

## **Context of childcare availability and female employment in the Czech Republic**

The lack of childcare places is not critical anymore, but places are still lacking for the majority of women who want to start working after 2,5-3 years at home – kindergartens accept children who are 3 as of 1 September, the official start of the school year. Only August-born children fit this requirement. In most regions – particularly the more developed ones and in large cities and towns – less than half of children between 2-3 years are admitted. So, there's a vicious circle of women who don't expect to find a kindergarten and return to work, municipalities who don't offer kindergartens because women don't ask for them hard enough, and employers who don't expect women to return early from kindergarten. This contributes to the very high gender pay and employment gap – we see that the wage of women stagnates or drops in direct relation to motherhood.

Last year the parliament cancelled the entitlement of 2-year-old children to a kindergarten place. Prior to this, a long public debate showed that even many mothers, especially those with lower education, but also university-educated ones, don't wish to return earlier to workplace and feel that their time is spent better with their children. They feel that either their partner or the state should provide enough for them to stay at home. This is due also to the pressure of “experts”, but also of many psychologists who say that a child under 3 is developmentally unsuited for collective care. On the other hand, about ¼ of all families are single parent families and these women need and ask to go to work as soon as possible, but there's no special entitlement for them. There is a strong discourse saying “a child is best taken care of only by its mother”, but also a negative misogynist current, “if we let children under 3 into kindergartens, their mothers won't go to work, but they'll stay at home with their feet up, doing nothing”. Father's role in child's development is usually never mentioned. Our recent effort focuses on stressing these points:

1. Promoting of fathers' involvement and role in childcare
2. The quality of childcare – there is one teacher to a class of 28 children above 3 years of age.
3. The integration of child groups, that are mainly paid from the ESF grants, into a system supervised by municipalities which already manage and finance public kindergartens – this guarantees that the system will be able to cover needs of the vast majority of parents, without unnecessary accumulation of child groups in some places and their lack in others.