no accident that in many places syphilis was called Lenin's disease. In Hungary, this led to a rise in the number of divorces from 1-2,000 in the early 1940s to over 10,000 by the end of the 1940s, and in 1959 the number temporarily exceeded 20,000. The steady annual divorce rate of over 20,000 has been a feature since the mid-1960s and has fluctuated above this level until recently. It reached its local peak in 1987, approaching 30,000 divorces.¹⁰⁴ While before the regime change, two-thirds (60-70%) of the population aged 15 and over were married, now less than half of them are married, and since 2014 only 41-43%.¹⁰⁵ Today, the declining and low divorce rate at younger ages is clearly linked to a similar trend in the married population: the shrinking number of young people in marriage means that there are, to put it mildly, no divorcees. The situation is similar all over Europe.

Number of divorces in Hungary (per 1000 people)



Source: <https://www.hellovidek.hu/csalad/2019/08/26/itt-el-a-legtobb-hutlen-magyar-brutalis-an-sok-a-valas-ezek-en-a-telepuleseken>

The study does not address the relationship between the Covid epidemic and family/population. The four waves of the pandemic so far have not caused any change in population growth or in marriage, although most experts on the subject expected a decline in both.

In the introduction to its publication *Family Policy in Europe and Hungary*, the Population Institute of the KSH puts it this way:

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/valas17.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_wdsd002.html

"Spending on family policy in Hungary is relatively high compared to other European countries and the support system pays special attention to families with young children: three forms of support (CSED, GYED, GYES) are available three years after a child's birth. For decades, the aim of these benefits has been to encourage children to stay at home. In recent years, with the introduction of the GYED extra package, the promotion of employment alongside young children has also been a priority."¹⁰⁶

5.2.Limitations on aid

Financial support for family policy depends primarily on opportunities, so the success/failure of the **economic policy** in question is a key determinant of the room for manoeuvre. On the public side, the size of budget revenues and redistributive policies, and on the private side, the population's economic situation. Of course, one might add, all this is done with taxpayers' money.

Among the constraints, we should also mention **withdrawal**. In addition to the rich and diverse support, there is also a significant tax deduction for families. Hungary's 27% VAT is perhaps unique in the world, but certainly in Europe. We cannot think of an example in the EU where baby food or pacifiers do not benefit from a VAT reduction or even an exemption.

At the time of writing, the situation is exceptional. The year 2021 is dominated by the pandemic and the run-up to the elections, and the first half of 2022 is still influenced by these, as well as the consequences of the Russian war in Ukraine. The budget deficit has become large, and public debt has increased. In this situation, increasing family support may not be appropriate, at least not in the short to medium term. Unfortunately, this also applies to the majority of expenditures. The result of often senseless and irresponsible overspending is that there is nothing left.

Recent examples of the Hungarian reality show what happens when there are too many money outflows. There has been no fiscal or monetary moderation, which is necessary in such cases (not the same as a Bokros-type austerity, we do not recommend it!). The increase in wages and other benefits, which was essentially unfunded, undoubtedly stimulated the demand side, creating a temporary economic stimulus, but unfortunately, the increase

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.demografia.hu/hu/kutatasok/17-kutatasok-egyenkent/212-csaladpolitika-magyarorszagon-es-europaban>

in demand was far from matching the increase in supply, the increase in value added was low, and we have now reached inflation of 8%, with a large out-flow of money, putting us at the top of the EU. Not everything can be explained by external factors, as inflation has been more modest even in our region.

Unfunded family policy support is also, of course, a demand driver. However, our position is that subsidies should not be reduced, but rather those that do not yield results even in the longer term, or are merely prestige-based, should be cut back. Another argument against cutting back is that Hungary has one of the lowest wages in the EU (in the Balkans!), so it is absolutely justified to support families who have to bear a heavier burden. And the necessary increase requires a healthy economic structure.

Do we need this kind of family support? Wouldn't it be more transparent, easier, and more flexible to follow if there were fewer but more readily available, mostly automatic? Many people are not even aware of the possibilities. The dense exchange is not conducive either. A more rational reallocation is also likely to increase the effectiveness of subsidies, but this would require a preliminary analytical impact assessment.

Social justice also argues for a reform of the support system. It is hard to deny that the current system favours the better off. A **social distribution**¹⁰⁷ would not only benefit low-income families but also have social benefits. An example is the Nordic countries, where there are huge tax deductions, but on the other hand, there is a transparent and tangible social safety net, which is thus accepted by society as a whole. Family support is one such example.

5.3. The state's moral support for families

In summary, this is the name given to the non-financial initiatives from the government and the needs from the social side that Hungarian families receive or could receive. Most of these cannot be measured directly in forints, so a detailed list of the type of material needs cannot be given here. However, their value may exceed the latter's effectiveness, especially in the longer term. If they are successfully implemented, a generation(s) will grow up in

¹⁰⁷ The other side of this is that the deductions should also be socially sensitive, such as the introduction of a multi rate tax.

which it will once again become a basic value to live in a family for a long time, where the environment and society will appreciate this.

We know that the mainstream does not favour families in the developed world. However, we believe that the process can be reversed and even reversed. We believe that **the media and education are two of the most important elements**. The best is to put the two together. In addition, many tools are already in place, but these two are far ahead of us in terms of their effectiveness, or more precisely, they can be.

Today, the role of the **mass media** has become enormous. It is a fresh, new phenomenon made possible by the development of technology in the 20th century, and the process is far from over; suffice it to say that mobile communications started to spread at the turn of the millennium. It is cheap to buy a radio, and flat-screen TVs, laptops and smartphones have become affordable. It is also inevitable that technological progress will not stop here, with newer and newer devices being added, making almost the whole of society very quickly and efficiently accessible.

Content service providers have already noticed the new opportunities, especially in the private and advertising sectors. The opportunity for the state is enormous here because who else can spend so much? The biggest customer is the state, even in the advertising market. It is also the biggest broadcaster because of its huge financial wealth. The frequency and content of targeted family programmes can influence how society looks at things. It is not diabolical even to set up a studio with such a profile on radio, TV or the net.

The other area **is education**. We deliberately do not write education because there is more to it. Education only provides the curriculum and the knowledge; but education also forms a person. It is useful to start in kindergarten and to continue consistently through primary and secondary school. It is necessary to devote an adequate number of hours to it, even if it is at the expense of subjects. A good teacher is known for being able to deliver the subject to the pupils and make them love it, the first step being to get their attention and love for the subject. But it does not stop there: they also need to care about their students at class and individual levels. Yes, it is necessary to care because, in some cases, the child does not get this at home, either because the parent is busy or because he or she has not had an example of it either; where can he or she draw inspiration from? Efforts should be made to ensure that all children receive at least half an hour a week of personalised

attention. Obviously, this is hardly possible with the current number of hours, but a healthier ratio would solve the problem. The presentation of family values, education for family life, and the community - family bond would play a very important role in this educational process.

Education reform requires a transformation of **teacher education** that prepares new teachers not only in subject knowledge but also in education. This benefits both the teacher and the student. It is not only the university that should give teachers a crutch but also society. He should be able to start a family and support it properly so the students can see the most useful, practical example. He or she should have the social esteem (in terms of salary) that students and their parents can look up to.

Family education is the most important part of education. The family is a "natural community of nurture in which the child is exposed to decisive influences throughout his or her life. In particular, the example of adults, especially parents, harmonious relationships and parental love that does not degenerate into sober indulgence have a great educational power."¹⁰⁸ The state could intervene here, too, starting at the very beginning of the marriage process, but it does not even have a programme. School education should complement this, or where parents are unable to do so (for example, because they themselves have not received such an education), the school must necessarily take over the role. The problem is really where neither is there.

Finally, both instruments are characterised by **slow progress and slow results**. It is wrong to expect the media or school to solve the problem overnight. Developing a new approach takes a long time, certainly decades. This is not an area where you can see immediate results, but yes, you can see results in the new generations growing up. On the public side, of course, it is also necessary to think here not just in terms of one government term, because if continuity is lost, it all makes no sense; consistency is one of the most important elements in raising a family.

¹⁰⁸ Új Magyar Lexikon Akadémia Kiadó, Budapest, 1959. Vol. 1. 478.

6. State family support

As Hungary navigates the challenges of the modern era, understanding its approach to supporting families becomes essential in comprehending the dynamics of its social policy. Hungary's concept of state family support reflects a comprehensive approach aimed at enhancing the well-being of families across various life stages. Rooted in a combination of traditional values and responses to contemporary socio-economic demands, Hungary's family support system encompasses a range of policies and initiatives.

Hungary recognizes the financial strains that families may face, particularly those with children. As a result, the state provides various forms of financial assistance, including child benefits, tax breaks, and subsidies for essential needs such as education and housing. These measures are designed to alleviate economic pressures on families and encourage a higher standard of living. The Hungarian government strongly emphasises supporting families in balancing work and family life. State-sponsored childcare programs and educational initiatives aim to provide accessible and high-quality services, allowing parents to pursue their careers while ensuring the well-rounded development of children.

The concept of state family support extends to healthcare services and social support networks. Hungary strives to provide adequate healthcare facilities and services catering to family health needs. Additionally, social services are available to assist families facing specific challenges, ensuring a safety net for vulnerable members of the community.

The country has implemented pro-family policies that incentivize family formation and growth. These policies may include grants for newlyweds, mortgage subsidies for families with children, and other measures aimed at creating a conducive environment for family life.

Hungary's state family support concept is not static; it adapts to societal changes and emerging needs. Continuous evaluation and adjustments to policies ensure that the state's support remains relevant and effective in addressing the evolving dynamics of Hungarian families.

At the IV Demographic Summit in Várkert Bazár in the autumn of 2021, the Hungarian Prime Minister summarised family policy (in brief) as follows:

Having children should be a financial benefit for a family and help families to own their own homes. Family policy should be based on mothers and the whole country should be made family-friendly. In addition, the institution of the family and children must be protected by the law. There is only one correct and viable solution to the depopulation equation: the state must help families start and thrive. Families need to be supported in a way that ensures sustained economic growth. Hungary spends 5% of GDP on family support. We are not yet where we want to be, we are half way there, but at least we know the direction we are going in," he added. He said that if it had not been for the new special Hungarian family policy, and everything had stayed the same, 120,000 fewer children would have been born in ten years. The number of marriages has almost doubled since 2010, and the number of abortions in Hungary has fallen by 41%.¹⁰⁹

It is natural for a prime minister to consider his government's family policy a success and highlight the decisions he believes have led to this success. This is the job of all, whatever the colour of their leadership. As with everything, there are downsides. One is success. Given the population's age composition, and specifically the low number of women of childbearing age, no family policy can be successful from a demographic point of view. In order to change this, not only economic measures are needed, and just as importantly, a general attitude that makes the large family model a role model and acceptable to society. Another major problem is the redistribution of family support on the basis of work. Families with little or no income cannot access various forms of support. Living on public works and family allowances is impossible. The different types of benefits are ad hoc and therefore insecure. In other words, the critics who claim that the current method favours better-off families are right in some respects. This is particularly true when there are no jobs in a particular area or when adult family members are unable to work for health or other reasons. There is a lack of an adequate social safety net, both financially and in terms of care, so it is almost inevitable that these families live in poverty or even extreme poverty.

The basic question is: what is the purpose of family policy, what are the possible objectives of public (government) intervention? We found a very good summary on the internet, and we quote from it:

¹⁰⁹ <https://kormany.hu/hirek/a-magyar-kormany-ot-pillerre-epitette-csaladpolitikajat>

- recognition of the usefulness of the child through the promotion of childbearing (in this conception, the child is seen as a "public good".)
- partial assumption of the costs of raising children by the state, by society.
- reducing income inequality and the risk of poverty for families.
- promoting the internal stability of families.
- influencing population growth.
- to develop and operate a complex and stable family policy system that is at the same time responsive to changing challenges." - writes Zoltán Lakner, head of the department at the Vitéz János College in Esztergom.¹¹⁰

What is the current Hungarian family policy? The best feature of the approach for evaluation is the description of the support system, i.e. to what extent the government intends to strengthen the position of families with children. We describe its main elements (without claiming completeness due to space constraints), provide a critique and, where we consider it necessary, suggest changes.

Amount of income considered necessary for different living standards in households with children [thousand HUF/person/month]

Level of living	Households with children					other	total
	an adult with one or more children	two adults					
		with 1 child	with 2 children	with 3+ children			
2010							
Very tight	54,9	55,8	46,7	35,9	42,1	46,7	
Scarce	72,8	72,7	61	46,8	55	61,1	
Average	99,5	96	80,9	61,7	72	80,8	
Good	136,4	128	107,3	80,3	95	107,4	
Very good	190,3	173,7	146,1	108,3	127,2	145,7	
2015							
Very tight	51,6	59,2	49	39,2	43,9	48,9	
Scarce	69,2	77,9	64,7	51,3	57,6	64,4	
Average	93,4	103,5	86	67,9	77,1	85,8	
Good	125,9	137,2	115,1	90,6	100,9	114	

¹¹⁰ sely.org/advice/2006_3/LAKNER.pdf

Very good	178,1	190,3	160,2	129,6	134,8	157,9
2020						
Very tight	74,3	75,4	62,5	48,3	54,9	62,8
Scarce	98,7	98,5	81,3	63,2	71,4	82,0
Average	138,6	139,6	113,6	88	99,1	114,9
Good	193,1	190,8	155,6	119,7	132	156,8
Very good	293,7	280,2	228,9	163,2	189,7	228,2

Source: KSH (2022): 14.1.1.16. A különböző megélhetési szintekhez szükségesnek tartott jövedelemösszeg a gyermekes, a gyermek nélküli és az egyszemélyes háztartásokban [ezer forint/fő/hó]

Annual expenditure per capita [HUF/person/year]

Title	an adult with one or more children	Households with children			other	total
		two adults				
		with 1 child	with 2 chil- dren	with 3+ children		
2020						
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	297 779	300 820	259 734	223 845	230 098	261 274
Alcoholic beverages, to- bacco	29 409	41 273	29 740	33 632	34 121	34 189
Clothing and footwear (including service)	45 157	60 794	61 570	36 556	36 818	50 525
Home maintenance, household energy	285 370	217 278	179 554	131 529	144 141	183 075
Furnishing, household equipment	51 103	56 591	62 941	33 943	33 206	49 185
Health	42 661	53 938	33 117	31 900	35 020	39 420
Transport	110 007	157 504	134 325	80 365	103 616	122 570
News release	90 725	92 778	72 026	55 376	63 352	74 338
Culture, entertainment	91 354	80 800	77 649	81 921	52 306	74 992
Education	30 695	17 108	22 763	19 037	10 567	18 843
Accommodation and food service activities	63 271	57 356	66 706	39 896	28 505	51 508
Other products and ser- vices	92 549	112 995	99 968	55 866	65 334	87 958
All	1 230 082	1 249 234	1 100 091	823 866	837 083	1 047 877

Source: KSH (2022): 14.1.1.35. Az egy főre jutó éves kiadások részletezése COICOP-csoportosítás szerint a gyermekes, a gyermek nélküli és az egyszemélyes háztartásokban [forint/fő/év]

6.1. Family support benefits

Family support benefits are: family allowances (childcare allowance and schooling allowance), childcare allowance (childcare assistance allowance and child-raising allowance) and maternity allowance.¹¹¹

Family Allowance – a direct form of state support with a basic entitlement, which increased significantly each year until 2008. The state provides a monthly education and family allowance to cover the costs of bringing up and educating a child.¹¹² The monthly amount depends on the number of children and other conditions. The minimum amount is HUF 12 200, without any deduction. It is paid from the birth of the child until the end of the child's full-time education. It exists in most EU countries. In our opinion, it is the most important support instrument and therefore clearly needs to be increased, and drastically (at least by 100 %!). We accept the need for and value of a work-based society and the support that this implies, but at the same time we must stress that there are hundreds of thousands of people, many of them with children, who, through no fault of their own, are unable to enter the world of work, partly because of their health, partly because of their socio-economic situation or for other reasons. This is particularly true in small villages and shantytowns far from large cities. As indicated earlier, there is a need to focus on social support. Social justice requires this, and it is essential that this is the first thing to be sorted out.

Maternity allowance – this is a one-off benefit. The government has made the amount of the allowance dependent on the minimum old-age pension in force at the time of the birth of the child or children, increased to 225% of the minimum old-age pension, or 300% of the minimum old-age pension for twin children. This assistance is a one-off benefit of HUF 64 125 per child and HUF 85 500 for twins. In our opinion, it is very useful at the beginning of a family's expansion, it contributes to (not reaches!) the initial expenses, and the amount can be increased as the budgetary situation improves.¹¹³

Childcare allowance (GYES) is a benefit payable on a monthly basis.¹¹⁴ The amount of the childcare allowance is independent of the number of children and is equal to the monthly minimum amount of the old-age pension. If the parent has twin children, the amount of child benefit is twice the

¹¹¹ Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support § 5.

¹¹² Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support § 7-8

¹¹³ Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support § 29.

¹¹⁴ Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support § 20.

minimum amount of the old-age pension, again irrespective of the number of children. In 2020, the benefit will be HUF 28,500 gross, from which 10% pension contributions will be deducted, making HUF 25,650. In our opinion: for many families, this is a very good help for the future, and an increase is justified, if only in the context of inflation.¹¹⁵

Childcare allowance (GYET) better known as full-time motherhood.¹¹⁶ It is a monthly benefit under family support benefits. The monthly amount of the childcare allowance is equal to the minimum amount of the old-age pension at any given time, i.e. HUF 28 500, regardless of the number of children, from which 10% pension contributions are deducted. It is paid to parents from the age of 3 until the age of 8 for the youngest child, provided that the beneficiary has 3 or more minor children in his/her household. Our view: the amount of the allowance is very small and should be increased as the budgetary situation improves.

6.2. Health insurance cash benefits

Health insurance cash benefits are the infant care allowance, adoption allowance, childcare allowance and sick pay.¹¹⁷

Childcare allowance (CSED) is intended to make up for the loss of income linked to the birth of a child.¹¹⁸ It is an insurance-linked cash benefit paid for the duration of maternity leave (from July 2021, it will be calculated on the basis of gross income). The basis of the benefit is determined by counting back three months from the date of claiming the benefit and starting to earn the days paid backwards from the last day of the third month. Our view: a good form of benefit, the duration could be slightly increased, our proposal is 183 days, i.e. a half year.

Childcare allowance (GYED) is a monthly cash benefit payable to insured persons only, on a pro-rata basis, to make up for loss of income by the parent.¹¹⁹ The amount of the childcare allowance is 70% of the calendar day average of the eligible income. In our view, this is a typical work-based

¹¹⁵ According to the KSH, the rate of inflation at the end of January 2022 will be 7.9%, with a possible increase of up to 10%, according to inflation expectations.

¹¹⁶ Act LXXXIV of 1998 on Family Support § 23.

¹¹⁷ Act LXXXIII of 1997 on Compulsory Health Insurance Benefits § 5/C (1) c)

¹¹⁸ Act LXXXIII of 1997 on Compulsory Health Insurance Benefits § 40.

¹¹⁹ Act LXXXIII of 1997 on Compulsory Health Insurance Benefits § 42/A.

benefit specifically targeted at better-off families, while support for the less well-off could be provided through other means, such as the above-mentioned increase in the family allowance. Our proposal is not to abolish it, but to move to a social fund/means-tested system.

An insured person who has fostered a child over the age of two or, in the case of twins, a child over the age of three, with a view to adoption, is entitled to an **adoption allowance**.¹²⁰ The amount is adjusted to the amount of the sickness allowance.

Cash. An insured parent who is liable to pay social security contributions (birth parent, adoptive parent, foster parent, surrogate parent, guardian) may be entitled to childcare allowance if he or she is medically certified as unfit for work to care for a sick child under the age of 12.¹²¹ If the sick child is between 12 and 18 years old, the parent may be entitled to childcare allowance only on a fair and equitable basis if the sick child is being cared for. The rate is 60% or 50% of income. Our view: for those who have no other resources, it is not enough; for others it is fine, but not necessarily justified.

6.3.Tax benefits

The amount to be refunded is the amount of **personal income tax** actually paid in 2021, up to the average annual tax rate on wages calculated on the basis of December 2020 data. Refunds are available to all parents with children who are entitled to family allowances, pregnant women and their spouses, and recipients of disability benefits. If both parents have a registered job, they get a refund of their personal income tax. The same applies to cohabiting couples with a child in common and raising him or her jointly. For divorced parents, the one who is entitled to the family allowance is entitled to the family tax refund. Thus, in addition to divorced parents who bring up their child alone, divorced parents who alternate the care of the child in their own household and, therefore, receive a 50-50% family allowance will also be entitled to a refund.

Family tax allowance. The family tax allowance reduces the taxpayer's total taxable amount. An insured person who cannot claim the full amount of the family tax allowance against his taxable amount may offset it

¹²⁰ Act LXXXIII of 1997 on Compulsory Health Insurance Benefits § 42/H.

¹²¹ Act LXXXIII of 1997 on Compulsory Health Insurance Benefits § 43.

against his social security contributions. The amount of the family tax allowance depends on the number of dependants.

Number of detainees	Tax base reduction	Maximum amount of family allowance per month
after 1 dependent	66 670 Ft	10 000 Ft
after 2 dependants	266 660 Ft	40 000 Ft
for at least 3 dependants		Maximum HUF 33 000/month per beneficiary per dependant
after 3 dependants	660 000 Ft	99 000 Ft
after 4 dependants	880 000 Ft	132 000 Ft
after 5 dependants	1 100 000 Ft	165 000 Ft

Source: own compilation

Income tax exemption. Full personal income tax exemption for mothers with many children. Mothers of four or more children A mother of four or more children is defined as a woman who, as a biological or adoptive parent, for the child she is raising

- you are entitled to family allowances or
- is no longer entitled to family allowances but has been entitled to them for at least 12 years and the number of children mentioned above is four or more.

6.4. Housing and vehicle

Housing-related data in households with children

Title	Households with children					
	an adult with one or more children	two adults			other	total
		with 1 child	with 2 child- ren	with 3+ child- ren		
2020						
Distribution of households by tenure, %						
Owner	77,2	88,5	88,7	85,2	95,7	87,7
Beneficiary, relative of the owner	3,1	2,3	3,3	2,5	-	2,3
Rented accommodation at market rate	10,2	4,3	4,1	7,6	1,1	4,9
Tenants of rented accommoda- tion at non-market rates or occu- pants of service accommodation	7,3	4,5	3,2	4,0	3,0	4,3
Private owner-occupiers of dwell- ings as a favour	2,3	0,3	0,8	0,6	0,2	0,7
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Distribution of dwellings by heating mode, %						
No heating	-	-	-	0,4	-	0,0
District heating	21,6	14,6	12,7	7,1	9,1	13,4
Gas boiler heating several apart- ments in a building	6,4	4,1	1,8	1,4	1,0	3,0
Boiler heating several flats in a building	0,8	0,6	0,5	0,8	-	0,5
Circulators, gas heating with gas	30,0	30,6	34,8	25,6	20,1	29,4
Circo, gas heating with other	9,2	25,4	31,8	26,4	42,1	27,6
Individual space heating with gas	13,5	9,0	5,4	5,3	8,7	8,2
Individual space heating with electricity	1,0	0,5	0,5	2,5	1,1	0,9
Individual space heating with other fuels (coal, wood, oil)	16,5	14,8	11,9	30,5	17,8	16,6
Mobile heating	1,0	0,3	0,6	-	-	0,4
Total	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0	100,0
Quantitative and qualitative indicators of housing						
Average area of dwellings, m²	71,0	86,0	92,8	94,7	100,0	88,9
Percentage with a bathroom, %	97,0	98,6	99,4	95,0	96,3	97,8
Percentage of people with a toilet, %	97,0	98,6	98,7	95,6	95,7	97,6

Source: KSH (2022): 14.1.1.33. Lakással kapcsolatos adatok a gyermekes, a gyermek nélküli és az egyszemélyes háztartásokban

Family housing allowance. In Hungary, 90% of the population live in owner-occupied housing, while rented and other types of housing account for the remaining 10%. The majority of households live in shared or semi-commodal housing (66% and 29% respectively), while 2.6% live in semi-commodal housing. In addition, 2.6 % of 104,000 households lived in uncomfortable or in-need and other housing in 2016. According to the KSH data¹²², single-family couples and multi-family households live almost exclusively in owner-occupied dwellings (91% and 95% respectively). In contrast, households in cohabiting relationships have the lowest proportion of owner-occupied dwellings (80%), a high proportion of renting (18%), and other forms of occupation, such as accommodation by favour. Single-parent households with children and single-parent households also have a higher than average share of rented accommodation. Part of the relevant family allowances:

The **CSOK**, Family Homebuyer's Allowance, is specifically for families, spouses, and life partners; single parents can apply for it for their existing children, regardless of their age, and couples can apply for it for a child they are expecting, if at least one of them is under 40.

For a new home	For a second-hand dwelling
no criminal record (for all offences or offences against property, against the family or children, damaging the budget or damaging the economy)	
proof that the claimant has not been obliged to repay any unauthorised CSOK or "szocpol" benefits in the last 5 years	
housing insurance for the subsidised property	
public debt exemption	
for 1 and 2 children, 180 days of continuous social security entitlement (with a maximum of 30 days' interruption), unless the claimant is in receipt of a care allowance	180 days of continuous social insurance (with a maximum of 30 days' interruption)
in the case of 3 or more children, 2 years of continuous social insurance (with a maximum break of 30 days), of which only gainful employment (e.g. employment, self-employment, self-employment, contract of agency) is acceptable for the 180 days preceding the application, unless the claimant is in receipt of a care allowance	

Source: own compilation

¹²² Mikrocenzus 2016. 6. A háztartások és családok adatai Budapest, 2018

The rates are different for new and second-hand housing, as shown in the two tables below. The rate of the CSK for the purchase or construction of a new dwelling or a detached house, for the construction of an attic or for the construction of a loft:

Number of children	Size of apartment/house	Amount of aid
after 1 child	Apartment of at least 40 m ² or detached house of at least 70 m ²	600 000 Ft
after 2 children	an apartment of 50 m ² or a detached house of at least 80 m ²	HUF 2 600 000 (+ HUF 10 000 000 state-subsidised housing loan)
after 3 or more children	an apartment of 60 m ² or a detached house of at least 90 m ²	HUF 10 000 000 (+ HUF 15 000 000 state-subsidised housing loan)

The CSOK rate for the purchase or extension of a second-hand or detached house:

Number of children	Size of apartment/house	Amount of aid
after 1 child	Apartment or family house of at least 40 m ²	600 000 Ft
after 2 children	Apartment or family house of at least 50 m ²	HUF 1 430 000 (+ HUF 10 000 000 state-subsidised housing loan)
after 3 children	Apartment or family house of at least 60 m ²	HUF 2 200 000 (+ HUF 15 000 000 state-subsidised housing loan)
after 4 or more children	Apartment or family house of at least 70 m ²	HUF 2 750 000 (+ HUF 15 000 000 state-subsidised housing loan)

Source : <https://csalad.hu/tamogatasok/csok>

To qualify for a **Home Renovation Loan**, families must have at least one child living in the household to be renovated or a 12-week foetus, have the goal of renovating their own home, have an employment or social security status (e.g. education, foreign social security, supplementary pensioner, student GYED) that makes them eligible for a Home Renovation Loan and meet the criteria for loan assessment.

As of 1 January 2021, the VAT rate will not only be reduced from 27% to 5% for families buying a new-build home or having it built with a general

contractor and receiving a CSOK, but they will not even have to pay the remaining 5% VAT, as the state will take over the remaining 5%. They will thus be essentially VAT-free when buying their new home.

Under the preferential Home Renovation Loan scheme guaranteed by the government, they can borrow up to HUF 6 million, with a maximum term of 10 years and an interest rate of 3%. Eligible applicants can settle the renovation costs, i.e. invoices containing 50% material costs and 50% labour costs, after taking out the loan and completing the works in order to reduce the loan amount by the maximum HUF 3 million of state subsidy. The family carrying out the home renovation will thus receive two subsidies from the state: one in the form of a state-subsidised loan at the beginning of the renovation and the second after the submission of the invoices, after the 50% of the loan, up to a maximum of HUF 3 million, has been waived.

Home Building Programme. Young couples who, for financial or other reasons, are not able to buy or build their own apartment or family house, or who are planning their future in a separate apartment but in the home of one of their families, with several generations living together, can receive a much higher subsidy for the works related to the construction of the attic apartment, equal to the amount of the CSOK for the construction or purchase of a new apartment. The amount of the subsidy:

- 1 child - HUF 600 thousand
- 2 children - HUF 2.6 million
- 3 children - HUF 10 million

The CSOK is available even if the children have not yet been born or the baby is not on the way, but the couple knows they want to have a child.

A further element of the Homebuilding programme is the reduction of **Value-Added Tax**. In order to pay only 5% VAT instead of 27% on the net amount, the date of supply must be after 1 January 2021, and the property must be up to 150 square metres in the case of an apartment and up to 300 square metres in the case of a house.

Village or Rural CSOK. In municipalities with less than 5000 inhabitants, there is an additional CSOK discount/loan for young married couples. In our opinion, it is an important means of maintaining rural existence, not the only break-out point for a village, especially if it is combined with job creation and successful infrastructure tenders.

Mortgage loan remission. Families with a second child can reduce their mortgage loan debt by HUF 1 million, while for the third child (or additional child if not previously applied for), the amount of the loan waiver increases to HUF 4 million (thus a total of HUF 5 million waivers can be claimed for 2 eligible children), and for each additional child, families can reduce their mortgage loan debt by an additional HUF 1-1 million. We believe that a permanent solution must be found and that borrowers and lenders are responsible.

Family car. A maximum of HUF 2.5 million (up to 50% of the purchase price) is available for purchasing a car with at least 7 seats. Large families with three or more children and those with a third child on the way (or a second or third child in the case of twins) are eligible. Only the number of children who are actually entitled to family allowances can be taken into account for the grant, and not higher education students. In our view, not many people can take advantage of it. The richest buy an expensive car, the poorest cannot afford it.

Average annual stock of consumer durables in households with children [per 100 households]

Title	Households with children					
	an adult with one or more children	two adults			other	total
		with 1 child	with 2 children	with 3+ children		
2020						
Refrigerator	20	26	23	34	42	28
Freezer	26	43	42	55	66	45
Refrigerator and freezer	84	80	81	73	71	79
Microwave oven	92	94	96	91	102	95
Dishwasher	23	38	49	43	33	39
Washing machine	99	101	98	99	101	100
Of which:						
automatic, semi-automatic washing machine	89	93	91	86	85	90
Washing machine with dryer	6	7	5	7	10	7
Drying machine	3	12	18	17	11	13
Television, colour	154	171	177	192	244	184
Of which:						
LED, LCD, plasma, laser television	115	141	143	137	171	142

Digital camera	10	8	12	7	12	10
Digital camera	21	29	37	22	32	30
DVD	18	27	25	19	28	24
E-book reader	2	4	7	4	5	5
Home cinema equipment	6	9	8	7	8	8
Desktop computer (PC)	49	43	53	58	65	52
Portable computer (laptop, notebook)	95	104	125	105	96	107
Handheld computer (tablet, PDA)	28	32	42	35	29	34
Mobile phone	210	265	280	334	360	284
Landline telephone	30	40	42	35	46	40
Air conditioner	14	19	23	15	15	18
High level alarm system	4	6	9	6	8	7
Motorcycle	2	7	9	5	17	8
Passenger car	55	113	122	97	132	108

Source: KSH (2022): 14.1.1.34. A tartós fogyasztási cikkek éves átlagos állománya a gyermekes, a gyermek nélküli és az egyszemélyes háztartásokban [100 háztartásra jutó darab]

6.5. Childcare

Child Care Allowance (GYOD). In cases of social need, the district office will set a child care allowance for the eligible person.¹²³ From 1 January 2022, it will be increased to the minimum wage amount then in force. A 10% pension contribution is deducted from the amount of the benefit. If you have two sick children, the benefit will be one and a half times the amount. In our opinion, it is justified to maintain it, as it is more expensive to stay in an institution, the care is likely to be more lax and there are not enough places, especially in rural areas.

Baby waiting allowance. Interest-free loans of up to HUF 10 million are available for couples where the wife is aged between 18 and 41 and at least one of the couple has at least 3 years of insurance.¹²⁴ If the second child is born, repayments are suspended for another 3 years and 30% of the debt is waived. If the third child arrives, the entire remaining debt is cancelled.

Since 2005, a one-off grant of HUF 42 500 has been paid as a start-of-life allowance, which the Hungarian State Treasury credits to the child's **Start-of-Life Account**.¹²⁵ A child entitled to a regular child protection benefit and living in Hungary who is fostered receives an additional grant of

¹²³ Act III of 1993 on Social Administration and Social Benefits § 38

¹²⁴ Government Decree 44/2019 (III. 12.) on the Baby Waiting Allowance

¹²⁵ Act CLXXIV of 2005 on support for young people starting their lives

HUF 44 600 in the 7th and 14th year following the year of birth. The amount deposited in the account bears interest at the rate of inflation until the child reaches the age of majority. The savings thus accumulated will be available to the child at the age of 18. The amount of the start-up allowance held in a deposit account can be increased by opening a Treasury Start-up securities account.

Infertility testing. New form of support, previously only available in private practices. Infertility tests were also free from 1 July last year for both men and women. In addition, the performance volume limit will be abolished, meaning that "in the future, there will be no waiting lists for infertility treatment", said the responsible minister, Katalin Novák, at the launch. In Hungary, there are about 150,000 couples with infertility problems who want to have children but for some reason, cannot conceive naturally - a very large number. The government wants to see uniformly high standards and guidelines for the treatment of infertility so that couples with the problem receive the same high quality of care everywhere in the country. The draft National Human Reproduction Programme, which is currently being negotiated but aims to make drastic improvements, is also part of the agenda. Also included is the **Lombik programme**, with public funding, but details are not yet known and no concrete figures are available because of its novelty. In our opinion, it is a great help to many families, many of whom could not afford it because of the cost, and the number of people who use it is increasing, if only because a growing proportion of couples are thinking about having children later and later, and the older people get, the more difficult it is to achieve this. The biological clock is ticking; careers may be available later - this needs to be emphasised more strongly in the media.

As of 1 January 2018, two of the family support benefits available in Hungary under the **Köldökzsinór Programme** will also be available to Hungarians living outside the administrative borders of Hungary. These two forms of support are the Maternity Allowance, the Youth Start of Life Allowance, and the related Baby Bond. In our opinion, this is a nice gesture of the state for Hungarian unity, but its value differs in Carpathian or Burgenland.

6.6.Other

Holidays, days off. Both parents are entitled to extra leave for the child. The amount of additional leave per parent is

- 2 working days after 1 child;
- 4 working days after 2 children;
- 7 working days per year for 3 or more children.

Additional leave is increased by 2 working days per disabled child if the employee's child is disabled. Under the provisions of the new Government Administration Act, from 2019, the amount of additional leave for children of parents working in the central administration has doubled: 4 working days of leave per year for one child, 8 for two children and 14 for three children. The additional leave is increased by 2 working days per disabled child if the government official's child is disabled.¹²⁶ Our view: it is sustainable, not significant in terms of amount, but it allows parents to spend more time with their child, which is very important, especially at a younger age.

Physicians, Paediatricians, Doctors. This is not a direct cash benefit, but it is important to note that Hungarian law clearly states that the employee must be allowed to go for a medical examination required for the pregnancy. An example is the morning laboratory test, which in the case of a diabetes test on exertion, must be included in the morning start of work. Of course, efforts should be made to ensure that, where possible, the tests conflict as little as possible with work and do not take up a whole day - this is also a matter for the state to organise. On the cost side, the question is whether the employee is entitled to an allowance for the time lost and what the cost is to the employer. After all, the employee does not work for these few hours, but there is a cost in some instances.

In our opinion, this should also include the **care of the nurse** and the regular professional health surveillance of the babies, which is almost unique in Europe – it is essential to keep it, in many cases, it is the only check that the parents are taking proper care of the baby.

¹²⁶ <https://csalad.hu/tamogatasok/gyermek-utan-jaro-szabadsag>

General practitioners and Family pediatricians

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2022
General practitioners								
Number of GPs	4 537	5 011	5 159	5 018	4 926	4 817	4 536	4 427
Registered with a family doctor, a thousand	8 962	8 778	8 497	8 616	8 594	8 745	8 749	8 691
Registered resident per GP	1 975	1 752	1 647	1 717	1 745	1 815	1 929	1 963
Family paediatricians								
Number of family paediatricians	1 420	1 527	1 570	1 571	1 525	1 460	1 359	1 321
Registered with a family pediatrician, one thousand	1 413	1 553	1 494	1 475	1 441	1 414	1 431	1 435
Registered resident per family paediatrician	995	1 017	951	939	945	968	1 053	1 086
Patient turnover, thousand								
cases treated in the clinic	8 043	9 053	9 158	9 634	10 042	9 915	8 051	8 625
services outside the clinic	1 016	1 589	1 346	1 036	667	453	230	92
telemedicine care	–	–	–	–	–	–	..	3 869
altogether	9 059	10 642	10 504	10 670	10 709	10 368	8 282	12 587
Annual patient turnover per family paediatrician								
cases treated in the clinic	5 490	5 928	5 846	6 121	6 535	6 715	5 870	6 498
services outside the clinic	694	1 041	859	658	434	307	168	69
telemedicine care	–	–	–	–	–	–	..	2 915
altogether	6 184	6 969	6 705	6 779	6 970	7 022	6 038	9 481
Patient traffic per thousand registered residents aged 0-18	6 411	6 850	7 032	7 232	7 433	7 334	5 787	8 770
Together								
Number of family doctors and family paediatricians	5 957	6 538	6 729	6 589	6 451	6 277	5 895	5 748
Residents per family doctor and family paediatrician	1 742	1 567	1 516	1 529	1 548	1 566	1 651	1 670

Source: KSH (2022): 4.1.1.7. Háziorvosok és házi gyermekorvosok

Indirectly (most of them are not direct monetary support, but tangible support): • associated duty exemption, • reduction of notary fees, • nursery development program, • grandparents GYED, • suspension/discharge of student loan debt, • adoption fee, • Workplace Protection Campaign, • supply of textbooks, • discount for first married couples, • Graduate GYED, • Meal discount, • nursery and kindergarten care; - indirectly (because they also include family members), the exemption from income tax for under-25s, the financing of the Drvinig-licence exam, the first language exam, etc. For more details, see: csalad.hu.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ <https://csalad.hu/tamogatasok>

7. Non-state family support

In addition to the state, there are other donors in the family support system. These include, in particular, municipalities, churches, charities and similar NGOs. They are also important contributors to a complex family policy.

Almost all of them have family support in their profile, and some even deal exclusively with it. Child rescue and support NGOs are at the forefront, accounting for half of the top 50 (21) and 6 out of the top 10. Those with a specific family support profile operate mainly in the form of foundations. The main areas where they can provide support in the context of **family support** are as follows:

- social, life skills and mental health counselling,
- organising access to cash benefits, benefits in kind and social services for people in financial difficulty,
- social support work, such as helping to resolve dysfunctions and conflicts in the family,
- the organisation of community development programmes and individual and group skills development,
- providing counselling to the long-term unemployed, the young unemployed, people with debt burdens and housing problems, people with disabilities, the chronically ill, addicts, psychiatric patients, people with drug problems and other socially vulnerable people and their families,
- crisis management and services to help families in difficult circumstances,
- a child protection referral system on-call service,
- case management tasks to ensure the follow-up of supported housing users following the conversion of large institutions.

Local authorities' family policies are primarily constrained by their budgets. During the Covid period, the state significantly reduced local taxes, thus reducing their revenues. Municipal poverty has zeroed out such programmes in many places, especially in small villages far from large cities. It has also become more modest than the wealthier, but, e.g. a free bus pass, back-to-school subsidy, Christmas gift, etc., is very much in the interests of families with children. Hopefully, with the pandemic and the war in Ukraine

over, there will be more consolidated local government and as the budget strengthens, local family support may increase. This is necessary because an office that is more familiar with local conditions can provide more effective and targeted assistance than its central counterpart. We propose to set up a state fund where local authorities would receive money on a means-tested basis, which they would distribute.

By the 20th century, the role of the **churches** in family policy had diminished considerably. The reasons for this are well known (the abolition of the former tithe, the confiscation of church property, secularisation, etc.), and it is not the subject of this article to analyse them. However, family policy remains at the forefront of the historical churches.

It is a new development that in December 2021, 14 churches formulated a joint statement entitled **Joint Declaration of the Hungarian Churches in Defence of Marriage, Family and Human Dignity**¹²⁸, which expresses a unified view on the value of families and the role of men and women, something that had not been done before. The short text of the statement¹²⁹ only mentions the traditional interpretation, so LGBTQ organisations have been quick to attack it. In its Charter of the Rights of the Family, the Catholic Church¹³⁰ states that "Spouses have the inalienable right to found a family and to decide on the timing of births and the number of children to be born, with full respect for their obligations to each other, to their children already born, to the family and society. In their decision, they must be guided by the right values, an objective moral order which excludes recourse to contraception, sterilisation and abortion."¹³¹ He also stresses the need for a family policy: "All governments at territorial, national, regional or urban level must have a family policy that enables families to assume their responsibilities in today's society freely and the succession of generations. These family

¹²⁸ <https://reformatus.hu/egyhazunk/hirek/magyarorszagi-egyhazak-kozos-nyilatkozata-a-hazassag-a-csalad-es-az-emberi-meltosag-vedelmeben/>

¹²⁹ "The biblical position was also stressed by Pope Francis during his visit to Budapest, when he reaffirmed that the sanctity of marriage is between one man and one woman. In the Jewish tradition, too, the sanctification of the male-female relationship through marriage is the foundation of human dignity. We, the undersigned representatives of the Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches and Jewish communities, in the run-up to Christmas and in the light of the Hanukkah candles, and in response to the growing social debate in recent times, hereby reaffirm the importance of the Jewish and Christian values of marriage, family and human dignity."

¹³⁰ The largest church in Hungary, with about 70% of the faithful people

¹³¹ <https://katolikus.hu/dokumentumtar/demografiai-fejlodesfolyamatok-etikai-es-pasztoralis-szempontok>

policies must use various instruments to regulate work, tailor tax policy, access to housing, access to education, etc."¹³² In addition to the ideological approach, the Church's family policy should also be based on financial resources. However, today's society – not only in Hungary – delegates this type of family policy primarily to the state, even though some of it has centuries of experience and its current activities (marriage education, family life education) are relatively successful. There are many examples in the EU where the state is giving more space (and funding) to churches in this respect.

Charitable civil society organisations operate mainly in the form of **foundations**. Most of them were established after the regime change. The great upheavals of Hungarian history in the twentieth century did not favour their long existence, although there are a few with a century-old history (for example, the Red Cross, where the basic profile is the care of wounded soldiers and prisoners of war, but in the 20th century, due to the great demand, this was supplemented by family support, family reunification, etc.) They are in great demand. Some of the better-known of these are specifically family support organisations (main profile in brackets):

- SOS Krízis Alapítvány – SOS Crisis Foundation (temporary home for families),
- Jaszlice Családsegítő Közhazsnú Alapítvány – Jaszlice Family Support Foundation (family day care),
- Kavics Alapítvány – Kavics Foundation (for rural families),
- Otthon Segítünk Alapítvány – Help at Home Foundation (for families with young children),
- Csillagfény Családsegítő Alapítvány – Starlight Family Foundation (health),
- Családsegítő Alapítvány – Family Assistance Foundation, Mór (local, segregation reversal),
- Ajándék Alapítvány – Gift Foundation (childcare, daycare),
- 2=1 Családsegítő és Házasszmisszió – 2=1 Family Support and Marriage Mission (family support for social and mental health problems),
- Örömhírmondók Alapítvány – Joyful News Foundation (disadvantaged families),

¹³² <https://katolikus.hu/dokumentumtar/demografiai-fejlodesfolyamatok-etikai-es-pasztoralis-szemponatok>

- KézenFogva Alapítvány – Hands on Foundation (family crisis relief),
- Hálózat Alapítvány – Network Foundation (families in arrears)
- Jaffe Zsidó Családsegítő Szolgálat – Jaffe Jewish Family Service (supports around 150 families)
- Veszprémi Családsegítő Intézmény – Veszprém Family Assistance Institution (child welfare, play house, temporary home)
- KERT Alapítvány – KERT Foundation (special care for disabled children and children with disabilities living in families), etc.

They are clearly needed. It is good to see more and more of these private foundations etc. being set up. Because of their diversity and small proportion, they are not covered in this paper, although they are an almost indispensable help for some of those concerned, especially families in difficulty. They are fast to respond to cases and find marginalised people. Our proposal in this area is that there should be closer links between the state and these types of organisations, the primary reason being that many of them can intervene professionally, more effectively and quickly than the state. The advantage of working together is that more or better help can be provided for the same amount of money, and families in need can benefit.

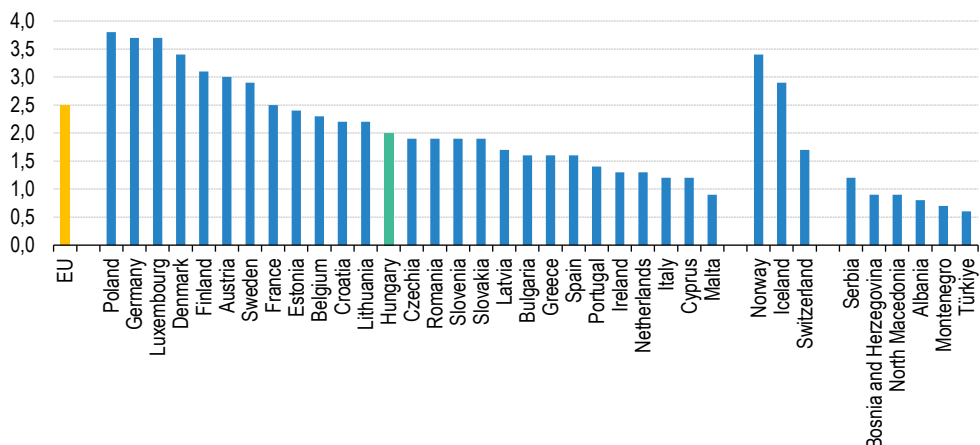
IV. Summary

Population decline is a problem both in the European Union and in Hungary. Growth from within, i.e., from the indigenous population, is impossible even in the medium term since the low number of women of childbearing age does not in itself make it possible to halt the process. The best that can be done is to slow down and gradually improve the situation to achieve the desired minimum of 2.1 children per two adults. The EU Member States are united in their desire to achieve this goal. But they differ in the means used.

The number and size of families is decreasing. Government support is available in all EU countries, but there is no real effectiveness anywhere. There are improving trends, including in Hungary, but not enough.

All EU countries have family policies. Member States take different measures to help children come into the world and thrive. The picture is varied: some give support to parents, some to children, some give money, some give services, some give benefits, most of them mixed. According to government communications, Hungary will spend 6.2% of GDP on family support in 2022, more than any other European country (although Eurostat and the OECD have calculated different figures).

Family/child support expenditure, 2020 (% GDP)



Source: Eurostat (2021): https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Social_protection_statistics_-_family_and_children_benefits

In the background, the EU is also helping through its policies, although the underlying issue is not Brussels' competence. There is much to be gained from specialised civil and ecclesial initiatives, especially when the state joins forces with them. Despite all this, or rather in spite of it, but in the nature of things, we conclude that population growth cannot be expected in the near future without migration, but this does not rule out strengthening the family's position or keeping borders closed.

Childcare has become a key policy tool in the response of supranational organizations like the EU and the OECD. Initially designed to support maternal employment, its focus has shifted in recent years to recognize its importance in fostering children's current and future capabilities as both citizens and workers. In the context of social investment, childcare is now viewed as a effective policy instrument within knowledge-based societies, where the challenge lies in enhancing productivity. However, critics argue that this shift in perspective has led to a neglect of the individual child and the specificities of national contexts, resulting in the instrumentalization of childcare and its outcomes.

In affluent nations, child benefits are widely recognized as crucial for redistributing resources to support families with children. Despite international acknowledgment of their effectiveness in alleviating child poverty, many middle- and low-income countries have yet to implement child benefit programs. Even among wealthy nations, the level of child benefits varies significantly. These benefits not only reduce child poverty but also empower mothers with purchasing ability and provide a degree of financial security during periods without earnings. They can lower wage demands, supplement low wages, enhance work incentives, and influence fertility rates. Evidence from middle-income countries suggests that child benefits can positively impact health, education, gender relations, and overall economic development. Given these advantages, they are considered both affordable and essential. The most straightforward child benefit schemes are universal and require minimal infrastructure to establish. Despite global economic growth in many developing countries, child mortality remains a significant issue, surpassing the casualties of any war in human history. Widespread stunting and malnutrition persist, largely due to the inadequate transfer of resources from economic growth to families with children. Recognizing that children's future is intertwined with society's future, child benefits are seen as a critical contributor to shaping a positive future for both.

External pressure is high. The liberal world believes that the key to the solution lies in importing migrants. An excellent antidote to this would be to increase our own population, the simple physical obstacle to which is the shortage of women of childbearing age, compounded by the fact that European societies have increasingly neglected family and childcare in recent decades. Another element of external pressure is the emergence of initiatives as an alternative to the family, which are opposed to the traditional model and gaining official recognition in many countries. Cultural change in the population can be an important explanatory factor for change in welfare state policies. However, cultural change does not per se create policy change, the lack of which can, for example, be caused by ambiguity in the cultural change itself, as in the example of Swiss family policies.

The big challenge for the future is to solve these problems and to create a successful family support system. The importance of the family is unquestionable, and family policy is necessary for all nations. Society cannot develop without children. The love, appreciation and support of families are fundamental elements of a civilised world. It is primarily the respective government's responsibility, duty and task to develop an appropriate system. Its failures are early, its results later, often a generation late.

The family is the primary guardian of the nation's future

– we need a good family policy.

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