
Protection for Maternity – Social, Economic and Political Trends in Selected EU Countries

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Agnieszka Parlińska¹, Anna Milewska², Iga Zmorczyńska³

Abstract:

Purpose: The authors attempt to identify differences within adopted models for calculating how various maternity benefits influence changes in expenditures on maternity and paternity benefits and the level of births and total fertility in Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, and Poland between 2009-2019.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The paper was written based on the available literature, current legislation, reports of social security institutions. During undertaken research, comparative, descriptive, and interdependence analysis methods were used. First, an overview of family policy trends and instruments of the social protection of maternity in Europe were presented. Then, characteristics of the construction of maternity allowances in selected countries were performed. Finally, a comparative analysis of the influence of family policies on birth and total fertility was carried out.

Findings: All the selected countries differ significantly in their approaches to maternity allowance, e.g., the duration of maternity/paternity leave, the amount, and construction of paid benefits. The research allows assessing the validity of governmental actions, the impact of benefit increases, and the changes being seen in the number of births.

Practical Implications: Provides relevant information for Human Resources teams. It allows HR specialists to familiarize themselves with the diversity of regulations governing the matter of the maternity allowance for both parents, and correctly address the growing diversity and inclusion within the organization.

Originality/Value: Both the public sector and the private sector may benefit from comparisons between countries in terms of parent support presented in this article. The paper can provide guidelines for government members and policy makers in other countries. The latter with an emphasis on the developing SSC / BPO area, employing employees from all over the world and creating new branches in various countries.

Keywords: Family policy, maternity and paternity benefits, selected EU countries.

JEL: J11, J13, J18.

Research type: Research article.

¹Institute of Economics and Finance, Warsaw University of Life Sciences SGGW, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0001-6640-3097, agnieszka_parlinska@sggw.edu.pl;

²Institute of Economics and Finance, Warsaw University of Life Sciences SGGW, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0003-4776-6049, anna_milewska1@sggw.edu.pl;

³Warsaw University of Life Sciences SGGW, Poland, ORCID: 0000-0002-8225-4420, iga.zmorczyńska@wp.pl;

1. Introduction

In times of economic crisis, such as those that have affected Europe, it is impossible for democratic countries not to support their citizens and encourage them to prevent or avert such problems. Therefore, implementing effective policies that support families is a requirement to stop the continued population decline and its long-term effects on the economy. The European society is aging, which means that the working population will not be able to cover the costs of pensions and other support for the elderly in the future. This is the primary reason that governments are keen to develop supportive family policies.

There are many programs to help families. These include hot meals for children in schools, housing assistance for young married couples, or financial support in the form of benefits (Dragan and Woronowicz, 2013). Each country, depending on its needs, runs its pro-family policy. Their approaches are historically or culturally conditioned. In some countries, efforts are made to help poorer families, counteract the drop-in birth rates, and limit the state's social spending. Other actions also include preventing workplaces reductions. The positive effects of increased spending on family policy programs (which help women combine family life and work) on fertility growth have been confirmed by previous research conducted in 16 Western European countries (Kalwij, 2010). Since different countries rarely have the same approach to the institution of the family, there are also many methods of solving the problem of the demographic crisis.

However, to bring a positive effect, it is necessary to invest and receive financial support from public funds (state budget). There has been a widespread consensus in recent years that improvements in the economic conditions of individuals generally lead to lower birth rates. In recent years, general agreement has emerged that improving economic conditions for individuals generally leads to lower birth rates. A converse way of looking at it is that lower birth rates contribute to economic development and help individuals and families lift themselves out of poverty. (Sinding, 2009). Paid maternity allowance is a fundamental element of the health and economic protection of working women and their children during the perinatal period.

This principle is widely recognized and confirmed because most countries have adopted laws and rules regarding paid maternity leave, which provides parents with continued employment while taking care of their children during the early stage of life. It also allows the woman to return to her full potential after the difficult period of pregnancy and childbirth (ILO, 2014). Motherhood obliges a woman to raise a child. The way motherhood is viewed in society, and the workplace is also changing. A mother may take more than the available leave options, and her job security may be at risk. To deal with this situation, significant social and personal adjustments are necessary (Poduval and Poduval, 2009). The main tasks of the allowance are protection against insurance risk related to random events such as pregnancy, childbirth, puerperium, death of the mother, or her dependence.

In this aspect, attention should also be paid to protection against the risk of incompatibility of professional work with caring for a new-born child or support of the family in fulfilling the educational and socializing functions of the child (Babińska–Górecka, 2015). The World Health Organization has announced that protecting maternity at work also reduces the risk of mortality, morbidity, and maintaining health (ILO, 2012).

Research carried out by the International Labour Organization in highly developed countries shows that paid leave is beneficial for women in professional opportunities. Additionally, no negative impact on productivity was noticed, and significant benefits for entrepreneurs (including small and medium-sized enterprises) are also indicated (ILO, 2014). In underdeveloped countries, the results suggested that the priority for female workers is addressing needs related to the risk of reproduction, including free healthcare. Societies are still failing women about health, especially in low-resource settings. Discrimination based on their sex leads to health disadvantages for women (WHO, 2009). Structural determinants of women's health, along with legal and political constraints, often limit women's access to health services (Temmerman *et al.*, 2015).

Women often feel the burden of balancing work and family, especially during the reproduction age. Requirements for mobility and demanding work schedules are uncomfortable for women who fill domestic and family responsibilities (IRENA, 2019). In these cases, where maternity leave, benefits, and job protection are not effectively provided, women must take a break or limit their professional activities to raise a child. This is often associated with a significant loss of income and a previous position. This happens during the most productive time in a woman's life, linked to the reproductive period. Additionally, the lack of adequate maternity protection could increase the health risks of the woman and the child. It has also become essential to involve fathers in childcare. Many countries are introducing paternity benefits, which are much shorter than those for mothers, creating a bond between the parent and the child and help the mother return to the pre-pregnancy state. In some countries, one can take extra leave only if it is shared between both parents. This is to support gender equality and relieve women of their responsibilities (Ray *et al.*, 2008).

Due to the importance of the disturbing problems, authors decided to identify differences within adopted models for calculating the maternity benefit and its influences changes in the expenditure on maternity' and paternity' benefit as well on the level of the births and total fertility in Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, and Poland between 2009-2019. The paper was written based on descriptive and interdependence analysis methods.

2. Literature Review

Family policy models: The pro-family policy is part of a country's social policy. According to Kurzynowski (1991), it should be understood as the entirety of legal

norms, actions, and measures launched by the state to create appropriate conditions for the family for its creation, proper development, and for it to fulfil all-important social functions. Its tasks include caring for a woman expecting a child and a young mother, providing leaves for parents of children, payment of cash benefits related to parenthood, organization of public care for children, regulation of family law. It aims to create favorable conditions for the formation and functioning of families (Dragan and Woronowicz, 2013).

How countries implement family policy depends on many factors. The literature on the subject analyses and searches for models to which selected countries can be included, considering demographic, economic, social, and cultural conditions. Esping-Andersen (2010) presented the most general breakdown of countries from all over the world. There are three welfare state systems in it, liberal, conservative, and social-democratic. After a deeper analysis of the processes taking place in the world, another model was specified - the Southern European one (Esping - Andersen, 2010; Isakjee, 2017).

The central part can be identified by drawing attention to the features of the liberal model that affect the family policy of the countries qualified to it. It determines that the child is a private matter of the parents and does not result in any additional parentage rights. The state supports families through the tax system and low-level social benefits, and special assistance is directed only to the neediest. There are extreme views that the child makes parents happy, which drives them to work, so they do not need additional support.

The conservative model is widespread in continental Europe. Its central pillar is social insurance, depending on the income criterion and the assumption that the man is the primary family breadwinner. Support for women in combining work and family responsibilities is limited. The social-democratic model is characterized by high state involvement in pro-family policy. The growth of child development services requires parents to reconcile work and family. As a result, it is a costly model, and therefore it often keeps the tax and employment rate at a high level. The view that characterizes the social democratic system is that children are the future, so society must cover the cost of having and raising them.

The South European model is like the conservative one. A strong family responsibility characterizes it. The assumption is to maintain family ties, thanks to which the child is cared for by relatives. Social benefits are low and unequally distributed (Balcerzak-Paradowska, 2009). Another classification of countries according to the approach to pro-family policy is the typology made by Saraceno (2007), which is based on proper guidelines conducted by individual countries of the European Union.

In Francophone countries, there is a focus on promoting fertility, and a lot of attention is focused on children and their well-being. In Scandinavian countries, it is based on individual social citizenship, which means the same opportunity for women and men,

children regardless of their origin, and elderly and disabled people. The focus is on social services, not cash benefits.

In Germany, Austria, and partly the Netherlands, pro-family policy is based on subsidiarity. This assistance consists mainly of financial support, and there are few benefits in kind. In Great Britain and Ireland, family policy assumes that the family should take care of itself, thus offering little social assistance, mainly for low-income families. In southern European countries - the approach is based on intra-family support, relatives look after children, and benefits are granted about income. In the former communist bloc countries, there is a model like that in the Scandinavian countries. Gender equality and the right to social assistance are respected. They are distinguished by the amount and scope of cash and in-kind benefits and limited access to them, e.g., this is influenced by the income criterion.

Another division of family policy was presented by Thevenon and Gauthier (2011). The features that they pay attention to are purpose and scope. Family policy focuses on population growth, supporting the family, stopping poverty in families with children, economic and cultural equality. Leira and Saraceno (2008) drew attention to economic and cultural equality of families, dividing it into four models, traditional - male family breadwinner, working man and woman working part-time, the model of "imbalance of duties" on the side of a woman who works and takes care of the home, and a partner model-equality policy (Leira and Saraceno, 2008; Ciccia and Bleijenbergh, 2014). It can be concluded that all models show characteristic features, but it is not possible for a country to have only one pure model. Usually, there is one dominant, but some aspect is taken from others as well.

Maternity allowance as an instrument of social protection in maternity: The leave from work related to pregnancy was not shared when high positions in government were held by men who ignored women's problems. After the end of World War I, the focus was on returning to normal functioning and providing the male breadwinner with eight hours of work, which was one of the assumptions of the establishment of the Labor Commission, which focused only on male work. This led women to take to the streets of Britain, France, and the United States, where they fought for the right to a fair, international standard for working women. After months of effort, they won the creation of the International Labor Organization, which regulates operating conditions worldwide.

In October 1919, the first International Congress of Working Women was convened in Washington. One of the aspects discussed was maternity leave. Before 1919, there was maternity leave in many European countries. Still, it was unpaid and lasted 3-4 weeks, which doctors considered too short for a full recovery, and they suggested six weeks before and after childbirth. Women took to the streets and demanded 12 weeks of paid maternity leave as a medical necessity and a social right. Congress adopted the 1919 Convention on the Protection of Motherhood, the first legislation on fair conditions for working mothers worldwide (Siegel, 2019). The central assumption

was to guarantee mothers six weeks of leave after childbirth and before childbirth, which was to be paid enough for the mother and child to support themselves fully and healthy. An important point was also to protect a woman's position at work during her absence, so she could not be fired (ILO, 1919).

In 1952, the Convention on the Protection of Motherhood was re-convened, but the assumptions in this matter did not change much. Information about the amount of benefit in payment from compulsory insurance was introduced, which could not be lower than 2/3 of the woman's earnings before going on maternity leave. In addition to the cash allowance, the mother should receive medical assistance. For many years, such provisions existed until 2000, when the latest Convention on the Protection of Motherhood was convened. During this meeting, the leave period was extended to a minimum of 14 weeks (ILO, 2000).

In the same year, the Recommendation on the Protection of Motherhood was published, which extended this time to 18 weeks, and talked about adjusting the leave time to the number of children born during one delivery. It also increased the recommended value of the allowance to the total remuneration before the maternity leave (ILO, 2000). The International Labour Organization was the first, but not the only, institution to protect motherhood. In 1948, the UN General Assembly issued the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which says that "Motherhood and childhood have the right to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in marriage or out of wedlock, may benefit from the same social protection" (UNGA, 1948, art. 25).

At the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights was adopted. The document stated that "mothers should be given special protection within a reasonable period before and after childbirth. During this period, working mothers must be granted paid leave or leave with adequate social security benefits" (UNGA, 1966).

In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was established. The UN General Assembly has identified measures to protect motherhood, noting that they are not discriminatory and "to ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of motherhood as a social function and the recognition of the shared responsibility of women and men for the upbringing and development of their children, it should be understood that the best interest of the child is most important in all cases" (UNGA, 1979).

Until the 1960s, the trend of extending maternity leave was noticed. However, the spread of gender equality is slowly partially shared between the two parents. Olivetti and Petrongolo (2017) pointed out that "While family policy legislation in the post-war period reflected the role of women as primary providers of child and home care, women's movements of the late 1960s contributed to introducing the first elements of equal parental treatment in family intervention". The concepts of childbirth and

childcare were separated. Fathers want to look after their children more and more. The willingness of fathers or both parents to take leave is increasing.

Financing sources of the maternity allowance: Access to social security is a fundamental right and a public responsibility. It is usually provided by public institutions that fund them through contributions, taxes, or contributions and taxes. There are several ways to raise funds for maternity benefits. Four types are mainly used: Contributory Program, Employer Only Liability, Mixed System, and Non-Contributory Program.

A contributory plan is a work-related system that is based on wages. If such a program is introduced in each country, it is compulsory and financed by employees' salaries. The employee makes contributions, the employer, or both, sometimes supported by the state. Maternity benefits are often provided as part of another branch of social insurance, such as health insurance and gifts for accidents at work and sickness. Individual risk of disease should not affect the number of premiums and exclusion from collateral. It is essential that everyone, including men, pay contributions to the fund for maternity benefits, primarily women who use it.

A mixed system is a system established between the employee and the employer who jointly finance the fund. Such a system is most common in many developing and developed countries. In some places, the government pays part of the contribution; this protects low-income workers and employers in small and medium-sized enterprises. In a system where the employer is solely responsible for paying the benefit, the principles of equality and unity are not respected. No contributions are paid; the employer supports the women after giving birth by paying them all or part of their previous salary. This policy is not linked to the idea that pregnant women should be protected in terms of employment. Employers fire pregnant women in order not to pay the benefits.

The idea of the non-contributory program is to help women whose financial level does not allow them to raise a child. Information on whether the woman worked, and the possible contributions are not significant in providing this assistance. Social assistance is usually financed by public funds, i.e., general government revenues or earmarked taxes, administered by governments, often at the local level. Benefits guaranteed by social assistance are usually much lower than those provided for by social insurance.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO 2014), benefits should be provided through compulsory social security or public funds, which are the pillars of social security. Such a system is designed to reduce discrimination in the labor market, which is more likely than when employers must bear the total cost of maternity leave.

Benefits of maternity leave: The importance of maternity leave is undeniable in shaping the bond with the child and developing parental sense. Any help given to parents during early care has many benefits for the baby, mother, and father.

The primary benefit of staying at home after giving birth is for the mother to recover, and it is also conducive to breastfeeding. It prevents some health problems of women and children, which reduces the infant mortality rate. After observing the children brought up by their mothers at home, it was noticed that they develop better, cause fewer parenting problems, speak better, and have a richer vocabulary in later years. Taking maternity leave by parents influences developing the child's psyche, behavior, and social attitudes. Mothers' health is enhanced by reducing work-related stress.

The economic benefit that has been observed is a significant reduction in poverty in families with children. Children are seen as a social investment and are therefore supported by the state. They are prepared to be good workers and citizens who will participate in the labor market in the future. Such an attitude prevents anti-social behavior and anti-civic attitudes.

The provision of maternity leave and job protection aims to encourage childless young women of childbearing age to join the labor market. It is also an incentive for mothers to return to work after their leave (ILO, 2014). Women are more willing to take up professional activity and work full-time because they are sure that if they become pregnant, they will benefit from help. Also, all activities supporting young parents are intended to encourage couples to have children. Typically, switching to leave has a minor negative impact on later earnings, and no such effect has been noticed in employment.

In countries with a higher fertility rate, there is usually a more extended leave period but a lower maternal benefit (Davaki, 2010). When the leave is too short, mothers may not feel ready to return to work and quit their jobs altogether. On the other hand, extended maternity leave, which is used chiefly only by women, can destroy their attachment and development at work, resulting in lower wages or loss of employment. Any absence from work longer than 12 months is considered a career break. There is no optimal period of maternity leave set that would not negatively affect employment and remuneration.

There are also some benefits for dads looking after their babies right after birth. They often gain new skills and more significant potential as employees. It happens to be retraining to a different position and creating new business models, including remote work. Because an employee is on maternity leave, the employer does not bear the cost of remuneration in most countries and is regulated by the state. The Employing entity has a guaranteed employee who will return to work. It does not have to additionally invest in an additional workforce, hire and train new people.

3. Research Methodology

The main aim of the research is to assess the impact of the changes in the pro-family policy on the maternity and paternity benefit increases and the changes being made to the number of births and total fertility in Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, and Poland. The

time range of the undertaken study is 2009-2019. In order to achieve the main objective, the following research questions were raised:

- What are the changes in the pro-family policy on the maternity and paternity benefits in selected countries?
- What trends can be observed in the number of births in selected countries?

The paper presents and verifies the research hypothesis that the variety of adopted models for calculating the maternity benefit influences changes in the expenditure on maternity' and paternity' benefit in selected countries. Preliminary analysis of the maternity allowance' solutions allowed to use targeted selection of four European Union countries, i.e., Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland and Poland. These countries have a well-developed administration of social security data. Furthermore:

- Bulgaria was chosen because has had the longest maternity leave among the European Union countries.
- Germany was included in this research due to the existence of a mixed financing system divided between employers and employees.
- Ireland was presented by contrast. The Irish government has a different approach to the payment of benefits, equally for everyone, where in other countries it is income dependent.
- And finally due to the origin of the authors, the solutions adopted in Poland were selected for research.

The paper was written based on available literature, current Bulgarian, Irish, Polish and Romanian legislation, reports of social security institutions in selected countries of the European Union as well online sources e.g., from the International Labour Organisation. Secondary data for conducting a comparative analysis were taken from the reports of the Social Insurance Institution in Poland and its counterparts in selected countries. During data collection and processing, research methods were used, such as:

- Literature and legal act review methods which support selecting, analysing, and evaluating available scientific and legal information and data,
- Comparative analysis allows to compare the same categories and establishing similarities and differences between them,
- Descriptive analysis presents descriptively changes that occur in the studied environment,
- Analysis of interdependence investigates whether there can be a logically justified causal relationship between the features.

The following selected indicators and variables were used in the undertaken research: number of births, birth rate, fertility rate, maternity and paternity leave benefit payments in EUR and maternity and paternity leave benefit payments per child in

EUR. To achieve comparableness of the data, payments for Bulgaria and Poland were converted into EUR, at the exchange rates of the Central European Bank at the end of the year to which the data relate.

4. Results

The review of Bulgarian, Irish, Polish, and Romanian legislation allowed for comparative analysis of solutions adopted in the maternity allowance in those countries. Each country finances payments within the Social Insurance System Schemes. However, a difference can be observed in the length and calculation techniques of the maternity or/and paternity allowance.

The details of a comparative analysis of the characterized solutions regarding instruments implemented in selected countries of pro-family policy as maternity benefit / parental benefit are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Comparison of maternity allowance in Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, and Poland*

Country	Financing	Length	Additional leave	Rate
Bulgaria	Sickness and maternity insurance	410 days Mandatory: 135 days	• Childcare allowance, up to the age of 2, payable BGN 380 (€194)	90% gross salary
Ireland	Social Insurance (PRSI)	156 days Mandatory: 24 days	• Additional maternity leave, 16 weeks, Free, • Parental leave, 2 weeks., € 245	€ 245
Poland	Sickness insurance as a part of Social Insurance	• 140 days (1 child), • 217 days (2 children), • 231 days (3 children), • 245 days (4 children), • 259 days (5≤ children), Mandatory: 98 days	• Additional maternity leave - 6 weeks (1 child) - or 8 weeks. (two or more children), 100% average monthly gross salary, • Parental leave, 26 weeks 60% average monthly gross salary	• 100% average gross earnings of the last 12 months before birth (maternity leave, paternity leave), • 80% average gross earnings of the last 12 months before birth (maternity leave + parental leave)
Germany	Health Insurance as a part of Social Insurance	14 months Mandatory: 8 weeks after birth and, in the case of premature or multiple births, 12 weeks after birth are generally not permitted to work.	• 2 months bonus leave for the fathers	• the health insurance fund pays a maximum of EUR 13 per day, • the rest is paid by the employer up to the amount of net salary (average earnings of the last 12 months before birth).

Source: *Authors' own study of the legal acts from selected countries.*

Comparing the differences in the selected countries, it is essential to present changes in the length and rate of the granted maternity allowances. The data in Table 2 shows the results of a comparative analysis carried out exclusively for maternity benefits for a woman or man who has one child on the expected date of birth. In order of comparableness of the data, all amounts have been converted into euro, at the exchange rates of the Central European Bank at the end of the year to which the data relate.

Table 2. Changes in the rate and length of maternity/parental allowances in Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland and Poland

Year	Poland	Ireland	Bulgaria	Germany
	Length [days] (Monthly rate)			
2009	140A (100%)	156A (70%) + 96R (0)	227A (90%) + 503B (BGN 240)	14 months B (65-67%) a minimum of 300 to a maximum of 1,800 euros per month for basic parental allowance and from 150 to 900 euros per month for parental allowance plus.
2010	140A (100%) + 14C (100%)	156A (80%) + 96R (0)	410A (90%) + 365B (BGN 240)	
2011	140A (100%) + 28C (100%)		410A (90%) + 365B (BGN 310)	
2012	140A (100%) + 42C (100%) + 182B (60%) or 364 (80%)	156A (230€) + 96R (0)	410A (90%) + 365B (BGN 240)	
2013			410A (90%) + 365B (BGN 340)	
2014		156A (235€) + 96R (0)	410A (90%) + 365B (BGN 380)	
2015		156A (240€) + 96R (0)	410A (90%) + 365B (BGN 380)	
2016				
2017				
2018				
2019				

Notes: A - Maternity allowance; B - Parental allowance; C - Additional maternity allowance; D - Maternity risk benefit.

Source: Authors' own study based on information from INLP&R. (2009-2019).

The analysis of the data presented in the table allowed the following trends to be observed:

- Bulgaria extended the length of the graded benefit from 227 days to 410 days in 2011. This was to force back the declining number of babies being born each year.
- In Ireland, on the other hand, in 2010 the benefit rate was increased from 70% to 80% of the weekly salary. Then, in 2014, a harmonised €230 allowance was introduced, which increased to €240 over several years.

Changes in birth and total fertility rates in selected countries 2009-2019 were presented in table 3. To ensure simple generational replacement, the fertility rate should be around 2.1. In the case of Poland, such a figure was recorded in the 1980s. In Ireland till 2011 this rate was close to the mentioned level, then a downward trend was observed. In 2019, the Irish fertility rate equalled 1.78, which does not allow for a simple generation replacement; however, it was the highest in Europe. Only an increase in the fertility rate was observed in Germany in the analysed years, although its level is lower than 1.57. In 2019 Bulgarian the fertility rate was 1.58, whereas the lowest level was noticed in Poland (1.36).

With less than 5 million, Ireland has one of the highest birth rates despite the downward trend. In the research time in Germany within the 83.02 million inhabitants, an upward trend in the birth rate can be observed (growth by 1.016, 12% between 2009-2019). In Poland, where the population exceeds 38 million, the coefficient between 2009 and 2019 shows a fluctuating trend with a decreasing level which reached 1.360 in 2019. About 7 million people live in Bulgaria. The birth rate in 2018

was 8.956 % and was the lowest of the selected countries, with a downward trend.

Table 3. *Changes in birth and total fertility rates in selected countries 2009-2019*

Specification	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	
Bulgaria	BR	9.958	9.826	9.693	9.561	9.428	9.334	9.239	9.145	9.050	8.956	9.686
	TFR	1.660	1.570	1.510	1.500	1.480	1.530	1.530	1.540	1.560	1.560	1.580
Ireland	BR	16.072	15.895	15.717	15.540	15.362	14.895	14.428	13.962	13.495	13.028	12.690
	TFR	2.060	2.050	2.030	1.980	1.930	1.890	1.850	1.810	1.770	1.750	1.780
Poland	BR	10.393	10.283	10.174	10.064	9.955	9.939	9.923	9.907	9.891	9.875	9.587
	TFR	1.400	1.410	1.330	1.330	1.290	1.320	1.320	1.390	1.480	1.460	1.360
Germany	BR	8.389	8.422	8.456	8.489	8.522	8.700	8.878	9.057	9.235	9.413	9.405
	TFR	1.360	1.390	1.390	1.410	1.420	1.470	1.500	1.600	1.570	1.570	1.530

Note: BR - Birth rate; TFR - Total fertility rates.

Source: Authors' own study based on Macrotrends (2020) and Eurostat (2020).

The analysis, based on interdependence between maternal benefit expenditure and the number of births, helped determine the role of this financial tool on the effectiveness of demographic processes. The results of the analysis are shown in Figure 1 and Table 4. The presented data allow observation changes in the studied variables. At the same time, the trend lines were added along with the coefficient of determination. The data analysis shows that the level of maternity allowance (€) and the number of births is comparable in Poland and Germany, and the data in Bulgaria and Ireland show similar values.

Table 4. *Maternity benefit payments (€) and number of births in selected countries*

Year	Bulgaria		Germany		Ireland		Poland	
	NB (K)	M&PLB (M €)	NB (K)	M&PLB (M €)	NB (K)	M&PLB (M €)	NB (K)	M&PLB (M €)
2009	81.0	159.5	665.1	1 010.0	75.3	331.3	417.6	556.1
2010	75.5	162.7	677.9	1 030.0	77.2	323.9	413.3	735.7
2011	70.8	150.1	622.7	1 040.0	75.1	309.1	388.4	732.6
2012	69.1	132.2	673.5	1 080.0	73.2	303.5	386.3	872.2
2013	66.6	135.1	682.1	1 160.0	69.4	292.6	369.6	1 026.4
2014	67.6	149.9	714.9	1 220.0	68.4	269.9	375.2	1 609.8
2015	66.0	166.1	737.6	1 270.0	66.4	259.8	369.3	1 805.8
2016	65.0	178.2	792.1	1 350.0	65.4	255.3	382.3	1 775.1
2017	64.0	190.2	784.9	1 410.0	63.9	259.1	402.0	1 847.2
2018	62.2	208.4	787.5	1 480.0	61.2	265.3	388.2	1 921.0
2019	61.5	226.6	778.1	1 520.0	59.8	267.2	375.0	1 973.0

Note: NB - Number of births; M&PLB - Maternity and paternity leave benefit payments

Source: Authors' own calculation on the base of data from Macrotrends, (2020) Eurostat, (2020), and Selected Countries Statistical Offices.

Since the end of the 1980s, the number of inhabitants in Bulgaria has been declining rapidly. Since then, the population has shrunk by just under 2 million. There is a risk

that it will decrease by another 1.5 million by 2030. That is why it is so important to support and encourage citizens to have children. People need to feel confident that they will have something to live for. In addition, many people emigrate in search of work or better living conditions. By analysing expenses and births, it can be observed that they are not related to each other most of the time. During the first two years, the number of births in Bulgaria decreased very quickly. In 2011, it was decided to extend the length of maternity leave from 227 days to 410. This operation slowed down the reduction in the number of births but did not help to stop or increase but caused that more was allocated to the benefit.

In 2012, there was an increase in expenditure on the benefit, which increased births a year later. In 2013, the rate of use for caring for young children up to 2 years of age was changed, the allowance increased from BGN 240 (€ 123) to BGN 310 (€ 159), thus equalling the minimum wage in Bulgaria. In 2014 the amount advanced to BGN 340 (€ 174) and was further increased to BGN 380 (€ 194). The increase in payments results from the more significant number of people entitled to the benefit, resulting from an increase in insured citizens.

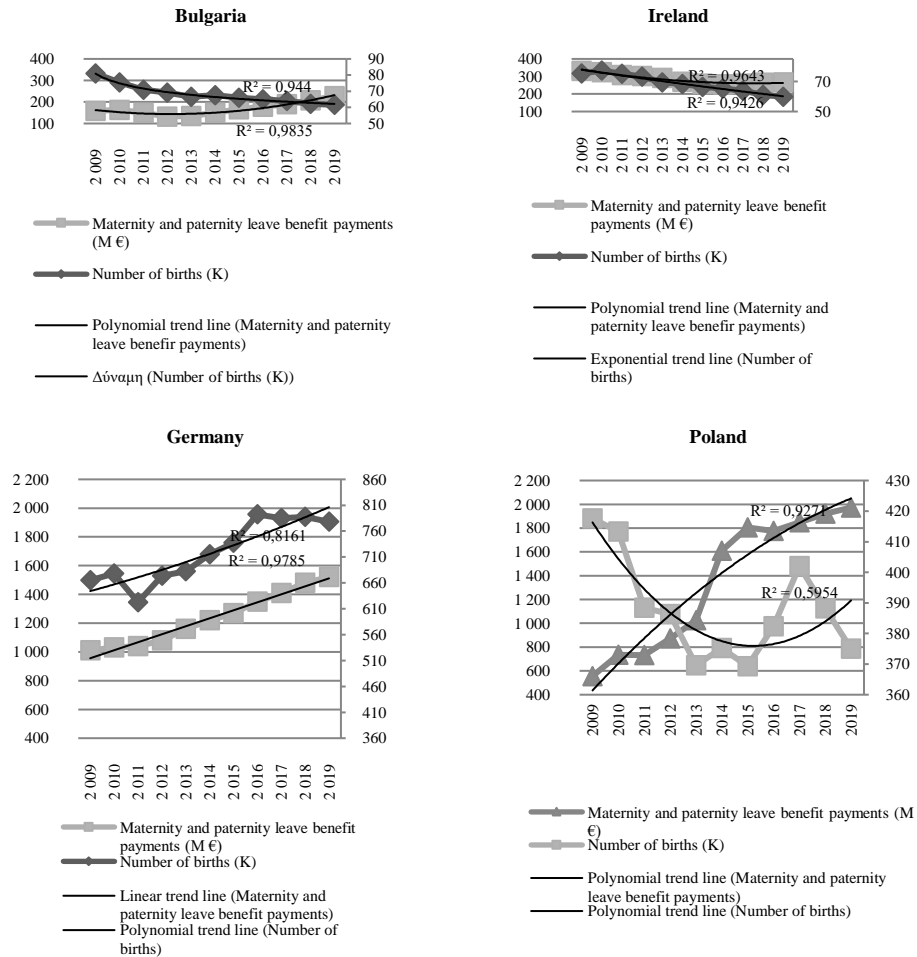
In 2018, the demographic crisis that had occurred in Bulgaria for several years drastically deepened. The main reasons are the difficult economic situation, high emigration of young people, and the tendency of women to postpone motherhood until later in life. In the case of Ireland, the overall trend is also downward. Fewer and fewer children are born, which is proportional to the benefits paid. In the years 2009-2016, the expenditure decreased, in some years less, and others more rapidly. By 2010, Ireland had one of the highest birth rates, showing how many children were born per 1,000 people. After this year, only a decrease in the number of births can be observed.

Many women choose not to become pregnant but pursue careers. The mean age of pregnant women is shifting. In 2014, the method of granting the allowance was changed, previously it was part of the salary, and a fixed amount of the budget of € 230 was introduced for all. In 2017, an additional period of paid allowance was introduced in the case of premature birth.

Women more often occupy higher positions at work, which means that if they decide to have a child, they suffer from the so-called "Double load." Although the family policy is gaining more and more attention in Ireland compared to other liberal democracies, the birth rate is falling.

However, given the number of people that grow each year, it is correct to say that many immigrants come to Ireland. In the years 2009-2013 in Poland, there is no correlation between births and payments for maternity benefits. In 2007, there was a financial crisis. Unemployment rose sharply, which was related to the fact that people could not afford to support children.

Figure 1. Maternity benefit payments (€) and number of births in selected countries



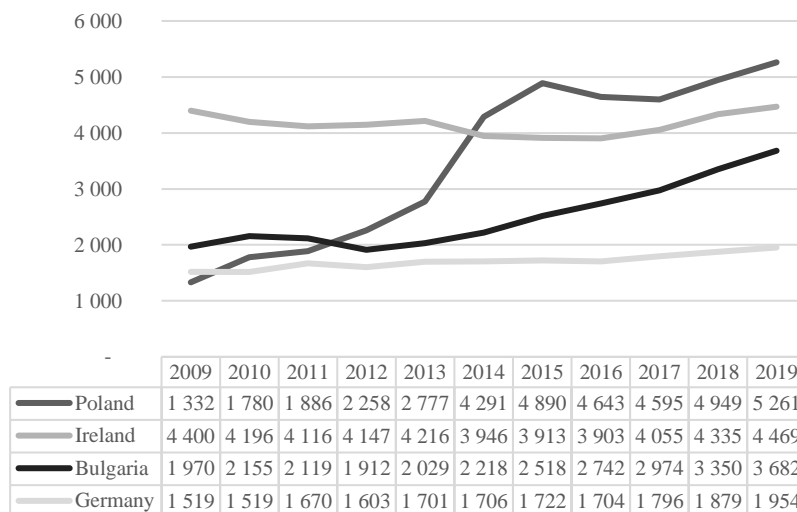
Notes: NB - Number of births; M&PLB - Maternity and paternity leave benefit payments
Source: Authors' own calculation on the base of data from Macrotrends, (2020) Eurostat, (2020), and Selected Countries Statistical Offices.

The phenomenon of a reduction in births can be observed until 2011. During this time, the expenditure on the benefit increased slightly. A year later, there were slight differences in conceptions. In 2013, the decline was so significant that the government considered introducing a program to encourage the population to have children. In 2013, parental leave was introduced; the mother could stay with the child longer as part of paid leave. In 2014, an increase in births was related to the rise in expenditure on maternity benefits. It may be caused by changes introduced in mid-2013 in the length of parental leave extended to 26 weeks and additional maternity leave to 6 weeks (Kadry, 2013).

The coefficient of determination for Poland shows less precise fitting relates to the

observed replacements caused by the introduction of the 500 Plus Program (500+) and the introduction of parental leave. During the year of arrival for births, but the costs continued to increase. Therefore, in 2015, the 500+ program was announced, aimed at supporting poorer families with children. It resulted in a significant increase in the number of children born. However, this does not affect the coverage as the 500+ is not financed by the Social Security Fund.

Figure 2. Average annual maternity benefit payments per child (€)



Source: ZUS (2009-2019) *Social Security Statistical Yearbook 2009-2019 and Selected Countries Statistical Offices*.

In 2016, the parental benefit was also introduced, which entitles parents who do not have paid sickness insurance contributions to PLN 1,000 (€ 229). It could be used by people employed under a contract of mandate, students, or the unemployed. This could be the reason for the rapid increase in births; people with lower or no earnings could decide to have a child. The cost of PLN 1,000 (€ 229) compared to the average maternity allowance of about PLN 2,400 (€ 550) was lower for the state in 2018; a significant decrease in births was observed. Those trends are caused by decreasing number of women who decide to become a mother. Moreover, the average age of mothers is shifting. Another reason for the decrease in the number of births in Poland is the emigration of Poles abroad, young people.

In the case of Germany, the coefficient of determination indicates a high fit of the trend line. At the same time, there is a perfect trend line fit in Ireland and Bulgaria. Comparing the average annual maternity benefits per child (in euro) in selected countries, from 2014, Poland paid the highest average child benefit (Figure 2). The main factor may be the amount of the allowance, which is 100% of the salary. In the case of Ireland, the average child benefit remains at a similar level. In 2014, there was a slight decrease when the wage supplement rate was changed to a fixed value. Growth

can also be seen in 2018.

The observed phenomena can be seen in the fact that women do not decide or later decide to have children. In Ireland, caring for children is very expensive. In addition, parents do not want to give up their careers; they are afraid of maintaining a balance between private and professional life. An upward trend is observed in Bulgaria in the studied years. This is due to the increase in the allowance and the decrease in births. The minimum wage and the number of people covered are growing.

5. Conclusions

Maternity allowance is an essential instrument of family policy. It performs a compensatory function, i.e., compensates for financial losses related to the birth of a child. Children are perceived as the future of society. Therefore, the entire population helps support and educate them. The purpose of the allowance is to ensure that women maintain their position at work and earn a living, which encourages them to have children. The woman is given the time she needs to recover from pregnancy and bond with her new-born baby.

The research questions posed at the paper's beginning helped present and analysed information in selected countries. All the selected countries differ significantly in the approach to maternity allowance:

- The duration of granting leave ranges from less than six months to more than one year.
- The differing amounts of benefits paid also indicate that there is a different approach in each country.
- It was checked what determines the part of the allowance.
- It happens that all mothers receive the same amount, regardless of income.

Analysing the statistical data, it was observed that the general tendency of births is downward. The observed trends are related to the changes that are taking place in society, i.e., changes in family models, changes in following the family's needs, including children, and the techniques. Times change, many people do not plan children, and they dedicate themselves to careers. They often decide to have children too late, and it is impossible or burdensome for biological reasons.

Summarizing the whole study, it can be said that perceiving the countries presented as a picture of the entire European Union; countries try to help families in various ways to make their lives easier. In some countries, aid is scant, but there is an awareness that there is a demographic crisis everywhere, and there is a strong emphasis on increasing the population. By verifying the hypothesis, it is impossible to notice the impact of the increase in maternity benefits on improving the country's situation in terms of family policy. There have been periods when the effect of these values was visible, but the overall trend of births is downward, even though the

number of benefits increased in most cases. This verification has been done using the interdependence analysis. Thanks to this tool, it was possible to determine whether there was a cause-effect relationship between the two examined features. A comparative study of births and expenses in selected countries was also performed. It was possible to determine which country spent the most annual funds on average for one child born.

As for the effectiveness of changes introduced in the family policy, there are abrupt increases in the number of births in the presented countries, but they last for a short time. Society is encouraged to have children, but over time the proposed approach becomes less attractive. Interdependence analysis was also used for this observation. The activities which caused the increase or decrease of births about the previous year were listed. To stabilize the growing trend of births, the state should eliminate women's fears of job loss, create favourable conditions for reconciling work and private life, reduce fears of lowering the material standard of living, facilitate the availability of housing for young people, and increase support including education and medical care. The decline in birth rate is a problem throughout Europe. Poland has one of the lowest fertility rates at 1.46 and the lowest among the countries discussed in the study.

However, there are examples of countries that have dealt with birth increases in the long term. For example, Ireland had population growth up to 2010 and a fertility rate close to simple generation replacement. Poland lacks long-term, consistent support programs. In 2016, the 500+ program was introduced, but the chart shows a lack of continuity in the effects. Citizens' priorities change, work and earnings are often higher than the desire to start a family. Following the example of Western countries, where there is minor gender division, and women occupy the same positions as men, climbing the career ladder takes a lifetime. To not fall out of this "race," they do not decide to have children.

It is impossible to force anyone to have children, but it is essential to assist families who want to have them but cannot financially decide. This barrier discourages having children due to the cost of giving birth and raising a child and indirectly due to the necessity to leave a job or career. An effective family policy is designed to create the best pronatalist policy, ensure the continuity of society, or promote the family. Still, it should support economic development, which will improve the demographic and economic situation of the country (Durasiewicz, 2012)

Summarizing the whole study, it can be said that perceiving the countries presented as a picture of the entire European Union; countries try to help families in various ways to make their lives easier. There is less aid in some countries than in others, but everywhere there is the awareness that there is a demographic crisis and a strong emphasis on increasing the population. The undertaken research allowed the authors to constitute the following recommendations:

- The public and private sectors may benefit from comparisons between countries regarding parent support presented in this article. The paper can provide guidelines for government members and policymakers in other countries. The latter emphasizes the developing SSC/BPO area, employing employees from all over the world, and creating new branches in various countries.
- Globalization forces organizations to know the regulations more widely due to the more effortless flow of human capital, economic and professional migrations, and the possibility of remote work for an employer located on the other side of the globe while respecting local law. Nowadays, employees are increasingly aware of their rights and applicable regulations. Therefore, internationally operating organizations are responsible for their knowledge and execution.
- This article provides relevant information for Human Resources teams. On the one hand, it allows HR specialists to familiarize themselves with the diversity of regulations governing the matter of the maternity allowance for both parents, and on the other hand, to correctly address the growing diversity and inclusion within the organization.

Also, the authors noticed that future research could be done in sociological sciences on the satisfaction of women with the approaches taken in their countries. One could compare the conclusions of this work regarding the finances of the issue with the relevance of the measures taken.

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