

Authors' version of an article submitted to *European Journal of Industrial Relations*.

Final version of the article is available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0959680116672279>

Hašková, Hana, Dudová, Radka. 2017. Precarious work and care responsibilities in the economic crisis. *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 23 (1): 47-63. <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0959680116672279>

Precarious work and care responsibilities in the economic crisis

Hana Hašková

Sociologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, Prague, Czech Republic

Radka Dudová

Sociologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, Prague, Czech Republic

Corresponding author:

Hana Hašková, Sociologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, Jilská 1, 110 00 Prague 1, Czech Republic
E-mail: hana.haskova@soc.cas.cz

Abstract

Economic transformation after 1989 and the global economic recession that began in 2008 have caused an increase in precarious work in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. As a result of refamilialization, precarious work acquired a specific form for women. We use the Czech Republic as an example in analysing a trend that is obvious throughout the Visegrád countries, and apply the capabilities approach to understand the dynamics of precarious work in the lives of women with care responsibilities. Neither the objective characteristics of work nor its subjective assessment alone make it possible to understand precarious work. The explanation lies in the (temporal) dynamics of the interconnection between the two: insecure jobs accepted by women with care responsibilities as a temporary strategy may turn into a trap excluding them from a stable job.

Keywords

women, precarious work, refamilialization, Czech Republic, Visegrád, economic crisis

Introduction

The global economic recession brought not only a rise in the EU the unemployment rate but also an increase in the forms of employment that are time-limited, lack (sufficient) legal protection, do

not establish full entitlement to social protection and provide earnings that are close to the poverty threshold. These forms of employment pose a greater threat to groups who were already vulnerable from the perspective of social exclusion and employment position (Carls, 2012). One such group comprise women who are responsible for care for dependent family members (Young, 2010). In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the precarization of work has taken a specific course as a result of the post-1989 economic transformation, which was accompanied by the weakening influence of trade unions and the process of refamilialization. This means a shift from policies which gave women incentives to combine paid work with care-giving towards policies that undermine women's employment and shift care work back to families.

In this article we investigate the forms of uncertain and precarious work in the Czech Republic (ČR) as experienced by women with care responsibilities for a child or other family member. We explore this case within the broader context of the Visegrád countries (ČR, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary). Within this region, the gender impact of the economic crisis, the post-1989 economic transformation and refamilialization has been the strongest in the ČR and, consequently, it is the country that can best demonstrate the precarization of work for women with care responsibilities. However, our study suggests that this trend is also evident in the other Visegrád countries. Using both quantitative and qualitative data we explore the different forms of precarious work amongst women in the ČR and how they have changed during the economic crisis. We focus particularly on how women interpret and evaluate these forms of work and the effects these may have on their lives. By applying the capabilities approach, we demonstrate how the choices these women make always depend on social structures, institutions and norms, thus contributing towards understanding the dynamics of precarious work in the lives of women with care responsibilities.

Women and precarious work in the Visegrád countries

Precarious work may be defined as paid work of a short-term nature, providing a low level of job protection, insufficient control over working conditions, low pay and limited social benefits (Rodgers, 1989; Vosko, 2009). Instead of equating precarious work with non-standard and time-limited forms of employment, we emphasise the multi-dimensional aspects of its definition.

The CEE countries witnessed a steep rise of precarious work and employment after 1989. By 2005, the Visegrád countries ranked in the higher half of the EU-27 countries in terms of uncompensated flexible work hours, lack of self-determination over work schedules, long work hours and imbalanced interpersonal power relations (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014).

During the global economic recession, the precarization of employment deepened and expanded into new areas and levels (Vosko et al., 2009). Unemployment in the Visegrád countries increased after 2008, and there was an increase in self-employment, with the ČR, Slovakia and Poland reaching the highest levels within an EU-wide comparison (Carls, 2012). This represents a particular threat to work standards, social security provision and minimum wages (Trappmann, 2011). In addition, in all four Visegrád countries there was an increase in involuntary part-time work. We can thus state that the economic crisis caused not only increased unemployment but also an increase in those forms of work which may be labelled as precarious.

Various population groups face different risks of precarious work, depending on their gender, citizenship, ethnicity, family obligations, education, field of work, individual personality characteristics and the degree of social protection in the country where they live (Kalleberg, 2009). 'Men and women participate differently in precarious employment, to differing extents, in different forms and with different consequences' (Vosko et al., 2009: 2). Globally, the number of women involved in precarious employment exceeds the number of men (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014; Presser et al., 2008; Young, 2010).

Previous research has focused mainly on the precarious work of women domestic workers from the Visegrád countries in Western Europe. These include Slovakian domestic workers who care for Austrian senior citizens and are either own-account workers or hired through agencies, working long hours for low pay entirely outside the protection and rules negotiated for carers by the local unions (Sekulová, 2015). Other research has covered the

precarious work of women in Poland's special economic zone factories (Maciejewska, 2015) and in feminized sectors of work in Slovakia (Filadelfiová et al., 2014). There are also studies addressing the topic of domestic workers from the Ukraine in the ČR and Poland (Ezzedine, 2012; Soralová, 2012; Uhde, 2012).

Studies to date have focused on certain gendered aspects of precarious work, such as low wages and the low level of trade union involvement in the feminized fields, combining paid work with care-giving, sexism in the workplace and financial dependence on partners. Thus far no studies in this region have addressed the topic of motherhood as an important life transition, which triggers the mechanisms contributing to women's precarious work. As compared to Western European countries, where the precarious work performed by mothers is primarily associated with part-time work (Puig-Barrachina et al., 2014), the share of women participating in part-time work in the Visegrád countries has been among the lowest in the EU and ranges from 5 to 11 percent (Eurostat, Labour Force Survey). In addition, the women most often working part-time in the Visegrád countries are those of (pre-)retirement rather than of childbearing age (Filadelfiová et al., 2014; Hora, 2009; Maciejewska, 2015).

Because of a combination of the historical legacy of women's full-time employment, post-1989 refamilialization and the nature of the labour market, a specific pattern of women's employment over her life course has developed in this region. Gender-sensitive research has identified refamilialization as one of the major socio-political processes in CEE after 1989 (Hantrais, 2004; Hašková and Saxonberg, 2016; Pascall and Lewis, 2004; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008). The pre-1989 communist regimes encouraged women's full-time employment over the whole life course, with extensive public care services, in an effort to increase industrial production. This was also supported by the socialist ideology, which glorified women's participation in paid work as a source of independence from men. After 1989, public (care) services were severely reduced, shifting care work back to families. Consequently, within the European context one of the greatest differences in the employment rates of women and men --- to the disadvantage of women --- may be seen in the age categories typical for childbearing in the Visegrád countries (OECD, 2015). Yet the employment rate of men and women in the age category of 45 -- 49 is almost equal.

[Table 1 about here]

The ČR, followed by Hungary and Slovakia, have by far the greatest differences in the EU in employment rates between mothers and women of the same age without dependent children (Eurostat, n.d). Accordingly, whilst in the ČR there is almost no difference in the unemployment rate between men and women aged 20 -- 24, in the 30 -- 39 category the women's rate is more than double that of men, and it remains higher until the retirement age categories (OECD, 2015). Although refamilialization occurred in all the Visegrád countries, experts have identified national differences in the process and its effects. The ČR and Slovakia (until 1993 both part of Czechoslovakia) may be considered exemplars of countries where, after 1989, women were explicitly encouraged to leave the labour market through incentives such as tax deductions for a non-working partner and the prolongation of the period of time during which a full-time care-giver receives social benefits. Conversely, in Poland women with care responsibilities were only implicitly expelled from the labour market because of the lack of support for combining work and care (Hašková and Saxonberg, 2016; Szelewa and Polakowski, 2008). However, in all the Visegrád countries, access to care services for children under three years of age has become the lowest in the EU. Additionally, access to care for older pre-school children is also below the EU average (OECD, 2015). The coverage rates for the formal (residential and home) care services for the elderly in the CEE countries have also been among the lowest in Europe, and the share of informal elderly care is among the highest in Europe (Bettio and Verashchagina, 2010).

In comparative terms, the male and female labour force in Visegrád countries remains concentrated in manufacturing (and in Hungary and Poland also in agriculture, albeit to a lesser degree). Negative time flexibility --- such as shift-, night- and weekend-work, non-standard work hours, and irregular schedules --- is associated with the manufacturing industry. Moreover, the

Visegrád countries are among those where employed men and women report some of the longest work hours (Lehmann et al., 2015). These factors reduce the ability to combine work and care, which helps explain the later return of mothers to the labour market (Hora, 2009).

Czech and Slovak studies have shown that during the economic crisis the gender differences in unemployment and precarious work increased. Whilst men with a secondary school education were 'protected' against unemployment, women needed a university education. In addition, temporary work and undesired self-employment increased more among women than men (Filadelfiová et al., 2014; Křížková and Formánková, 2014). Taking into account the specific employment model for women in the Visegrád countries over their life course, it may be assumed that after the care-related break, mothers encounter a number of problems associated with their employability. One consequence may be their increased concentration in precarious employment. The ČR has one of the largest gender gaps in unemployment in the child-bearing age categories, and motherhood has the most negative effect in Europe on the economic activity of women (OECD, 2015). For these reasons, it is an appropriate choice for a study of the impact of the economic crisis on the precarization of the work of women with care responsibilities.

Theoretical approaches

To a certain degree, precarious work is associated with the care-giver role that still applies primarily to women (Young, 2010). There are several theoretical explanations for this. According to *human capital* theory, women are more focused on their current and future family obligations and thus invest more time in caring for their families and less time on work, which is subsequently reflected in their education, experience and employment position. The result is a higher concentration of women in work regimes that pay lower wages, are short-term in nature and have low job responsibility (Mincer and Polachek, 1974). If this were an exhaustive explanation, the work situation would be the same for men and women with the same education and experience, who spend the same amount of time caring for children and the household. However, Young (2010) shows that this is not the case, and part of the difference must be explained with the help of *gender stratification* theory. Not only do gender norms deprive women of the same opportunities as men to invest in their career paths, but the same investments do not bring the same results. Given the stereotypes and discrimination on the part of employers, women have a lower rate of return on their human capital than do men; as a result, they must accept precarious work more often.

However, even in combination these two explanations are insufficient. Even if it is true that women invest less in their careers we must also ask why. According to *rational choice* theory, the specialization of gender roles (one member of a couple focuses on the family and the other on their employment) optimizes the benefits received by the household (Becker, 1985). However, a number of critics have pointed out the erroneous presumptions upon which this theory is based --- for example, that partners always share their incomes. In addition, growing labour market uncertainty and high divorce rates could lead to the opposite conclusion: specifically that the investment of all of a woman's human capital in the private sphere is extremely risky, not only for the woman but also for the whole household (Kalmijn, 2011).

According to *preference* theory the choice to invest less in human capital on the labour market is the consequence of the preferences of women, which are founded not on a rational choice but rather on cultural values and lifestyles (Hakim, 2000). However, this theory overvalues freedom of choice and undervalues the influence of structures and norms and the variability of preferences (Crompton and Lyonette, 2005). Although Hakim acknowledges that external factors influence women's decision-making regarding their earning activities and motherhood, she overlooks the fact that their preferences are constructed within the socio-cultural context which not only forms their external environment, but is also internalized. Choices cannot be perceived as free without taking into account the context within which they originate and which constrains them. This is why, when asking why women with care responsibilities more often participate in precarious forms of work, we look to the *capabilities* approach (Sen, 2006). We understand as capabilities what people actually can do and what they can become. This approach allows

analysis of the actual possibilities for men and women to act with the aim of achieving work-life balance, where these are a combination of personal characteristics and external factors (Hobson et al., 2011). It puts an emphasis on the difference between *a right* and *a capability*. A right may formally exist on paper, but becomes real only once it is possible for people actually to exercise it, which depends on context. Sen also develops the concept of *adaptive preferences*: as a rule, women adapt their preferences to their lower status and form them in relation to existing conditions, which are unequal (Sen, 1995). Hobson et al. (2011) emphasize that when investigating the employment position of men and women and their work-life balance it is important to study not only how various factors influence what a person does and what their possibilities are, but also how they feel entitled to choose certain possibilities. Within such an approach, *agency freedom* is defined as the sense of entitlement to make claims within the family and at the workplace, and also includes the capability to act in conflict with tradition.

When investigating why women accept precarious or insecure work, and even when determining if the work in question is precarious or not, it is therefore not sufficient to work with the concept of choice. Particularly in the case of women with care responsibilities, it is necessary to assume that their decision is conditioned not only by their personal characteristics but also by institutional sources (such as the welfare state, the labour market and the company's organizational structure) and societal sources (norms, social movements and media discourse) (Hobson et al., 2011). We use the capabilities approach to contribute towards understanding the dynamics of precarious work in the lives of women with care responsibilities. We focus on the ČR, where the gendered impact of the economic recession seems to be of particular significance and where we have quantitative and qualitative data on the precarious work of women. We will situate the results from our analyses against relevant studies that capture comparable trends in the Visegrád countries, in order to show that the results from our study illustrate a phenomenon that may be identified throughout the entire region.

Methodology

When studying precarious work, one should not examine only the 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' nature of a job: as explained above, individual decisions are influenced by cultural norms on care, the gendered division of work and the context of the welfare regime (Hobson et al., 2011). It is also apparent that a low-paid temporary part-time job (defined in terms of salary, type of work contract and working hours) may have a different meaning and consequences for people in different life situations. Therefore, when performing an analysis it is appropriate to take into consideration the formal status of a specific job, the situation in practice (for example, the right to return to one's job after parental leave may be protected by legislation, but the enforcement of the law may be impossible) and the subjective perception of the job in question. As a result, it seems advisable to combine quantitative and qualitative data.

We place emphasis on both the objective features and the subjective perception of the work. Our mixed-method research aims to explore the forms taken by precarious work in the ČR, how these change during an economic crisis and how women with care responsibilities interpret them. The deductive analysis of statistical data tests assumptions about the timing and extent of the increase in precarious work carried out by women in the ČR during the economic crisis. The inductive analysis of biographical narratives explores in parallel how precarious work has been experienced by women with care responsibilities. Subsequently, quantitative and qualitative data are merged to obtain an understanding of the precarious work carried out by women with care responsibilities during the economic crisis.

The quantitative data were obtained in 2010 through the survey 'Life Course 2010'. The sample (N=4010; quota sampling) corresponded to the composition of the Czech population aged 25 -- 60. The questionnaire was constructed to make it possible to extract the dates of important life events (such as childbirth and the start of unemployment, employment and self-employment) and to facilitate the analysis of the relationships between them; for details see <http://nesstar.soc.cas.cz/webview/index.jsp?study=http%3A%2F%2F147.231.52.118%3A80%2F>

obj%2FfStudy%2FCSDA00047&node=0&mode=documentation&submode=ddi&v=2&top=yes&language=en.

The qualitative narratives were obtained from three research projects, during which the authors and their colleagues conducted interviews with women with care responsibilities (N=75). In 2009, 37 interviews were conducted with mothers of various education levels who lived in municipalities in different regions with or without a partner, and had at least one child aged between two and seven; in 2012 -- 13, 25 women were interviewed who cared for an elderly family member; and in 2013, 13 interviews were conducted with mothers caring for a child with disabilities.

The interviews focused on the topic of employment paths and work-life balance. However, precarious work repeatedly emerged in the women's narratives. Secondary analysis made it possible to explore the forms of precarious work, the experience of women and, at the same time, answer the question why women participate in precarious work. It revealed the dynamics of the entry into and evaluation of the precarious work of women with care responsibilities and its possible consequences.

Quantitative data on precarious work

In the ČR, non-standard work includes fixed-term contracts, short-term agreements to perform work, work performed without a contract, self-employment and part-time work. In order for non-standard work to also be precarious, additional characteristics must be taken into account. These include the subjective perception of the work in question, how the respondents evaluate their living standards, whether or not they would prefer to work with a standard employment contract and the level of control they have over their working conditions. It is also possible to include other labour market indicators: for example, whether working on the basis of a fixed-term contract leads to permanent employment or, conversely, if it increases the risk of unemployment.

In 2014, 9 percent of men and 11 percent of women in the ČR worked on fixed-term contracts (Eurostat, n.d.). Such contracts are found disproportionately among workers with low qualifications, those with health problems, those aged over 55 or under 25, and women with children under the age of 7. Fixed-term employment may be considered of lower quality because two-thirds of the workers carry out fixed-term employment involuntarily (Hora, 2009).

During the global economic crisis, there was an increase in precarious forms of employment. As can be seen from data from the *Life Course 2010* survey, the proportion of those starting employment who were able to find work only on the basis of a fixed-term contract increased from 15 percent of women and 12 percent of men in 2005 -- 07 to 37 and 32 percent respectively in 2008 -- 10. During the latter period, 28 percent of the newly unemployed lost their jobs because they were working on the basis of a fixed-term contract, as compared to only 13 percent during the previous three years. In addition, the self-employment increased during the economic crisis, particularly in the case of women. This increase was the highest (by 74 percent) among women aged 35 -- 39, who typically have small children. Self-employment thus became one of the most significant ways of avoiding unemployment as a result of the economic crisis (Křížková and Formánková, 2014).

Part-time work is also carried out primarily by people from marginalized groups in the labour market, and is associated with low job security and a higher level of poverty. As can be seen from the *Life Course 2010* survey, full-time women workers were much less likely than part-timers to have non-standard contracts: 14 percent of the former were employed fixed-term compared to 28 percent of part-timers; 3 percent worked on the basis of a short-term agreement to perform work, were self-employed or without a contract, compared to 27 percent of part-timers (Vohlídalová and Formánková, 2012).

Precarious employment by definition involves low job security, is associated with lower wages, and includes a high concentration of individuals from marginalized groups in the labour market. Additionally, during the economic crisis its share amongst the employed, particularly amongst women, grew. Data from the *Life Course 2010* survey revealed that having care responsibilities increased the risks of working in such employment regimes. Amongst wage-

earning women who cared for small children, the proportion of precarious employment was statistically significantly higher than amongst wage-earning women without small children (see Table 2).

[Table 2 about here]

Precarious employment regimes affect women's economic situation and their family's standard of living. Mothers working with fixed-term employment contracts, informal agreements or without a contract evaluated the standard of living of their household as significantly worse than mothers who worked with a permanent contract. These differences are statistically significant (Chi-Square Test, Sig. = 0.011). In addition, these women were more likely to work shortened hours and as rank-and-file employees, and even if they had the same working hours and work positions they earned less money. These differences are statistically significant (ANOVA, Tamhane Post Hoc test, Sig. = 0.004).

The situation of women with small children became worse with the economic crisis. Of all the mothers who specified their last economic status as being on parental leave, those whose leave ended before the economic crisis were better off than those whose parental leave ended during the crisis: they were more likely to be employed and less likely to be unemployed or 'at home'. These differences are statistically significant (Chi-Square Test, Sig. < 0.000). In addition, if they started working immediately after their parental leave ended, those who recommenced employment before 2008 were more likely to work on the basis of a permanent contract. Conversely, those who specified their status as employed immediately following the end of their parental leave, but whose change in status occurred in 2008, 2009 or 2010, were more likely to work on a fixed-term contract. These differences are statistically significant (Chi-Square Test, Sig. = 0.008). Therefore, the quantitative data shows that a high share of wage-earning mothers of pre-school and young school children have precarious employment status. Most often their work is for a fixed term. The main problem with fixed-term employment is that it often acts as a 'gateway' to unemployment, and this effect increased during the economic recession.

Qualitative data on precarious work

In the women's narratives, precarious work took on different forms and the way it was experienced varied in relation to other circumstances, particularly the period of time that the woman has spent carrying out this type of work, her family and financial situation and the specific type of work concerned.

Precarious work as a strategy

Some of the women interviewed either worked or planned to work on terms that, from an objective perspective, could be considered 'precarious', but they perceived this as the best solution in their current situation. These women always described their work as a temporary strategy to participate in the labour market, which provided them with the time flexibility they needed for care responsibilities.

Most frequently, they were on parental leave (or home-makers) and were only just starting (or thinking about returning to) work. They were certain that the responsibility for caring for their children and the household would remain theirs, as their partners were the main breadwinners whose careers could not be restricted in any significant manner by family demands. They believed that as long as their children needed intensive care they would hold only occasional short-term jobs.

One example is provided by Anna. Prior to the birth of their first child, neither she nor her partner ever had a permanent job. Anna only had experience of temporary work, such as in a café, as a hostess and as a sales representative. When she was on parental leave, her husband found a permanent job and his earnings became the family's only secure source of income. For

this reason, when she wanted to return to the labour market she knew that the timing and the manner must be adapted to her family's needs in order to ensure that her husband's employment was not put at risk:

[My husband] prepared his career plan so that he would move up in his profession.... He works even during the weekends and late at night on almost a daily basis.... If my working were to introduce any sort of stress... I'll probably decide to work somewhere only on a temporary basis once in a while and won't have any permanent employment. (Anna, age 26, secondary school graduate, two children aged 3 and 1, married, almost 4 years at home, receives state parental benefits)

Although the law states that an employer cannot normally dismiss a pregnant woman, particularly women who work in small companies do not feel able to demand the enforcement of this law. This may be seen in the case of Jana, who planned to stay at home with her two children for five years. This time frame provided some sort of psychological closure to one employment phase of her life and, at the same time, she did not consider it possible to plan beyond that time:

Well, unfortunately it was right at a time when [my employer]... was cutting back staff. So we just agreed that way, because I knew that I would not return for at least five years.... Of course I did have some occasional short-term jobs in between, but because we wanted to have more than one child I didn't want to start some new job where six months later I would have to say I was sorry. (Jana, age 38, secondary school graduate, 3 children aged 14, 11 and 7, almost 13 years at home, married, employed)

Although Jana described her occasional short-term jobs as a strategy for 'getting some rest away from the children' during the period when she felt she had to care intensively for her children, her narrative also captures the dynamics regarding her approach to occasional short-term jobs. Since she considered these jobs as only a temporary strategy and aimed to find standard employment once she felt her children no longer needed intensive care, she started to view occasional short-term jobs and the inability to find stable employment in a negative manner.

The issue was actually different after our second [child].... At that time I already had sort of a longing to do something else than just change nappies and such. That was the first time I realized that it is in no way easy to find a job.... Whenever I mentioned that I have two children, the standard reply was, 'sorry, but this isn't quite the right job for you.'

The narratives show that even though the mothers of small children describe temporary work as a strategy chosen to cover only a certain time period, they do so within the context of the institutional and cultural resources that are available to them. The unavailability of adequate child care that can be combined with the mother's care on a regular basis, the need not to put their partner's wage-earning activities at risk and the lack of family-friendly flexible work arrangements are all important aspects. The norms of 'intensive mothering', which assume that the mother's life will be secondary to the child's interests, also influence the situation (Hays, 1996). The 'psychological agreement' that exists between an employer and an employee, their informal understanding about mutual obligations and expectations, also plays a role (Guest, 2004). Although such agreements may be in conflict with the law, it nevertheless has an impact on the behaviour of employees and employers.

Precarious work as a last resort

For a number of women, precarious work was not the optimal choice, but rather the only choice they had in a situation with limited availability of family-friendly, flexible permanent employment options, a lack of institutional care, a traditional gender division of work and discrimination against women on the labour market. These women needed work income in order

to supplement their household budget, but existing conditions made it impossible for them to participate in standard work arrangements.

One example is Renata, who unintentionally became pregnant while at medical school. She finished her degree and separated from the child's father. Whilst still receiving parental benefits, she started looking for ways to earn some money. Because of the absence of appropriate child-care services she did not seek a position as a doctor, but instead returned to the same type of occasional short-term jobs she had performed during her studies to supplement her income.

Renata explained this within the context in which she was *de facto* forced to make this 'choice'. Renata's mother, who was still employed, helped her only from time to time to care for her 3-year-old child, who was not accepted at a kindergarten.

I really don't dare work exclusively on the basis of an employment contract, even if it were for minimal working hours, if I have only my mother to rely on for watching my child. (Renata, age 27, university degree, 1 child aged 3, more than 3 years at home, single mother, receives state benefits)

Renata did not abandon her aim to start medical practice once her child began attending kindergarten. However, as a result of her changing family situation, lack of child-care options and financial situation, she repeatedly had to re-evaluate her plans. She considered an increase in the volume of occasional work she performed to be a blind alley that would not allow her to use her hard-earned qualifications. However, she did not turn down this option in the end because of her need for income and the unavailability of regular child-care.

Precarious work as a trap

As soon as the length of the time spent in precarious work became longer and efforts to find a more stable source of income repeatedly failed, this type of work began to be viewed negatively by all the women concerned. This was particularly the case when the women faced multiple disadvantages, such as caring for a disabled child, being a single mother, caring for an ageing parent in combination with being of pre-retirement age, having a low level of education, personal health issues or being from an ethnic minority. Precarious work became a trap from which the women could not escape, even after their care responsibilities were no longer so time-consuming.

The women most often caught in the precarious work trap were single mothers. They were dependent on social benefits and their occasional income, and as a result often found themselves living in poverty. These women viewed paid work as a necessity; self-realization through employment took second place. They alternated periods of looking for work with periods of performing precarious work.

When you get a chance, you'll take anything. But there's nothing. At the employment office they offer you a job that requires working three shifts --- I could find that type of work, but it's for three shifts. Hopefully, I'll now get something through a charity organization, working as an assistant for a few hours. Or maybe through an association that looks for assistants for senior citizens or the disabled.... However, it will be for only 7 or 8 months, but it's all about money. (Zdena, age 35, vocational school graduate, divorced, 3 children aged 12, 7 and 4, 12 years at home, unemployed.)

Some of these women saw an alternative in starting their own business. However, they were aware that self-employment may be another form of precarious work, without any income security, with an uncertain future, and, in addition, with the risk of losing the initial investment and indebtedness.

Antonie also found herself in the precarious work trap. At the age of 50, she left her job in order to take care of her sick mother. After her mother's death three years later, Antonie could not return to her former profession as the number of positions requiring her qualifications was limited in the region. She completed a requalification course to become an assistant nurse in long-

term care. However, she was still unable to find work for one year and worked at low-paid short-term jobs which did not match her qualifications.

It's quite possible that after the one month they'll send me someplace else. It's unpleasant for me at my age when I have to start at a new workplace, always having to learn new things, meeting new people, when all I am really trying to do is get adjusted during that week. (Antonic, aged 55, secondary school graduate, married, 3 years at home, employed on the basis of a short-term agreement to perform work.)

These women worked in precarious employment because the situation did not offer them any other option, and they all felt the insecurity of a succession of uncertain jobs very intensely. The pattern of alternating periods of temporary work and unemployment did not offer any hope of improvement, and the income was not sufficient to cover even basic needs. The women found themselves in this situation because of absence from the labour market resulting from their responsibility for providing care in combination with one or more other disadvantageous characteristics.

Discussion and conclusion

In line with the capabilities approach, our qualitative data analysis has shown that women with care responsibilities accept precarious work within a socio-cultural context which is not only the external environment of preferences and choices, but is actually a part of it. Preferences and strategies for combining work and care represent context-sensitive capabilities. Precarious work follows a specific course in the lives of women with care responsibilities. At first, it is the positive acceptance of occasional short-term jobs as a temporary strategy for employment or the gradual return to the labour market. If the woman subsequently does not find an adequate job, insecure work turns into a last resort and ultimately a trap when her interrupted and incoherent employment history, in combination with her increasing age, fuels mechanisms which prevent her from escaping from the cycle of precarious work and unemployment to a path of stable work. The uncertainty that is an integral part of occasional short-term jobs --- which some women choose during a particular phase of their life because of care responsibilities (as defined by social structures, institutions and intensive mothering ideology) --- may turn into a long-term disadvantage and lead to marginalization.

The precariousness of a succession of insecure jobs was felt most by those women who needed the income in order to maintain at least a minimum living standard for their households and who, at the same time, faced a combination of other disadvantages (such as their age and low education and qualifications). The intersection of these disadvantages was reflected in the length of the time during which these women could not find stable employment. Such time is one of the determining factors in the perception of the precariousness of participating in insecure work: It is specifically the length of time spent in the cycle of temporary low-income jobs that leads to a reduction in (or loss of) entitlement to the social benefits that could provide some income during periods of unemployment, a reduction in (or possibly even the loss of) the right to receive an old-age pension, the inability to create any sort of financial reserve, and indebtedness. Additionally, it results in the loss of self-confidence, decreased interest on the part of employers and a negative change in the capabilities available for actions not only on the labour market but also at home, and consequently a much less optimistic perspective for the future.

In all the Visegrád countries, the economic crisis resulted in an increase in unemployment as well as in precarious work. In particular, these forms of work may recruit from fixed-term employment, work performed on the basis of agreements, self-employment, and involuntary part-time employment. Support for self-employment became one of the active employment policy strategies during the economic crisis, and own-account labour in the ČR, Slovakia, and Poland reached the highest levels in Europe (Carls, 2012). Moreover, in the ČR and Slovakia, self-employment increased the most among women of child-bearing age in the same period. Women in both of the countries that were considering self-employment as a strategy for returning to the

labour market were aware that self-employment could turn into another form of precarious work, as a result of which the risks are transferred from the employer to the *de facto* employee. Even the statistical data have shown that the increase in newly established own-account businesses in these countries was, for the most part, negatively motivated during the economic crisis and viewed only as an alternative to unemployment (Filadelfiová et al., 2014; Křížková and Formánková, 2014).

With the exception of Hungary, the Visegrád countries saw a reduction in the number of temporary workers at the beginning of the economic recession because these were the first to lose their jobs when unemployment rose. This was, however, only a short-term decline. Contrary to the EU average, their numbers grew quickly during the next few years in all the Visegrád countries. In addition, in all four countries there was an increase in the share of involuntary part-time workers. Within this comparison, Poland shows specific characteristics: even before the economic crisis, there was a high percentage of self-employed and temporary workers. Subsequently, while the percentage of self-employed in the ČR has increased to the Polish level since the economic crisis, the share of temporary workers remained much higher in Poland than in any other EU country even during the crisis years.

The refamilialization that accompanied economic transformation in the Visegrád countries after 1989 intensified the negative impact of the economic crisis on women with care responsibilities. Refamilialization involved the collapse of the care services system and, at the same time, offered incentives to keep women from participating in the labour market, rather than directly expelling them. Together with the lack of work-life balance flexibility on the labour market, this contributed to a specific model for the employment path of women: full-time employment with the long-term interruption of wage-earning activities through child-care responsibilities and early retirement in order to care for ageing parents. During the economic recession, this model was transformed into a pattern within which precarious work increasingly represented the only option for women returning to the labour market after a long absence, as stable employment after such a break in their wage-earning activities became impossible for many. Some differences among the Visegrád countries can however be observed. The fact that agriculture (as well manufacturing) plays a significant role in the economies of Poland and Hungary means that there might be a larger share of women working in the grey economy on family farms and businesses. This type of work contributes to the image of (if not precarious) definitely insecure work that gained in importance during the economic crisis. Since Poland did not offer such explicit incentives for women with care responsibilities to stay at home as the other Visegrád countries after 1989, the gender employment gap in the child-bearing age groups remains lower there (though still above the EU average). Since Poland remains the EU leader in temporary work and own-account employment, the lower gender employment gap does not necessarily mean a higher share of women with care responsibilities in stable and secure employment.

The ČR remains the EU leader in women's employment in manufacturing, closely followed by the other Visegrád countries (all of them far above the EU average). Shift work and long working hours in manufacturing constitute an exemplary model of an employment regime where women leave the labour market for several years after their first child is born (or when they need to provide care for elderly relatives) and then face difficulties in returning to paid work, which makes them accept precarious work. Moreover, the ČR and Slovakia have since 1989 provided the most explicit incentives for women with care responsibilities to stay out of the labour market. Consequently, the negative effect of motherhood on women's employment rates is the highest in these two countries, followed by Hungary. Despite these specificities, the trend of women with care responsibilities having to accept precarious forms of work, which increased in importance during the economic crisis, is evident from labour market statistics in all the Visegrád countries.

Other factors contributing to this trend include low trade union density and collective bargaining strength in this region, and also the fact that women in particular often work in jobs that are poorly covered if all by collective bargaining. Self-employment or work on a short-term contract subsequently leads to an even greater weakening in the protection of collective agreements. The biographical narratives of women with care responsibilities in the ČR, as well as the studies carried out by Filadelfiová et al. (2014) in Slovakia, Maciejewska (2015) in Poland

and Hobson et al. (2012) in Hungary show that the precarious work of women with care responsibilities also results from the low enforcement of sanctions for discrimination (against women), and a lack of capabilities to request and achieve a work-life balance. Our qualitative data show that while the choices women make in specific moments of their life are often interpreted as their individual preferences, they are in fact the results of structural factors, norms and the perception of (not) being entitled to choose certain options.

We have used the ČR to illustrate some of the mechanisms that led to the precarization of work for women with care responsibilities during the economic crisis. At the same time, by applying the capabilities approach, we show how precarious work becomes accepted and subsequently leads women with care responsibilities into the precarious work trap. Given that the labour market indicators in other Visegrád countries, particularly as regards the employment trajectories of women, reflect similar processes of refamilialization and economic crisis, we can assume that this is a trend that crosses national boundaries and may be identified throughout the entire region. Quantitative labour market indicators and studies in Slovakia, Poland and Hungary suggest that this is a phenomenon in all the Visegrád countries. Research specifically focused on the precarious work of women with care responsibilities in the other three Visegrád countries is needed in order to verify this hypothesis.

References

- Becker GS (1985) Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor. *Journal of Labor Economics* 3(1): 33–58.
- Bettio F and Verashchagina A (2010) *Long-Term Care for the Elderly*. Rome: EU Expert Group on Gender and Employment (EGGE). http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/elderly_care_en.pdf
- Carls K (2012) Precarisation and the Crisis. The growing challenge of transforming precarious into decent work. [http://www2.filcams.cgil.it/info.nsf/0/520E6C0F230BFEA1C125799600126476/\\$file/PR%20ECARISATION%20AND%20THE%20CRISIS%20FINAL_REPORT_16JAN2012.pdf?OpenElement](http://www2.filcams.cgil.it/info.nsf/0/520E6C0F230BFEA1C125799600126476/$file/PR%20ECARISATION%20AND%20THE%20CRISIS%20FINAL_REPORT_16JAN2012.pdf?OpenElement)
- Cranford CJ, Vosko LF and Zukewich N (2003) The Gender of Precarious Employment in Canada. *Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations* 58(3): 454–482.
- Crompton R and Lyonette C (2005) The new gender essentialism – domestic and family ‘choices’ and their relation to attitudes. *The British Journal of Sociology* 56(4): 601–620.
- Eurostat (n.d.) *Labour Force Survey*. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/labour-market/statistics-illustrated>
- Ezzedine P (2012) Mateřství na dálku: Transnacionální mateřství ukrajinských migrantek v České republice. *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* 13(1): 24–32.
- Filadelfiová J, Gyárfášová O, Kobová L, et al. (2014) *Výskumno-analytická štúdia týkajúca sa situácie žien vykonávajúcich prácu v zamestnaniach s nízkou mierou istoty*. Bratislava: Centrum vzdelávania MPSVR SR.
- Guest D E (2004) The Psychology of the Employment Relationship: An Analysis Based on the Psychological Contract. *Applied Psychology* 53(4): 541–555.
- Hakim C (2000) *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hantrais L (2004) *Family Policy Matters: Responding to Family Change in Europe*. Bristol: Policy.
- Hašková H and Saxonberg S (2016) The Revenge of History: The Institutional Roots of Post-Communist Family Policy in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland. *Social Policy & Administration* 50(5): 559–579.
- Hays S (1996) *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hobson B, Fahlén S and Takács J (2011) Agency and capabilities to achieve a work-life balance: a comparison of Sweden and Hungary. *Social Politics* 18(2): 168–98.

- Hora O (2009) Český trh práce z hlediska vybraných forem flexibility a kvality pracovního života. *Fórum sociální politiky* 3(2): 5–13.
- Kalleberg A L (2009) Precarious Work, Insecure Workers: Employment Relations in Transition. *American Sociological Review* 74(1): 1–22.
- Kalmijn M (2011) The Influence of Men's Income and Employment on Marriage and Cohabitation: Testing Oppenheimer's Theory in Europe. *European Journal of Population / Revue Européenne de Démographie* 27(3): 269–293.
- Křížková A and Formánková L (2014) Pracovní dráhy žen a mužů v době ekonomické krize. In: Hašková H (ed) *Vlastní cestou? Životní dráhy v pozdně moderní společnosti*. Prague: Slon, 231–258.
- Lehmann Š, Kyzlinková R., Pojer P and Veverková, S (2015) *Czech Republic: Working Life Country Profile*. <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/eurwork/comparative-information/national-contributions/czech-republic/czech-republic-working-life-country-profile>
- Maciejewska M (2015) Unavené telá a drahocenné výrobky. Pracovní podmínky žien v zvláštnej ekonomickej zóne v elektrickom priemysle v Poľsku. In: Kobová L (ed) *Feministky hovoria o práci*. Bratislava: Aspekt, Duke University Press, 135–170.
- Mincer J and Polachek S (1974) Family investments in human capital: Earnings of women. *The Journal of Political Economy* 82(2): 76–108.
- OECD (2015) *OECD Family Database*. www.oecd.org/social/family/database.htm.
- O'Reilly J and Spee C (1998) The Future Regulation of Work and Welfare: Time for a Revised Social and Gender Contract? *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 4(3): 259–281.
- Pascall G and Lewis J (2004) Emerging Gender Regimes and Policies for Gender Equality in a Wider Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy* 33(3): 373–94.
- Presser HB, Gornick JC and Parashar S (2008) Gender and Nonstandard Work Hours in 12 European Countries. *Monthly Labor Review* (February): 83–103.
- Puig-Barrachina V, Vanroelen C, Vives A, Martínez JM, Muntaner C, Levecque K, Benach J and Louckx F (2014) Measuring employment precariousness in the European working conditions survey: The social distribution in Europe. *Work* 49: 143–161.
- Rodgers G (1989) *Precarious jobs in labour market regulation: the growth of atypical employment in Western Europe*. Geneva: ILS.
- Sekulová M (2015) Najčistotnejšie, najzodpovednejšie, najpracovitejšie. Slovenské opatrovatelky senioriek a seniorov v Rakúsku. In: Kobová L (ed) *Feministky hovoria o práci*. Bratislava: Aspekt, 101–134.
- Sen A (1995) Gender Inequality and Theories of Justice. In: Nussbaum M and Glover J (eds) *Women, Culture and Development*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 259–273.
- Sen A (2006) What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice? *Journal of Philosophy* 103(5): 215–238.
- Souralová A (2012) Nekupujete si lásku, kupujete si službu: (Re)konstrukce péče o děti v prostředí agentur na hlídání. *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* 13(1): 33–41.
- Szelewa D, Polakowski M (2008) Who cares? Changing patterns of child-care in Central and Eastern Europe. *Journal of European Social Policy* 18(2): 115–131.
- Trappmann V (2011) Precarious employment in Poland – a legacy of transition or an effect of European integration? *emecon* 1/2011.
- Vohlídalová M and Formánková L (2012) Částečné úvazky v České republice: šance nebo riziko? *Fórum Sociální Politiky* 5: 17–21.
- Vosko LF (2006) Precarious employment: towards an improved understanding of labour market insecurity. In: Vosko LF (ed.) *Precarious Employment: understanding labour market insecurity in Canada*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 3–42.
- Vosko, LF, MacDonald M and Campbell I (2009) Introduction: Gender and the concept of precarious employment. In: Vosko LF, MacDonald M and Campbell I (eds) *Gender and the contours of precarious employment*. New York: Routledge, 1–25.
- Young MC (2010) Gender Differences in Precarious Work Settings. *Relations Industrielles / Industrial Relations* 65(1): 74–97.

Uhde Z (2012) Slepá ulička instituce nájemní domácí péče. *Gender, rovné příležitosti, výzkum* 13(1): 12–23.

Author biographies

Hana Hašková is a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and teaches at Charles University.

Radka Dudová is a senior researcher at the Institute of Sociology of the Czech Academy of Sciences and teaches at Charles University.

Acknowledgement

The research in this paper was funded by Czech Science Foundation [grant number P404-12-P053 and 15-13766S] and by institutional support RVO: 68378025.

Table 1. Gender employment gaps^a in main child-bearing age groups, in 2013

	Age 25--29	Age 30--34	Age 35--39
Czech Republic	20.4	32.5	19.9
Slovakia	17.6	27.8	15.3
Hungary	14.5	22.2	17.7
Poland	16.4	16.5	13.3
EU-27 (unweighted average)	8.8	13.2	11.9

^a Difference between male and female employment rates, percentage points.

Source: OECD (2015); authors' calculations.

Table 2. Employment status of wage-earning mothers, by age of youngest child

Age of youngest child	Permanent contract (%)	Precarious status (%) ^a
Over 9 years	85.0	15.0
6 -- 9 years	72.6	27.4
0 -- 5 years	67.1	32.9

^a Self-employed, fixed-term, short-term agreement or no contract

Source: Life course 2010 (N_{mothers} = 769). Authors' calculations.

Chi-Square Test, Sig. < 0.000.