

Parental Leave and Child Allowances: Attitudes, Preferences and Possible Impact*

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The paper addresses two family policy measures: parental leave and child benefit. It attempts to find out: 1) how people evaluate the existing measures, 2) which are the preferred alternative forms of these two measures (the length and mode of use of the parental leave, and dependence of child benefit rates on the family income, age of the child and the number of children), 3) how high the improvements of these two measures rate among the desired family policy measures, and 4) what possible impact these improvements may have on deciding to have (more) children. Empirical analysis is based on the International Population Policy Acceptance Survey database that covers 14 European countries. Multivariate analysis is used to explain the individual countries' results and some of the intercountry variation. It was found out that people tend to estimate a relatively high impact of the introduction of desirable family policy measures on their probable decision to have a(nother) child. The combination of improved parental leave arrangements and a substantial rise in child allowance proved to have a lower fertility impact than other combinations of family policy measures considered in the survey.

Key words: parental leave, child allowance, preferences, fertility impact.

INTRODUCTION

Family policy is aimed at neutralising, or at least lessening, the negative impact of psychological, social and economic constraints for forming families and having the desired/greater number of children. Financial and other family policy measures reconcile the objectives of strengthening families, offering equal opportunities to men

and women, and increasing the well-being of individuals and families. It is believed that family policy measures also have an indirect impact on fertility. According to Laroque and Salanié (2004:424), "it is natural for economists to presume the existence of a link between family transfers and fertility". This is in line with the economic theory of fertility (Willis, 1973; Becker,

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1981; Cigno, 1991), which associates the demand for children with the cost of children for their families. Any public transfer, be it in the form of cash benefit, price subsidy or lowering the opportunity cost of childbearing and childrearing, decreases the cost of children for their families and thus may positively influence fertility.

This paper addresses two important and widespread family policy measures: parental leave and child allowance. The aim of the paper was to find out:

- 1) Which are the preferred alternative forms of these two measures (the length and mode of use of the parental leave, and dependence of child allowance rates on the family income, age of child, and the number of children);
- 2) How much were the respondents in favour of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantially higher child allowance, and what are the differences among European countries;
- 3) What possible impact the improvements in these two measures may have on deciding to have (more) children.

In the next Section, a short overview of the previous research on the impact of family policy measures – parental leave and child allowance in particular – is given. A short description of parental leave and child allowance arrangements at the time of the national surveys follows in Section 3. In Section 4 the data, model and methods are presented and explained. The results are presented in Section 5. Preferred family policy measure arrangements are compared with the current ones; attitudes towards the two selected measures are analysed; priority family policy measures to be introduced by the government are identified; and finally,

possible impact of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a higher child allowance (if introduced) on the fertility behaviour is evaluated. The conclusions are in Section 6.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF FAMILY POLICY MEASURES ON FERTILITY

As it is challenging and complex to formulate non-overt policy measures with possible fertility impact, it is also extremely complicated to measure the impact of such policies – and in particular the impact of an individual measure – on the fertility behaviour.¹ One can never be sure about the size and direction of influence of other circumstances and about what the fertility rate would have been in the absence of such measures. Policy interventions may just strengthen a trend that was nevertheless under way (Andersson, 2004). It also holds that the impact of new or improved family policy measures has never been felt in the longer term (Neyer, 2003), not even in countries where abortion has been prohibited. Usually, the impact of family- and population policy measures was the greatest at their beginning, and it was gradually decreasing as benefits ceased to be new, or their value decreased (Klinger, 1987; Philipov, 1991). The problem is that positive short-term effects have been followed by a decline in births, indicating that these measures have mostly induced fluctuations in births (because of the change in timing) and not so much the births, which otherwise would not occur. However, taking into account the possibility that postponed births might never have occurred, we can nevertheless speak about positive effects of measures introduced (Pavlik, 1991).

¹ An overview of research on the relationship between family policy and fertility is given in Neyer (2003), Laroque and Salanié (2004) and Gauthier (2005).

The researchers have very different views of the importance of public policies for the fertility behaviour. Fagnani (2002) opposes the general understanding that without appropriate support from society, women are obliged to choose between maternity and employment (at least that on a full-time basis). She argues that such approach is “too determinative and overestimates the role of state policies *per se*”, and points to the influence of “a complex set of interactions between cultural norms with respect to child care outside home, attitudes towards working mothers and family policies” (Fagnani, 2002:105). According to Rønsen (2004b), generous family policies may be necessary, but not sufficient to sustain fertility at a reasonable level. Falling fertility rates in Sweden in the mid-1990s indicate that adverse macroeconomic conditions and rising unemployment have counteracting effects. Kamarás et al. (1998:244) stress that policy experiences in different countries often reflect different historical, cultural and religious traditions; therefore measures successfully implemented in one country need not have the same result in other countries. Gauthier (2005) also points to the fact that the link between policies and fertility is a complex one and that one should also take account of female employment, the economic context and social norms regarding gender equality. Other social processes - such as various changes in the status of women, postponement or refusal of marriage, liberalisation of laws in view of contraception, abortion and divorce, etc. - have a decisive effect on fertility, too. A negative impact on fertility might originate from economic recession, falling standard of living, unemployment, social and political changes, etc., all experienced by former communist countries during the transition years (Stropnik, 1996). The effect of economic variables on fertility is difficult to isolate from the effect of demographic variables (Laroque and Salanié, 2004).

There is some evidence, however, of effective policy measures in France, Austria, Scandinavian countries, Hungary, Poland, the former German Democratic Republic, etc. Klinger (1987:420) quotes Calot, who has estimated that in the absence of pronatalist policies, the completed fertility rate in France in the second half of the 20th century would have been reduced by 0.2-0.3 children per woman. Of course, not all the increase in the fertility rate can be attributed to the family policy, but it is true that the fertility rate remained at a satisfactory level until the middle of the 1970s.

Oláh and Fratzczak’s (2004) results for Hungary indicate that women’s employment does not necessarily reduce the propensity to become a mother if the combination of labour-force participation and family life has been facilitated by policy measures. In Poland, however, where state support was somewhat less generous, part-time workers and housewives had substantially higher first-birth intensity than full-time employed women. Even so, indication was found that as policy measures increasingly improved the conditions to combine employment and family responsibilities, the propensity to have the first child increased.

The role of parental leave/allowances and child allowances as fertility incentives has not yet been consistently proven by research. There seems to be some effect on childbearing behaviour, but the measurable effects are small and not always significant (Neyer, 2003, Appendix:3). Gauthier and Hatzius (1997) found only a limited effect on fertility of the governmental support to families: as high as a 25% increase in average benefits (child allowance and maternity/parental paid leave) in 22 industrialised countries would result in a short-run increase of 0.01 children per woman and a long-run increase of 0.07 children per woman. Child allowances are positively and significantly related to fertility – in particular to the birth of the first child - while

the impact of the duration of maternity/parental leave and the wage replacement rate proved to be insignificant. No evidence was found that child allowance affects fertility in the Anglo-Saxon countries, but the effect was large and consistent in the Scandinavian countries, with continental and southern European countries in between. Just three years before, Blanchet and Ekert-Jaffé (1994) came to a conclusion that – if child allowances available at that time in France were introduced in Britain – the same increase in the number of children per woman would occur.

The results of some studies are of limited reliability for methodological reasons. For instance, Büttner and Lutz (1990) argue that a remarkable increase in the period fertility level in the former German Democratic Republic may be directly related to the explicitly pronatalist maternity policy package introduced in 1976,² but this study was based on a descriptive and intuitive approach where other fertility determinants were not checked for (Gauthier and Hatzius, 1997). In their study of a possible link between more generous child care benefits (formerly available to parents with three and more children and then extended to parents with two children) and the increase in births in France since 1995, Laroque and Salanié (2004) found out that fertility responded to this financial incentive in a non-negligible way, and that it may account for one-half to three-quarters of the recent rise

in the French birth rate. However, this was not in line with their finding that economic variables contributed little to explaining the fertility. In addition, impact was identified for first birth in particular, and was zero for births of rank 3 and more, which was in contradiction with the measure whose impact was analysed.

Research has also resulted in different conclusions regarding the influence of family policy in the same country. Sweden is an interesting case. The end of the period 1984-1990 was characterised by a continuously increasing fertility in this country, up to the level of 2.13. Hoem (1990) believed that it was a reward for the expansion in public day-care, child allowances, parental leave provisions, parents' rights to part-time work and similar measures,³ while Rønsen (2004a) argued that Swedish studies based on the individual data did not render much support for the notion that family policies have stimulated fertility. She quotes studies, which have examined the effects of the extension of parental leave and supply of public day-care and have found no significant effects on the births in Sweden and Norway. Her own previous analysis for Sweden, Norway and Finland indicated that maternity/parental leave extensions may have had some positive effect on fertility, child allowances had none, while the effect of public childcare coverage was estimated to be negative and significant (Rønsen, 1999).⁴ In her later study (Rønsen, 2004a),

² In addition, the relative stability of order-specific mean ages at maternity indicates that the impact was not in the form of short-term anticipations of births that would be compensated by lower rates of childbearing in future. The total fertility rate was increasing in a six-year period following the implementation of measures, and despite a later decrease remained at the level of 1.7 until 1988, when the transition process began (Gauthier and Hatzius, 1997).

³ At that time, Sweden was an example country among the developed countries due to its facilitating of women's entry into the labour market and their continued attachment to it at minimum cost to childbearing and childrearing.

⁴ The last finding is somewhat puzzling, but may be explained by the fact that more public childcare facilities are needed when the activity rate of women is higher, and higher female labour force attachment used to be negatively related to fertility in the Nordic countries. Today, there is no longer a negative relationship between fertility and female employment in these countries.

she found a positive significant impact of the length of maternity/parental leave for third conception in Finland and for second one in Norway. The effect is more significant for Finland that had more extensions during the analysis period. Contrary to that, the author found out that in Norway the influence of child allowance was not significant and had no impact on the risk of conception.

Three years after his quoted study, Hoem's (2000) research showed that childbearing among childless women in Sweden had been affected by both public policies and economic fluctuations. Changes in Swedish social policies had induced a shorter spacing of births, which had caused second and third births to occur at a quickened pace (but it did not affect first births). Andersson (2004) also demonstrated the change in birth-spacing practice that occurred in Sweden following the introduction and extension of a "speed premium" (in the 1980s) on childbearing in the parental leave arrangement. Higher second-birth risks only applied to childbearing before the first child turned 3, and it is where childbearing propensities peaked in 1995. Oláh (1997) has found out that Swedish women on parental leave have speeded up their second birth, while other categories of women have not. The author's analysis has identified an increase in second-birth risk in periods of advantageous policies and stimulating reforms in Sweden and Hungary. A positive impact of Swedish policy measures facilitating the combination of paid leave and family responsibilities was also shown in Andersson (2004) and Corman (2000).

In the literature there is also evidence of a chain effect that turned the direction of impact around. In early 1990, the change in the Austrian parental-leave policy, which favoured women who had their second or subsequent child shortly after the previous one, increased the tempo of childbearing

(Hoem et al., 2001). The consequent unexpected large rise in public expenditure caused a cut in child allowances in the mid 1990s. According to the authors, this is likely to have contributed to the further reduction in Austrian fertility in subsequent years.

Some studies are based on the self-reported fertility intentions. Kocourková (2001) estimated the impact of introduction of desirable family policy measures on fertility behaviour for the Czech Republic, using the Family and Fertility Survey data. She concluded that the chances for a fundamental change in fertility intentions significantly increase only in case of the introduction of a special allowance for parents taking care of children instead of working outside the home, or measures facilitating a greater compatibility of professional and parental duties (Kocourková, 2001:47). Kamarás et al. (1998) based their study of the impact of policies on family size preferences and stimulating unplanned births on the Population Policy Attitudes and Acceptance Surveys conducted in the early 1990s. Measures providing financial support proved to have the highest fertility impact in most countries included in the survey, followed by measures aiming at better working arrangements. Engelhardt (2004) used the same kind of data, namely the 2001 Austrian Population Policy Acceptance Study data (they make part of the IPPAS database, at which this paper is based), to examine the causal effects of family policy incentives and constraints on fertility intentions and preferences. Her results show that a considerable increase in child allowances could contribute to an increase in fertility aspirations at all parities but parity 1. On the other hand, improved parental leave has significant impact only at parity 1. The most astonishing result is that Austrian women do not show the expected response on financial constraints, meaning that the Austrian government cannot reach

its goal of increased fertility through current generous financial incentives.

Based on the past experiences and research findings, our assumption is that family policy measures very seldom have important and measurable demographic effects, and if they do, then it is for very short periods only. Our hypothesis is that people rather easily declare that there might be or would be a positive impact of the implementation of new or changed family policy measures on their decision-making regarding having a child or having more children, but when it comes to making a decision, the impact of other circumstances often prevails. One of the reasons for this discrepancy is the fact that survey questionnaires cannot take into account all the factors that influence one's decision to have a child and the modalities of these factors. Also, since there are no consequences of giving this or that answer, respondents tend to give answers that they think are expected.

CURRENT FAMILY POLICY MEASURE ARRANGEMENTS

Information on family policy arrangements at the time of national surveys (henceforth: current family policy arrangements) is essential for the interpretation and understanding of the respondents' preferences. In line with the scope of the paper,

only parental leave and child allowance are described below.

Parental Leave

The term "parental leave" includes all forms of leave of absence from employment that are a continuation of the maternity leave. Its main purpose is to provide opportunity to employed parents to take care of their children in the first months (and years), with job security and (possibly) wage compensation or a lump sum that lowers the opportunity costs of their temporary absence from work. Parental leave is one of the crucial instruments for successful reconciliation of work and family life. In some countries, all residents are entitled to parental leave and allowance. The latter is financed from the state budget and is aimed at creating more favourable economic conditions for families raising children at home, also because such families do not profit from subsidized childcare arrangements.

Parental leave arrangements at the time of national surveys are presented in Table 1. Only paid leave is taken into account, since unpaid leave is not affordable for most families. In about a half of the observed countries there is a possibility of a part-time parental leave. In two countries the leave may be taken until the child's age of eight.

Table 1:
Parental leave at the time of the national surveys (2000-2003)

Country	Parental leave at the time of the survey		
	Duration ¹⁾	Possibility of part-time leave (after maternity leave)	Flexibility
Belgium (Flanders)	Up to age 0.5	Up to age 0.8; or 1/5 reduction of working time up to age 1.5	
The Czech Republic	Up to age 3		
Germany	Up to age 2 ²⁾	Yes	3 rd year till age 8, Upon approval by employer
Estonia	Up to age 3		
Italy	Up to age 1.2		Till age 8
Cyprus	Up to age 0.3 ³⁾		
Lithuania	Up to age 3		May be taken in parts; entitled persons may take it alternately
Hungary	Up to age 3	Age 1.5-3	
The Netherlands ⁴⁾	Up to age 0.2		
Austria	Up to age 2	Up to age 4	
Poland	Up to age 2.5		
Romania	Up to age 2		
Slovenia	Up to age 1	Up to age 1.7	
Finland	Up to age 3	Up to school age ⁵⁾	

Notes:

1) All paid leave (maternity leave after birth of the child, parental leave and paternity leave) with job security, if taken continuously. Special arrangements for certain groups are not taken into consideration. Duration is expressed in terms of the child's age.

2) In five out of sixteen federal countries paid until age 2.5-3.

3) At the time of the survey there was only maternity leave in Cyprus (parental leave was introduced in 2003).

4) Only maternity leave is paid in the Netherlands. Parental leave is paid in the public sector and very rarely in the private sector.

5) Till the end of the year in which the child starts attending school.

Sources: DIALOG project, WP4 country reports (internal material); European Commission (2001).

Child Allowance

Child allowance (child benefit, family allowance) is a public transfer paid for children and aimed at alleviating a sharp decrease in the family living standard following the birth of a child (since the same or lower income is distributed among more persons). In most countries, child allowances were paid irrespective of economic position of the family, meaning that the stress is on horizontal redistribution (that

is, on equity among families with similar income, but different needs arising from the number of family members). In four out of fourteen observed countries, however, child allowances are income tested, which means a vertical redistribution of income. Allowances may also differ according to the age of child, but in the observed countries their amount is mostly independent of age. Child allowance may have a demographic objective, too; this is evident from higher

allowances for children of higher birth orders, although the marginal costs of children are usually lower for each subsequent

child. Child allowance arrangements at the time of national surveys are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:
Child allowance arrangements at the time of national surveys¹⁾

Country	According to family income		According to the age of children		According to the number of children	
	Dependent on income	Independent of income	Higher for older children	Independent of age	The same for each child	Increases with the number of children
Belgium (Flanders) ²⁾		X	X			X
The Czech Republic	Income ceiling: 3 times the living minimum		X		X	
Germany		X		X		The same for the first 3 children, and for 4 th and subsequent child
Estonia		X		X		For the 2 nd and subsequent child twice the amount for the 1 st child
Italy ²⁾	Income ceiling in absolute amount			X		X
Cyprus		X		X		For all children in families with 4 and more children
Hungary		X		X		X
The Netherlands		X	X		X	
Austria		X	X			X
Poland	Income ceiling: 50% average wage per family member			X		X
Romania		X		X	X	
Slovenia	Income ceiling: average wage per family member			X		X
Finland		X		X		X

Notes:

1) Different arrangement for specific groups are not taken into account

2) Eligibility limited to persons covered by social insurance.

Sources: DIALOG project, WP4 country reports (internal material); European Commission (2001).

DATA, MODELS AND METHODS

Data

The analysis is based on the International Population Policy Acceptance Study (IPPAS) database that covers 14 European countries and includes 35,377 respondents. These countries are: Belgium (Flanders), the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Italy, Cyprus, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Finland. National surveys were conducted between 2000 and 2003. There was a section on family policy measures in the questionnaire where people's attitudes and preferences towards family policy measures were captured. Improved parental leave arrangements for working women who are having a baby⁵ and a substantial rise⁶ in child allowance, that are in focus of our analysis, were two of thirteen listed family policy measures.⁷ Other measures included: lower income tax for people with dependent children, income dependent allowances for families with children, better day-care facilities for pre-school and school children, birth allowance, childcare allowance for non-employed parents, flexible working hours and opportunities for part-time employment, a substantial decrease in the costs of education, and better housing for families with children.

Considering the fact that the final topic to be investigated was a possible impact of family policy measures on fertility behaviour, a sub-sample of respondents aged

20-49 years was formed comprising 23,345 persons. The lower limit was imposed by the lowest age of respondents in one of the countries, while the upper limit is close to the biological one for women to consider further pregnancies.

Since not all questions were included in all national questionnaires, the number of countries and observations varies across analyses performed. Due to considerable within-country variation, Eastern and Western Germany were treated as two separate units.

Method

Respondents were asked to select three measures (two in Austria and Belgium (Flanders)) that they would most like to see implemented by the government.⁸ They further evaluated the consequences for their personal life if the measures they considered desirable were implemented. Four statements were offered with which the respondents agreed or disagreed:

- a. It would make it easier for me to have the number of children I intend to have
- b. It would enable me to have my next child sooner
- c. I would reconsider the possibility of having a(nother) child
- d. I would probably decide to have a(nother) child.

Our analysis is limited to those respondents who agreed with the most serious state-

⁵ This measure was not included into the Italian questionnaire. In Belgium (Flanders) and Germany the question was limited to maternity leave. In Lithuania, the question specified duration of parental leave until the child's age of one. In Finland, the question was about raising parental allowance from 65% to 80% of the former wage.

⁶ "Substantial" was quantified as 7% of the monthly GDP per head. The amount of an increase was not specified in Estonia and Lithuania.

⁷ The measures and their number were different in some countries.

⁸ Also in some other countries the respondents did not always select three measures. For instance, In Estonia and both parts of Germany only 53%-62% of all respondents did so. This was very unfortunate for our analysis because it decreased the possibility to have the two measures, which we focus on, selected.

ment as regards their future fertility behaviour: the one that probably means more births (d). Other positive statements are much less binding. In Model 2, our focus group is further reduced due to the condition that the respondent selected among the family policy measures that he/she considered desirable both improved parental leave arrangements⁹ for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance. Having included persons who had selected both measures of our interest, we minimised the impact of any third measure selected that we are not focusing on in this analysis.

One of the methods to estimate the correlation between our dependent variables and explanatory variables is logistic regression. We applied the binary logistic regression method to the model described above in order to estimate:

1. The probable fertility impact of the two selected measures (mostly accompanied by one more that varied across answers) as compared to all other combinations of (up to three) measures, if implemented by the governments, and
2. The characteristics that determine the lower or higher propensity of the respondents who selected the two measures of our interest for probably deciding to have a(nother) child if the desirable family policy measures were implemented.

The dependent variable is the respondents' answer to the question if they would probably decide to have a(nother) child in the case that the government's introduces three (or two) family policy measures they considered most desirable. In all countries

except Cyprus¹⁰ the answer to this question was dichotomous ("yes" or "no") which enabled us to use binary logistic regression. All variables were entered at the same time using the 'Enter' method. The results are presented in terms of odds (ratio between the likelihood that particular outcome will occur and the likelihood that it will not). Since all independent variables are categorical, the results can only be interpreted within categories. Values smaller than 1.00 indicate that the likelihood of occurrence is smaller for this particular category than for the reference category (everything else being controlled for).

RESULTS

Preferred arrangements¹¹

Preferred type of parental leave

Only in four countries the respondents were asked about their most preferred type of parental leave. Current regulation was specified in the question, so we can assume that all respondents were properly informed about the duration of parental leave when evaluating it. The alternative answers were adapted to current regulation and prevailing patterns of combining work with care for small children in individual countries, so they had to be standardised at a more general level in order to allow for a comparative analysis.

In Table 3, only preferences by the respondents aged 20-49 who were in favour of one of the offered types of parental leave are presented. The existent full-time leave is most preferred in Poland and Slovenia.¹²

⁹ Improved parental leave means longer duration, higher parental allowance, and/or higher flexibility of taking the leave.

¹⁰ In the Cypriot questionnaire there was also the answer "no opinion". We excluded these cases from our analysis.

¹¹ Determinants of public opinion towards parental leave and child allowances, as captured by the first round of the Population-related Policy Attitudes and Acceptance Survey, were studied by Gauthier (1998).

¹² Half-time leave and flexible leave are most preferred in the Netherlands where they are available (but paid only in the public sector and very rarely in the private sector) in the child's age of 0.2-0.7 years.

A quarter of the Polish respondents would prefer flexible leave, which is not available in this country. We believe that the preferences of the Slovenian respondents reflect poor availability of part-time and flexible jobs, but may also be under strong influence

of the facts that: 1) full wage compensation is paid throughout the one-year long maternity and parental leave, and 2) good quality child care is widely available and highly subsidized. In Romania, only full-time leave is possible, but also least preferred.

Table 3:

Most preferred type of parental leave; respondents aged 20-49 who were in favour of parental leave (%)

Country	Most preferred type of parental leave			
	Full-time leave	Half-time leave	Flexible leave	Total
The Netherlands	17	50	33	100
Poland	57	19	24	100
Romania	5	24	71	100
Slovenia	82	12	7	100

Source: IPPAS database; own calculations.

Preferred child allowance arrangement

Child allowance is dependent on family income in the Czech Republic, Italy and Slovenia, and the highest share of respondents in all three countries chose such arrangement. The same was preferred by the highest shares of respondents in Germany, Cyprus and Finland, where they have child allowance independent of income. In Hungary, these two arrangements enjoyed the same support. Respondents in Belgium (Flanders), Estonia, the Netherlands and Romania were mostly happy with an existent arrangement, which is child allowance independent of income.

Surprisingly, the majority of respondents in all countries prefer the arrangement of child allowance according to the age of children, which they already have. Respondents from countries with the same child allowances for all children, regardless of birth order, highly prefer this option. This is also true for the majority of respondents from other countries except Hungary, where the existent child allowances, which

are increasing with the number of children, are preferred.

Attitudes and highest preferences

The proportions of respondents who were strongly in favour or in favour of individual family policy measures (13 altogether) were generally over 60%. The exception was support to some measures in the Netherlands, Finland and Estonia. In Romania, Slovenia and Italy, the support was over 80% to all listed family policy measures. The highest support was registered in Romania to lower income tax for people with dependent children (98%).

As shown in Table 4, very high proportions of the respondents were also (strongly) in favour of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance. The lowest support to improved (maternity) leave was found in Belgium (Flanders), which is very much surprising considering the fact that both maternity and parental leave in this country are the shortest among the European countries included in the analy-

sis. Maternity allowance is also far from full wage compensation, except for civil servants. The Netherlands is also an interesting case with 29% of respondents not in favour of improved parental leave arrangements for working women, although the paid leave is very short (up to the age of 0.2 years), and can be prolonged until the age of 0.7 years only if accompanied by part-time employment (the leave is paid only in the public sector and very rarely in the private sector). The highest support to improved parental leave was registered in Romania (duration up to age 2 with 85% wage compensation), Slovenia (duration

up to age 1 with 100% wage compensation) and Lithuania (duration up to age 1, 60% wage compensation). Obviously, the measure was not sufficiently defined, so it is very probable that the respondents had different characteristics of parental leave in mind when expressing their support to the improvement of parental leave arrangements. Some respondents (or respondents in some countries) may have perceived it primarily as a reconciliation measure with the emphasis on its duration, while others may have understood improvement as a higher amount of parental allowance.

Table 4:
Attitudes towards implementation of two family policy measures; respondents aged 20-49 (%)

Country	Family policy measure to be implemented by the government					
	Improved parental leave arrangements for working women			A substantial rise in child allowance		
	(Strongly) in favour	Neither in favour, nor against	(Strongly) against	(Strongly) in favour	Neither in favour, nor against	(Strongly) against
Belgium (Flanders)	62	29	9	69	21	9
The Czech Republic	87	12	1	85	11	4
Eastern Germany	85	14	1	85	10	5
Western Germany	83	14	3	76	14	10
Estonia	91	7	2	95	4	1
Italy	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	89	n.a.	11
Cyprus	94	6	1	87	11	3
Lithuania	95	5	0	80	15	5
Hungary	88	9	3	92	6	2
The Netherlands	71	16	13	60	24	16
Austria	87	10	3	71	20	10
Poland	91	8	1	68	18	14
Romania	98	0	2	97	n.a.	3
Slovenia	97	0	3	94	n.a.	6
Finland	76	21	2	68	25	8

Notes:

1. Rows may not sum to 100 due to rounding.
 2. In Belgium (Flanders) the question was limited to paternity leave, and in Germany to maternity leave only.
- Source: IPPAS database; own calculations.

The highest proportion of the respondents who were (strongly) in favour of a substantial rise in child allowance was identified in Romania, Estonia and Slovenia. The level of child allowance has decreased dramatically in Romania during the transition years. In Slovenia, child allowance is income dependent and is very low for children in middle-income families, while it is quite high for children in low-income families, particularly those of higher birth orders.

The respondents were asked to select three family policy measures (two in Austria and Belgium (Flanders)), which they would most like to see implemented by the

government. Percentages of the respondents who selected improved parental leave arrangements for working women among their most desirable family policy measures, as well as country ranks according to these percentages are presented in Table 5; the same information is available for a substantial rise in child allowance. The first three choices were taken into account on an equal basis, i.e. without applying weights. Higher ranks indicate that the respondents in these countries perceived the proposed measure as very important. Lower ranks, however, do not necessarily mean that a certain measure is not very important; they may reflect satisfactory arrangements in those countries.

Table 5:

Percentages of respondents who selected improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance as most desirable measures (% of respondents aged 20-49, and country ranks)

	Improved parental leave arrangements for working women		A substantial rise in child allowance	
	% of respondents	Country rank	% of respondents	Country rank
Slovenia	42	1	31	10
Romania	36	2	45	4
Estonia	35	3	53	2
Cyprus	29	4	11	15
The Czech Republic	23	5	38	6
Austria	21	6	12	14
Poland	20	7	23	13
The Netherlands	20	8	36	7
Lithuania	18	9	32	9
Finland	15	10	34	8
Hungary	13	11	53	3
Western Germany	11	12	29	11
Eastern Germany	10	13	39	5
Belgium (Flanders)	6	14	24	12
Italy	n.a.	15	67	1

Note: The respondents selected up to three most desirable measures. In Austria and Belgium (Flanders) only two choices were allowed.

Source: IPPAS database; own calculations.

We can see that the percentages of respondents who very much desire an improvement in the parental leave arrangements for working women vary considerably among countries: from 6% in Belgium (Flanders) to 42% in Slovenia. Germany, Hungary and Finland already have very family-friendly arrangements in terms of the duration of the leave. The wage compensation rate is also relatively high in Hungary (70%) until the child's age of two; in Germany and Finland it is income dependent. However, in Germany the income limits for entitlement were increased substantially in 2001, just before the survey was conducted. In Slovenia, improvement could only mean a prolongation of a one-year parental leave (due to full wage compensation), while in Estonia it most probably means an increase in parental allowance during a three-year long parental leave.

A substantial rise in child allowance is most desired in Italy; as many as 67% of the Italian respondents selected it. A great majority (89%) of this group of respondents also want to keep income dependent child allowance. In Estonia and Hungary, too, more than a half of the respondents desired a substantial rise in child allowance to be implemented by their governments. Child allowances in both countries are independent of income and age, but increasing with the number of children. The respondents obviously considered them too low compared to the costs of children.

Theoretical model

Based on the overview of the IPPAS data concerning fertility intentions, par-

ticularly those on the fertility impact of the introduction of the desirable family policy measures, we have decided not to quantify possible fertility impact – which was done by Kocourková (2001).¹³ Our intention was to identify the characteristics of respondents that determine their lower or higher propensity for probably deciding to have a(nother) child if their most preferred measures were implemented, as compared to the characteristics of the reference group. Then we focused on the group of respondents who selected two particular measures (improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance) as desirable. Our theoretical model builds on previous research on the topic, which used the Family and Fertility Survey and the Population Policy Attitudes and Acceptance Survey data (Kocourková, 2001; Gauthier, 1998; Kamarás et al., 1998).

Due to high importance of all family policy measures that were selected as most desirable, it is hard to predict the fertility impact of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance as compared to that of the implementation of all other combinations of desirable measures. Relative frequencies of these two measures among all desirable measures are not of much help since we do not know to what extent the respondents who selected these two measures would be stimulated to probably decide to have a(nother) child.¹⁴ Too many different factors influence fertility decision-making.

¹³ Using the 1997 Czech Family and Fertility Survey data, Kocourková (2001) modelled the effect of the implementation of a hypothetical measure separately for two groups of respondents depending on their previously declared intention to have another child. The probability that an unplanned child would be born to those who had declared not to intend to have another child was constructed based on the agreement with the statements "I would reconsider the possibility of having a(nother) child" and "I would probably decide to have a(nother) child". The probability that a planned child would be born to those who had declared an intention to have another child was constructed based on the agreement with the latter statement quoted above.

¹⁴ The frequency of a significant rise in child allowance is twice the average one for all listed family policy measures while that of improved parental leave is somewhat below the average.

Our model uses demographic, economic and some other explanatory variables. Standard demographic variables (covariates) related to life cycle include sex, age, and attained educational level of the respondent. Six five-year age groups are observed and three educational levels (primary and lower secondary; higher secondary; and post-secondary). Two demographic variables are related to family responsibilities: number of children (0, 1, 2, and 3 and over) and living arrangement (living with spouse/partner, living apart together, and no partner). A general intention to have a(nother) child in the future is included as well. Economic characteristics of respondents are brought into the model through the variable “employment status” (full time, part time, casual work, and no job). There is also a country dummy in the model, and a dummy variable for respondents who selected improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowances among three/two most desirable measures. We refer to this model as Model 1. In Model 2, the latter dummy variable does not appear since an additional condition was added, namely that desirable measures included both improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance.

While we expect the likelihood of deciding to have a(nother) child to decrease with the age of the respondent, we hesitate to predict the sign of the coefficient for the sex, attained education and employment status covariates. It is expected that the selected two measures may be more important for respondents up to the age of 40 than for older ones, because most births are realized till that age and the relative importance of child allowance is higher for families with

lower income (people usually have lower income in their young age).

A negative association between the number of children the respondent already has and the likelihood to decide to have a(nother) child after the implementation of the desirable family policy measures is expected. On the other hand, we assume that respondents living with partners will be more inclined to having a(nother) child than respondents without a partner or living apart together. We also assume that fertility response highly depends on the general intention to have a(nother) child in the future.

The availability of data was a decisive constraint for our theoretical model; ideally, additional variables would have been included. Some possibly relevant explanatory variables had to be omitted because they were not available for many countries (“satisfaction with the total household income”) and/or there were too many missing cases (“the age of the youngest child”). Including such variables would have meant losing too many observations.

Possible fertility impact

Taking into account all combinations of desirable family policy measures to be introduced by governments, from 30% of the respondents in Austria¹⁵ to 82% in Estonia declared that they would reconsider the possibility of a(nother) child if the measures they considered desirable were introduced. From 26% of the respondents in Austria¹⁶ to 76% in Estonia declared that they would probably decide to have a(nother) child. Since the percentages are quite high in many countries – not to mention the upper extremes – we argue that people tend to give an affirmative answer to hypothetical

¹⁵ The percentages are lower in Italy because only one kind of impact could be selected.

¹⁶ See note 15.

questions regarding their fertility intentions easily.¹⁷

The answer regarding intention to have a(nother) child in the future was given (also) taking into account family policy measures existent at the time of the survey. Accordingly, all positive answers to the statements regarding consequences of introduction of the desirable family policy measures were taken into account as the cases where there probably would be an impact in the form of unplanned births. However, one may argue that the negative answer to the question "Do you intend to have a(nother) child in the future?" (with the answer "don't know, uncertain" also being available) implies that no policy measure would make people change their minds. It is also true that some respondents previously stated some serious reasons as (very) important for their not wanting a(nother) child. Due to that, we checked for possible inconsistencies in answers.

The shares of those respondents who first declared not to intend to have a(nother) child in the future¹⁸ because they already had all the children they wanted, but later agreed with the statement that they would reconsider the possibility of a(nother) child as the consequences of the implementation of the family policy measures they considered desirable, is in the range from 19% in Austria to 75% in Estonia. High shares (over 30% in eight out of fourteen countries) also agreed with the most serious/obliging statement, i.e. that they would probably decide to have a(nother) child due to the implementation of the family policy measures they considered desirable. It was most surprising to find high percentages

even among those respondents who previously stated that they did not intend to have a(nother) child in the future due to serious impediments, such as: their state of health did not allow it, they/their partner was too old (both may be considered permanent objective impediments), their partner did not want a(nother) child (a relatively important but not permanent impediment), etc. We can also look at this issue from another angle. For instance, out of the Estonian respondents who would probably decide to have a(nother) child, 86% previously stated not to intend to have a(nother) child because they already had all the children they wanted, their state of health did not allow having a(nother) child to 96% respondents, they/their partner was too old in 74% of cases, and in 79% of cases the partner did not want a(nother) child. From all these examples, it is obvious that the respondents were very inconsistent in their answers; even more so, since their reasons for not wanting a(nother) child have nothing to do with the measures which - if introduced by the government - would stimulate them to change their fertility intentions.

Out of those respondents who would probably decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures were implemented by the government, from 8% in Belgium (Flanders) to 42% in Slovenia selected improved parental leave arrangements for working women as one of desirable measures to be implemented by the government (Table 6). From 7% in Austria up to 67% in Italy selected substantial rise in child allowance. On average, percentages are higher for the latter measure, but this is not enough to conclude that this measure

¹⁷ We additionally support this by the fact that in Estonia, 74% of the respondents (who had non-missing values for all four statements) agreed with all offered statements, 58% in Lithuania, and from 37% to 41% in Finland, Poland and Slovenia.

¹⁸ Here we included the respondents who gave negative answers to the question if they intended to have a(nother) child in the future, those who did not know the answer or were uncertain, and those who/whose partners were pregnant and did not state the number of additional child(ren) they may have intended to have.

would have a higher fertility impact than the former one. In most cases, each of these measures is accompanied by one or two other desirable measures that may be more important for the respondents.

It is much less probable that both improved parental leave arrangements for working women and substantial rise in child allowance were selected as the most preferred (desirable) family policy measures (see the last column of Table 6).¹⁹ The highest share of such cases among respondents who would probably decide to have a(nother) child was registered in Estonia (22%). From the results presented in Ta-

ble 6, it is evident that both of the observed measures are particularly important for the respondents in Romania and Slovenia as well. Estonia also has very high percentages of respondents who prefer each of the two measures (the implementation of improved parental leave and substantial rise in child allowance) among those who would probably decide to have a(nother) child. This is even more or similarly true for countries like the Czech Republic, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Finland and Poland; however, in these countries not both measures are of high importance for respondents, thus resulting in relatively small cross sections.

Table 6:
Selection of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance among desirable measures to be implemented by the government; respondents aged 20-49 (%)

Country	Respondents who included ... among desirable measures to be implemented by the government (% of all respondents who agreed that they would probably decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures were implemented by the government)		
	... improved parental leave arrangements for working women...	... a substantial rise in child allowance improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance ...
Belgium (Flanders)	8.	25	0
The Czech Republic	30	40	7
Eastern Germany	12	42	5
Western Germany	10	37	2
Estonia	40	56	22
Italy	n.a.	67	n.a.
Cyprus	32	13	3
Lithuania	22	33	3
Hungary	15	53	6
The Netherlands	19	42	4
Austria	29	7	1
Poland	25	25	3
Romania	33	44	11
Slovenia	42	33	9
Finland	17	46	4

Note: For some countries, the number of observations is relatively low, particularly in the last column where it is not higher than 10 for Belgium (Flanders), Western Germany, the Netherlands and Austria.

Source: IPPAS database; own calculations.

¹⁹ See note 15.

We can be quite confident that the probable decision to have a(n)other child would be a consequence of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and substantial rise in child allowance in all cases where both measures were selected as desirable.²⁰ It is evident from Table 7 that – out of those respondents for whom both observed measures are desirable – relatively very high shares in Estonia (85%),

Romania (80%), Lithuania (71%), Cyprus (68%) and Eastern Germany (61%) also agreed that they would probably decide to have a(n)other child. The shares are considerable in Finland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland, too. From this we can conclude that the improvement in these two measures may be a very important incentive for people in most observed countries to decide to have a(n)other child.

Table 7:

Probable decision to have a(n)other child as a consequence of implementation of desirable measures; respondents aged 20-49 (%)

Country	Respondents who agreed that they would probably decide to have a(n)other child (% of all respondents who included ... among the most preferred measures to be implemented by the government)		
	... improved parental leave arrangements for working women...	... substantial rise in child allowance improved parental leave arrangements for working women and substantial rise in child allowance ...
Belgium (Flanders)	35	27	17
The Czech Republic	65	49	54
Eastern Germany	51	45	61
Western Germany	45	51	35
Estonia	80	77	85
Italy	n.a.	5	n.a.
Cyprus	48	52	68
Lithuania	73	63	71
Hungary	33	27	39
The Netherlands	27	35	20
Austria	34	14	27
Poland	57	56	43
Romania	72	74	80
Slovenia	54	57	48
Finland	65	73	59

Source: IPPAS database; own calculations.

The results of two logistic regressions based on theoretical model described in Section 5.3 are presented in Table 8. Model 1 takes into account all respondents who answered the question about the consequences of implementation of desired meas-

ures – whether they would probably decide to have a(n)other child or not. Model 2 is limited to those respondents who selected improved parental leave arrangements for working women and substantial rise in child allowance as/among their most desired measures.

²⁰ Many respondents selected only two measures. Even if the respondents selected three measures, the two observed measures taken together may still be expected to have a higher impact than the third one.

Table 8:
Determinants of fertility response on the introduction of most desirable measures

		Model 1	Model 2	
Sex	Male	1.00	1.00	
	Female	1.02	0.70	
Age group	20-24	1.00	1.00	
	25-29	0.97	0.98	
	30-34	1.13	0.33	*
	35-39	0.63 ***	0.16 ***	
	40-44	0.56 ***	0.28 *	
	45-49	0.43 ***	0.12 ***	
Living arrangement	Living with spouse/partner	1.00	1.00	
	Living apart together	0.79 ***	2.10	
	No partner	0.81 ***	0.82	
Number of children	0	1.00	1.00	
	1	1.35 ***	9.10 ***	
	2	0.92	3.17 **	
	3+	0.63 ***	0.44	
Intention to have a child in the future	No	1.00	1.00	
	Yes	3.85 ***	2.65 **	
Education	Below higher secondary	1.00	1.00	
	Higher secondary	0.96	1.38	
	Post-secondary	0.63 ***	0.48	
Employment status	Full-time	1.00	1.00	
	Part-time	0.97	0.37 **	
	Casual work	1.19	0.00	
	Don't have a job	0.96	0.77	
Selected measures	Other combinations of measures	1.00		
	Improved parental leave + higher child allowance (and another one)	0.80 *		

	Model 1	Model 2
Slovenia	1.00	1.00
Belgium (Flanders)	0.31 ***	0.23
The Czech Republic	0.83	1.43
Eastern Germany	0.67 **	3.11
Western Germany	0.77	0.84
Estonia	3.22 ***	11.26 **
Italy	0.01 ***	
Lithuania	2.10 ***	3.58
Hungary	0.25 ***	0.35
The Netherlands	0.31 ***	0.43
Austria	0.25 ***	1.29
Poland	1.05	0.99
Finland	1.50 *	1.67
-2 Log Likelihood	11359.4	289.8
N	12221	413

Note: Regression coefficients are expressed in odds. The reference category for each variable has odds of 1.00.

* significant at the 0.1 level

** significant at the 0.05 level

*** significant at the 0.01 level

Source: IPPAS database; own calculations.

The results for Model 1 show a significantly lower likelihood that a(nother) child will be born for people aged 35-49 than for the reference group 20-24 years. The sex of respondent does not appear to be relevant.

As expected, the impact of policy measures on the probable decision to have a(nother) child is lower for the respondents living apart together and those who have no partner at all, as compared to respondents living with a spouse/partner. It should be noted that – due to possible misunderstanding of the term – the group “living apart together” might also include a less serious partnerships, which explains why they would react in a very similar way as respondents without a partner.

Generally, the likelihood for the respondents to probably decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures were

implemented is the highest for those who already have one child, which was also expected. For those who already have two children, the likelihood of such decision is not statistically different compared to those who have no children at all. However, the implementation of desirable measures would have a significantly smaller effect on the fertility decision-making by those who already have three or more children than by those with no children. The explanation may be found in the fact that they already have the number of children they want.

It is also in line with our expectations that the implementation of desirable family policy measures would have greater influence on deciding to have a(nother) child by those who declared that they intended to have a(nother) child in the future than for those who expressed the opposite intention.

The likelihood that the implementation of desirable measures would stimulate the respondents to probably decide to have a(nother) child is not statistically different for those with attained higher secondary education and those with only primary or lower secondary education. However, the implementation of measures would have smaller fertility impact on those with post-secondary education as compared to those with below higher secondary education. More educated persons are usually better off, which makes them less dependent on public transfers. They can also afford to pay for good quality childcare services.

The results show that the likelihood for the respondents to decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures are implemented is considerably higher in Estonia and Lithuania than in Slovenia.²¹ On the other hand, this likelihood is much lower in Belgium (Flanders), Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, and particularly in Italy.

It is interesting that our results are very much in line with those obtained by Kocourková (2001), although her analysis used the Family and Fertility Survey data and was limited to the Czech respondents.

Since this paper is focused on two family policy measures, improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance, in Model 1 we compare the group of respondents who chose these two measures as most desirable (i.e. among their first three or two preferences) with other respondents. We wanted to find out if the implementation of their desirable measures (mostly in combination with some third measure) would have a greater or smaller influence on additional fertility for this group of respondents than for all others. The statistically significant result shows a smaller likelihood for this

group, meaning that the respondents who selected other combinations of measures are more likely to decide to have a(nother) child if their most desirable measures were implemented.

We wanted to get a better insight into the particular group of respondents (defined in the previous paragraph) and their decision-making regarding having a(nother) child in the case of their desirable family policy measures being implemented. Consequently, we ran a separate logistic regression on this relatively narrow group of respondents only (Model 2). Presuming their different behaviour pattern compared to the average of all respondents, we expected interesting comparison of the results of Model 2 and Model 1. However, the analysis proved the number of observations (413) to be too small to obtain many statistically significant results and draw strong conclusions.

We will nevertheless briefly comment on some statistically significant results for Model 2. Like in Model 1, the likelihood that the implementation of desirable measures will have a positive influence on the respondents' fertility is smaller for older age groups (30-49) as compared to age group 20-24. Regression coefficients for older age groups (35-49) are smaller in Model 2 than in Model 1. This may mostly be due to the fact that parental leave arrangements are only important in a relatively short time period after childbirth while the majority of other family policy measures remain relevant in a longer period or are focused on older children – meaning that they are desirable for older parents, too.

In Model 2, a positive influence of the introduction of the two observed measures on the fertility behaviour of respondents with one child, as compared to the reference group (respondents with no children),

²¹ Due to some specific details in the Belgium (Flemish) questionnaire it was not appropriate to take this country (the first one by alphabetical order) as the reference one.

is higher than in Model 1. It is also positive and significant for respondents who already have two children. This is logical, since parental leave (a reconciliation tool) and child allowance (an income source that lowers the cost of children for their families) are much more important for those who have children than for those without any children. They are particularly important for those with one child because, firstly, they already have experience with both family policy measures, and secondly, they probably intend to have another child in the future. The importance of parental leave arrangements for working women is also evident from its significantly lower fertility impact on the respondents working part-time than for those working full-time.

CONCLUSION

Our results show that people in all observed countries are strongly in favour of family policy measures including improved parental leave arrangements for working women and higher child allowance. They also tend to estimate a relatively high impact of the introduction of family policy measures they consider most desirable on their probable decision to have a(nother) child. However, logical control proved that respondents were not always consistent in their answers. This fact should be seriously taken into account, particularly in the analyses that try to quantify the possible impact in terms of a probable increase in the number of births.

The obtained results also indicate a lower probable fertility impact of the combination of improved parental leave arrangements for working women and a substantial rise in child allowance, as compared to other combinations of family policy measures considered in the survey. This, however, does not reduce the importance of parental

leave as a reconciliation tool and the relevance of child allowance for alleviating a considerable decrease in the standard of living after the birth of each child and even poverty among families with children.

The literature generally suggests that family policy measures may have some positive effect on fertility. However, so far we do not know what influences births: a specific measure, a package of measures, the welfare state as a whole, the favourable economic conditions, social norms and values, or something else. To make things more complicated, both the effects of individual factors and the sign and size of their interaction should be accounted for.

It is thus not surprising that many papers on the subject contain cautionary concluding remarks. For instance, Engelhard (2004) warns that her results should not be interpreted as “true” causal effects, but more as an indication on the direction and strength of the causal influence of the policy incentives on fertility intentions. This is undoubtedly the case with our results, too. Much more in-depth research using individual data must be done before we shall be able to formulate policy recommendations without any reservation.

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Sažetak

PORODNI DOPUST I DJEČJE NAKNADE: STAVOVI, PRIORITETI I MOGUĆI UČINCI

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Članak se bavi dvjema mjerama obiteljske politike: porođnim dopustom i dječjim naknadama. Članak pokušava istražiti: 1.) kako ljudi procjenjuju postojeće mjere, 2.) koji se alternativni oblici ovih dviju mjera preferiraju (dužina i način korištenja porođnog dopusta, ovisnost stopa dječjih naknada na obiteljska primanja, dob djeteta i broj djece), 3.) kako se poboljšanje tih mjera procjenjuje unutar željenih mjera obiteljske politike, i 4.) koji bi učinak ta poboljšanja mogla imati na donošenje odluke o rađanju (još) djece. Empirijska analiza temelji se na bazi podataka Međunarodne ankete o prihvaćanju populacijske politike (International Population Policy Acceptance Survey) koja obuhvaća 14 europskih zemalja. Multivarijantna analiza rabi se za objašnjenje rezultata pojedinačnih zemalja i neke od varijacija među zemljama. Otkriva se da ljudi teže procjeni relativno visokog učinka uvođenja željenih mjera obiteljske politike na njihovu odluku da imaju (još jedno) dijete. Pokazalo se da kombinacija poboljšanog porođnog dopusta i znatno povećanje dječjih naknada ima manji učinak na stopu plodnosti nego druge kombinacije mjera obiteljske politike koje se razmatraju u anketi.

Ključne riječi: porođni dopust, dječje naknade, preferencije, učinak na fertilitet.