

# SOCIALIZATION OF CHILDCARE IN SLOVENIA AND ITS IMPACT ON INFORMAL CARE MARKETS

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**This article examines how family and care policies related to childcare frame formal and informal care, including the status of work and positions of workers who perform unregulated childcare in private households in Slovenia. Within the conceptual frame of (de)familization of childcare, current childcare policies in Slovenia are analyzed and the peculiarities of the Slovenian situation compared to other Central and Eastern European countries are pointed to: an informal childcare market characterized by live-out arrangements and high standards of individual childcare, performed by native retired women and students. The empirical material analyzed in the article incorporates results from two qualitative studies conducted in Slovenia researching informal paid care work and the processes of the relocation of childcare, focusing particularly on the intersections of informal (both paid and unpaid) and formal childcare.**

**Keywords:** Childcare; Care Policies; (De)Familization; Informal Childcare Markets; Childcarers; Slovenia

Care policies, in particular systems of parental leave and remuneration, as well as the provision of childcare services for preschool children, are the mechanisms through which the state impacts on and constructs the range of paid domestic work such as informal childcare (Fodor et al. 2002; Polese et al. 2014). In Slovenia, a postsocialist former Yugoslavian country with the particular politics of nonaligned countries, the dual-career family model (Lister et al. 2007) has predominated, with a large proportion of women participating in full-time, noninterrupted employment since the 1960s. Policies granting parental leave, family benefits, and public childcare services for preschool and school children originated in the socialist period of the former Yugoslavia. These policies aimed to enable women to enter the labor market to offset the shortage of working men after the Second World War under conditions of rising industrialization, but they were also motivated by an ideology of women's economic emancipation, independence, and gender equality. However, the socialist ideology of gender equality built on equal participation of women in the labor market did not question women's role as primary caregivers in the family (Boh and Černigoj Sadar

1980; Kocourková 2011). Since there was a strong tendency against part-time employment of women, other mechanisms needed to be developed in order to disburden women from care work in the family, such as public day care, canteens, and laundries (Boh and Černigoj Sadar 1980:31).

In the 1990s during the transition to the capitalist democracy, Slovenia did not face the introduction of long parental leaves, mass closures of nurseries, and consequent processes of redomestication of women, as opposed to some other Eastern European countries (the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary) that experienced socialism as part of the Soviet bloc (Saxonberg 2011). On the contrary, Slovenia preserved and even upgraded the socialist legacy of a public, institutional, and good-quality subsidized childcare, and the leave scheme—and consequently the high rate of women’s full-time employment continued. It is a common view (and economic necessity) in contemporary Slovenia that both women and men should contribute to the family income and that being employed for women is a precondition for equality and independence. On the other hand, with the new socioeconomic system the rise of more traditionalist views on care, employment, and gender have been observed in the last decade. If in a 1992 public opinion poll only 20 percent of women and men agreed that a child would suffer if the mother was employed, twenty years later, a public opinion poll found that as many as 40 percent of women and 60 percent of men agreed with this statement (Jogan 2014).

Research on values shows that the traditional roles of women as housewives and mothers are an important source of identity for Slovenian women; however, the emancipation derived from full-time employment and economic independence remain highly valued priorities of equal importance (Šadl 2006). These contradictory gender norms lead to a work-family conflict, as women have to combine career with motherhood, housekeeping, and partnership, which in general creates a chaotic life, constant lack of time, and, most burdensome, fatigue and exhaustion. Domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, tidying, and ironing are time-consuming, intensive, and tiring work, and as women are often exhausted from paid work, outsourcing of these chores has become increasingly frequent. This is one of the strategies middle-class women with higher education use to negotiate the contradictory requirements of the family, paid work, and gender norms. Consequently, in contemporary Slovenia the phenomenon of domestic workers, who do the “invisible jobs” in private households, has become more common. In 2009 a quantitative survey of the extent of domestic service showed that 5 percent of Slovene households employed domestic workers, who sometimes regularly and sometimes only occasionally perform cleaning in 81 percent of households, care for the elderly in 23 percent of households, and childcare in only 10 percent of households (Hrženjak 2012).<sup>1</sup> These figures are meaningful, and in this article we follow the thesis that the high degree of socialization and defamilization of childcare in Slovenia is a crucial factor influencing the low rates of informal paid childcare (compared to elder care and cleaning). Slovenia, as we discuss later in the article, has specific characteristics that set it apart from other European countries. We argue that

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<sup>1</sup> Some services may be combined, for instance cleaning and elder care.

informal care markets emerge at points where the state and its policies are missing. First we will outline our theoretical framework focusing on the concept of (de) familization of childcare as a factor structuring informal childcare markets; then we will analyze the current childcare system in Slovenia and point to the elements that provide for the defamilization of childcare and shape the needs of families for informal childcare services; in third part we will examine the empirical evidence about who is working as a paid childcarer in Slovenia, in what arrangements, and why.

## DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The empirical material analyzed in the article comes from two sources. The first is the research project "Informal Reproductive Work: Trends in Slovenia and the EU,"<sup>2</sup> a qualitative study conducted from January to April 2009 and consisting of 31 semi-structured interviews: 10 interviews with cleaners, 10 interviews with childcarers, and 11 interviews with caregivers for the elderly. Interview questions related to previous work experiences, motives for doing this type of work, positive and negative experiences, relations with family members, reliance on income from work, potential connections with other care workers, and their plans for the future. Among paid childcarers eight were women and two were men (both students), living in Ljubljana or its vicinity. Two groups prevailed among interviewees: students between ages of 23 and 26 and pensioners 56–64 years of age. The majority of pensioners finished secondary school, while students were in the process of earning university degrees. The majority (nine) of childcarers identified themselves as Slovenes, while one respondent was Macedonian.

The second source of empirical evidence comes from the first author's PhD dissertation "Ethics of Care, Gender, and Family: The Processes of Relocation of Care between Private and Public Spheres" (Humer 2009), which explored the impact of relocation of childcare on the distribution and organization of childcare among parents, grandparents, and informal childcarers. Research was conducted between January and June 2008 and included semistructured interviews with 36 parents of preschool children, 12 grandparents who daily or occasionally looked after grandchildren, and 12 childcarers who did informal paid childcare work daily or occasionally. Among parents 20 were women and 16 men, living in both two-parent and single-parent families. The average age of interviewees was 31.2 years, while the youngest interviewee was a 25-year-old woman and the oldest was a 42-year-old man. Among grandparents there were 10 women and 2 men who daily or occasionally looked after grandchildren. The average age of the interviewees was 62.9 years, while the youngest was a 53-year-old woman and the oldest was a 76-year-old man. More than half of interviewees (seven) were childminding two or more grandchildren. Among 12 interviews with paid informal childcarers, there were 11 women and 1 man (a student) living in urban neighborhoods, mainly in Ljubljana and its vicinity. Two age groups prevailed among informal paid childcarers: students between 20 and 25 years and

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<sup>2</sup> The project was funded by the Slovenian Research Agency from 2008 to 2010.

pensioners who were on average 57 years of age. They all identify as Slovenes. Interviews with paid childcarers focused on their experiences with unregulated care work, the reasons they decided to perform childcare, their relations with family members, in particular with “their employers” (parents), their average day doing childcare, and their perspectives on the future. In both studies the interviewees were recruited by snowball and link-tracing methods; all interviews were recorded and transcribed to enable detailed analysis.

Apart from this empirical material, we also refer to data and materials on the Slovenian childcare system that were collected and analyzed within the research project “Caring Work between Individualization, Globalization, and Socialization.”<sup>3</sup>

The demographic data from both empirical studies show that the large majority of informal paid childcarers are women of Slovene ethnic background. Only one childcarer identified herself as a Macedonian who moved to Slovenia as an internal migrant in the 1980s when both countries were still part of Yugoslavia. On the other hand, the demographic data from interviews from the first study with domestic workers who performed cleaning and elder care in private homes show that approximately half of the respondents are migrants from other former Yugoslavia states to Slovenia. Hence, demographic data describe the segregation and hierarchization of informal markets of domestic work in private households according to the ethnic background of the domestic workers. Childcare is deemed a socially recognized, important, responsible, and skilled form of work and it seems that this field of informal care work employs only citizens of Slovenian ethnic background. On the other hand, the least valued and most labor-intensive work of elder care and cleaning is open to migrants coming mostly from former Yugoslavian states, either as internal migrants in the 1980s or as “new” migrants during the Yugoslav war of the 1990s or right after the war in the hope of better opportunities, which were limited in the former Yugoslavia by years of war. Between 1960 and 1980 (when Slovenia was still part of the former Yugoslavia) there were intensive internal economic migrations from less prosperous rural parts of Yugoslavia to Slovenia. Many young women were recruited through local employment agencies in poorly paid, feminized sectors of work as cleaners, factory workers, and caregivers in Slovenia. Today many of them are retired, with low pensions, and represent one major group of migrant women in informal care markets performing cleaning and eldercare (Hrženjak 2012).

## **CHILDCARE BETWEEN FAMILIZATION, SOCIALIZATION, AND MARKETIZATION**

The politics of care depend on assumptions about what care is, how it should be performed, and who should manage it. Familialistic policies encourage women’s unpaid care work at home by ensuring families the right to time for care through long maternity leave schemes, indirect and direct financial benefits, and other social rights related to caregiving, such as individual retirement rights, partial inclusion into other

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<sup>3</sup> The project is funded by the Slovenian Research Agency during the period from 2014 to 2017.

schemes of social security, derived rights for unemployed housewives, and special rights for mothers (Tsuji 2011). However, because of the shift in employment patterns towards the dual-earner model and also because of gender equality politics framing the equality of women as equal participation in the labor market, European states have tended to redefine the division of care responsibilities in order to establish a new balance among providers of care: the family, the market, and the state (Bettio and Plantenga 2004). When women are no longer available for unpaid care work at home due to their inclusion in paid work, a need for defamilization of care occurs, and consequently care has to be provided by either the state or the market. From this perspective familization of childcare appears to be in contradiction with employment trends (and women's equality) as it stands as an ideology positioning family (and within it women as mothers) in the role of primary care provider. The care deficit and the problems of work and family reconciliation therefore derive to a great extent from policies that insist on familization of care despite changed patterns in employment and gender relations. Hence, defamilistic policies aim to unburden families (chiefly women) of care by providing public services or financing market mechanisms. Defamilization leads to monetization of care, transforming women's unpaid work in the family into paid formal employment of care workers in public institutions (kindergartens, homes for the elderly), while the accessibility of these services from the perspective of the service user is structured through social citizenship regulations in a universal, selectively universal, or residual way (León 2014). In a universal model, characteristic especially of Scandinavian countries, the state ensures access to public services to all in need of care through extensive public benefits; in a selectively universal model public care, either in the form of financial benefits or in the form of services, is available to those who are the most in need; while in a residual model the state ensures care through the system of public social transfers only to the poorest social groups based on the principle of minimal needs.

Care policies determine the level of commodification of care services. While the defamilization and socialization of care through organization of public care services presuppose the commodification of women's work—formerly unpaid care work in the family is transformed into paid employment of women in care institutions—the care service itself gains the status of a public good of special social importance and is not commodified. However, with measures promoting a shift in providing care services from the state to the market—these are the measures that favor financial benefits (i.e., cash-for-care benefits) over service organization—work as well as service becomes commodified, and that, except for the wealthy, leads toward the refamilization of care (Mahon and Robinson 2011). The question of whether the state should ensure mainly financial benefits or also services is key in determining how the state connects or divides family and care. Measures favoring the state's provision of financial benefits over its organization of public care services do ensure the right to care; however they also support the privatization of care and private solutions for its organization, either in the form of familization of care where the financial benefits are directed to a family caregiver or in the form of marketization where care is bought on the formal or informal market (Hobson, Lewis, and Siim 2002).

Care policies also influence the level of formalization and professionalization or deformalization and deprofessionalization of care work. Those policies that are directed more toward the familization of care, ensuring financial benefits instead of public services, create conditions for deformalization and deprofessionalization of care, as under such conditions a great extent of care is transferred onto the family and/or informal markets of domestic work. And vice versa: the greater the extent of care services provided by the state, not only through financial benefits, the greater the level of formalization and professionalization of care. Research (Williams 2011; Van Hooren 2014) shows that the relationship between financial benefits and organization of services determined by policies makes a decisive impact on the extent of informal care markets and the recruitment of migrant women into home-based care work. It is important not only to what extent the state takes over the responsibility for care, but also how the state carries out its responsibility: favoring financial benefits over ensuring public services means promoting informal care markets and care work by migrant women, because users and families tend to organize needed care with the financial resources available to them in the most economically efficient way. On the other hand, however, the existence of high-quality public and universally accessible care services significantly decreases the extent of informal care markets, including the globalization of care work. Within this framework we are now turning to our analysis of the Slovenian childcare system, arguing that it is to a high degree socialized and defamilialized and that as such it has an important impact on shaping informal paid childcare.

## THE PUBLIC CHILDCARE SYSTEM IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenia the childcare system, including care for children ages one to three, is an integral part of family and education policy that defines and determines the relations between the state, its institutions, and families/parents. For the purposes of this article, parental leave schemes and the institutional childcare system will be analyzed as two main mechanisms with which the state directly influences informal paid childcare.

In the 1970s the leave policy in Slovenia followed the Swedish model of short maternity leave and long parental leave,<sup>4</sup> with the possibility of leave being shared between partners (Korintus and Stropnik 2009; Javornik 2014).<sup>5</sup> The possibility of sharing parental leave between partners represents an important milestone in the history of parental leave and was a political novelty, recognizing the caring role of fathers and the importance of gender equality in the distribution of care work within the family (Jogan 2001). High-quality schemes of parental rights and financial ben-

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<sup>4</sup> In Slovenia three months of maternity leave is given exclusively to mothers in the first months after the child is born, while nine months of parental leave can be shared by parents and starts when maternal leave is finished. In addition, there is a third type of parental leave—paternity leave as a nontransferable right of fathers.

<sup>5</sup> Sweden and Slovenia have been the pioneer countries in breaking the exclusion of unmarried couples from parental rights. Since the 1970s unmarried couples have the same parental rights as married couples.

efits, namely those rights that enable parents to take care of children, are, as we already mentioned, a legacy of the Yugoslav socialist system. The parental leave scheme that is currently in place was introduced in 1986, granting 365 days of leave: 105 days of maternity leave and 260 days of parental leave, the latter can be freely shared between parents but in reality is mostly taken by women. Financial compensation for maternity and parental leave is covered by the state, not by the employer, and amounts to 100 percent of the previous salary (in 2012 it was temporarily lowered to 90 percent of the previous salary due to austerity measures). From the European comparative perspective, the overall duration of childcare leave in Slovenia (12 months altogether: 3 months of maternity and 9 months of parental) can be categorized as medium long (roughly speaking, short leaves of 3 to 7 months are more typical for Western European countries, while longer leaves of up to 3 years are more common in Eastern Europe). This enables women to reintegrate into the labor market after one year of absence due to birth giving. Childcare leave is fully paid and is counted as years of service for retirement benefits.

In addition to maternity and parental leaves, in 2003 paternity leave was introduced. It took effect gradually and consisted of a shorter paid part (15 days) and a longer unpaid part (75 days). In 2014 the paid part of paternal leave was extended from 15 to 30 days on account of the reduced unpaid part. The main aim of introducing paternity leave was to foster a more equal division of care for children between women and men, representing an important alternative to the outsourcing of care work to informal paid childcarers.

The development of public childcare for preschool children was particularly intense between 1971 and 1985: in this period 70 percent of existing childcare institutions were built (Vojnovič 1996). From 1980 the share of preschool children (from the age of 11 months to 6 years) included in daycare increased to a great extent: 7.7 percent of preschool children were included in daycare in 1961, 15 percent in 1971, 41 percent in 1981, and as many as 76.9 percent in 2014 (Stropnik and Šircelj 2008; Statistični urad Republike Slovenije 2015). Currently, Slovenia has a well-developed unified system of preschool care provided by kindergartens. Public kindergartens are established by municipalities, while private kindergartens are founded by private persons or companies; however, privatization of childcare is very limited: currently 93 percent of kindergartens are public and only 7 percent are private (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije 2015). The public kindergarten network is mainly financed by public resources, mostly by municipalities, and in part also by parents' share, which is calculated on the basis of their income and assets. In 2008 the government introduced free institutional care for the second child and all following children, but in 2012 payment of 30 percent of the price for the second child was reintroduced due to austerity measures, while care for subsequent children remained free.

The system of public childcare is characterized by relatively high-quality working conditions. Although public childcare is an exceedingly feminized field of work, employees have secondary or tertiary degrees, most have full-time and permanent contracts, and their salary is close to the average salary in Slovenia. Teachers in public kindergartens are unionized and have a strong public voice.

To sum up, childcare in Slovenia is socialized to a great extent and excels in universalism, following the principles of ensuring equal opportunities to all children along with gender equality by providing conditions for women's participation in paid work. While in a child's first year the state enables family care through a scheme of paid parental leaves, for children aged over one year measures of familization of care are substituted by measures of defamilization through the organization of a public, universally accessible, high-quality kindergarten network, which consequently provides a high level of professionalization and formalization of childcare. In situations where the state takes over a substantial part of childcare, commercial or informal care markets and globalization of childcare remain limited because demand is low. We will now turn to an interpretation of the "lived experiences" of informal childcarers in Slovenia, to analyze, based on the interview data, who they are, what their working arrangements are, and why families need them.

## INFORMAL UNPAID AND PAID CHILDCARE

Studies show that less than 4 percent of families in Slovenia choose private paid childcare for preschool children aged one year and above (Rakar et al. 2010). The maternal ideology, wherein the child's needs and their satisfaction are central to a notion of "good motherhood" and when being a good mother means taking care of a child at home (Williams 2005), leads to favoring familial over institutional care in most families. A small number of parents, mainly in urban environments and in wealthier strata, use private childcare, especially for one- to-three-year-old children, by employing a private childcarer who works either in their homes or in care providers' homes within the realm of the gray economy.<sup>6</sup> As has been already mentioned, in contrast to many European countries, in Slovenia migrant women do not work in informal paid childcare. Reasons for this can be found in the fact that Slovenia is not a target country of feminization of migration and therefore has a small number of female migrants, working mostly informally in cleaning and elder care. Childcare is a highly valued area of care work, and there is a distrust (linked also to nationalism and xenophobia) of migrant women who are not seen as capable and reliable childcarers (Hrženjak 2012). A small share of families preferring familial over institutional childcare for young children, mainly those with fewer economic resources and from rural areas, tend to organize childcare through intergenerational links with grandparents. This is possible also due to the early retirement of women, on average at age 58. The key reason for the low proportion of informal paid childcare in Slovenia, however, lies in the fact that the state ensures and also financially subsidizes a high-quality public kindergarten network and does not support private care with cash-for-care subsidies. Parents who elect private paid childcare outside the public kindergarten network hence lose the

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<sup>6</sup> By gray economy we refer to the situation in Slovenia where informal paid childminding takes place in private households through one-on-one arrangements regarding working conditions and payment without written contracts. Parents pay childcarers most often "under the table," which means that taxes from earnings are not paid to the state. It is unregulated and disfavored by the state for both workers and parents.



right to their subsidy and have to pay full price. Beside a small proportion of care for one- to-three-year-old children in private homes in urban environments and wealthier strata, informal paid childcare in Slovenia can also be found in occasional and short-term forms: for instance, short-term afternoon or evening childminding during workdays and, to a lesser extent, during weekends; taking a child for a walk so a mother on maternal leave can rest a bit; care for a sick child; or accompanying a child to leisure activities. Kindergarten opening hours (from 6 a.m. until 5 p.m.) and a standard rule that a child can spend a maximum of nine hours per day in the kindergarten create difficulties for some parents because of the prevailing culture of long workdays and an increase in nonstandard working hours. In such cases informal afternoon childminding responds to these needs. These forms of childcare services are not ensured by the state but rather are increasingly offered by private agencies and informal paid childminders, especially students and female pensioners.

### INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY

The data show that the extent of private childcare is limited mainly to children between one and three years old. Some parents, who want the child to enter public childcare only at the age of three, rely on the intergenerational solidarity of grandparents who look after grandchildren on daily basis. As observed in interviews with grandparents and parents, intergenerational solidarity is taken for granted and is based on moral attachment and interdependency. Childminding performed by grandparents is most often understood in terms of mutual expectations of support, and for both parents and grandparents is the preferred option for the youngest children. As one grandparent emphasized:

It was pretty much spontaneous and normal that when I retire, I'll start looking after grandchildren ... and I know, if I needed something, also in financial terms, I know I can always count on my children. (female pensioner, 59)

Even when in care of a grandmother, the child enters kindergarten at the age of three and grandparents help with occasional childminding, especially when the child is sick or during afternoons and evenings. Grandparents' childcare covers complete care including playing, outdoor activities, and driving children to afternoon activities, which eases the pressure on work-life balance of working parents. Grandparents represent a very important social pillar, a support for their adult children with family obligations, in particular with childcare, but also household work and financial support (Humer 2009).

### CHILDCARE IN THE GRAY ECONOMY

Another form of informal childcare in private households is paid childcare provided mostly in the gray economy. The extent of paid informal childcare in private households, as we already mentioned, is very limited and mainly found in urban areas, provided by local women exclusively in live-out arrangements. Informal childcarers are largely represented by students, female pensioners, and pensioner couples. Payment is mainly understood as an additional income on which they are not existentially

dependent, therefore joy and love for children, as stated by many respondents, are the motives driving informal childcarers to do this kind of work. Not being existentially dependent on these earnings and working in live-out arrangements mean that entering and exiting informal paid childcare are usually the care provider's voluntary choice, which also influences power relations with employer-parents by providing informal childcarers with more leverage over their working arrangements. The empowerment of local childcarers is particularly evident with students who perform childminding through Sezam, Association of Parents and Children, a platform offering occasional childminding in Ljubljana.<sup>7</sup> Sezam has a policy that childminding should not involve any domestic work, and therefore students strictly decline employer's requests for additional domestic chores (frequently requested are vacuuming, dish washing, and cleaning).

Students, who represent one of the main groups of informal paid childminders, are either members of Sezam or work individually. They perform occasional afternoon and evening childminding, which includes picking the child up from kindergarten and staying with him/her for a couple of hours until the parents return from work, playing, accompanying the child to afternoon activities, and offering already prepared food and drinks. Some students also perform childminding on a regular basis, every day for a few hours, and they report that they also prepare a meal for the child and occasionally do some domestic work. The money earned from childminding is more like pocket money, since usually the students' parents financially support them during their studies. Students' childminding addresses parents' difficulties with work-family balance; in particular it fills the gap between the extended working hours of employed parents and kindergarten hours, while evening childminding mainly responds to parents' needs to spend some time together apart from their children.

Female pensioners between ages of 56 and 64 represent another group of informal childcare providers in private households. Usually they start with childminding soon after their retirement, when many of them reported they wished to stay active and earn a bit of extra money. Regular or occasional childminding in their or in the child's home represents possible options for earning income in addition to their pensions. Mostly female pensioners are asked by someone from their social network if they would take on childminding, and they rarely looked for the possibility themselves. Since this work is performed within the gray economy, communication and recommendations about childminders are passed on by word of mouth.

Similarly to female pensioners, pensioner couples also participate in informal paid childcare to supplement their pensions. They offer informal daily childcare in their homes for a small group of children (up to six children) from Monday through Friday for eight or more hours per day, which includes complete care such as nursing, preparing meals, and playing. The age of children is mostly from one to three years, and care involves a lot of physical work like lifting children, carrying them, and so on.

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<sup>7</sup> It is a small NGO located in Ljubljana that offers occasional childminding in the child's home by linking families with students willing to earn some pocket money by providing occasional care. It was established in 1989 and is financially supported by the municipality of Ljubljana (the capital of Slovenia).

Most often women look after nursing, cooking, and cleaning up after children, while their husbands take on playing and helping out by lifting children, feeding them, and the like. Even though this is physically demanding work for elderly people, as many of them reported being exhausted by the end of the day, it is, according to their statements, morally rewarding and satisfying to help working parents, to be surrounded by small children, to stay active, and to earn a bit. As one female pensioner explained:

Soon after retirement I decided it's about time to do something, you cannot knit all day long ... and at the beginning, I have to be honest, it was because of the money, but now it's because we love children and people need our help. (female pensioner, 59 years)

The pensioners who have to provide care for their own grandchild include him/her in the group of children they care for. The informal everyday paid childcare by female pensioners and pensioner couples is closer to the formal childcare provided by kindergarten, as they offer similar services, albeit situated in the gray economy and thus with tailored and negotiable rules agreed upon by both parents and childcarers.

### **THE INTERSECTIONS OF GENDER, AGE, AND CLASS IN LOCAL CHILDCARE CHAINS**

Although none of the three groups of informal childcare providers are existentially dependent on income from informal childminding, there are important class differences among them. These earnings improve the financial situation of female pensioners, especially those whose pension is very low. According to some data, more than half of pensioners in Slovenia receive a pension below the poverty threshold, and of these almost two thirds are women (Humer and Roksandić 2013).

The average pay varies to a great extent and differs based on the frequency of childminding, the region, and the care provider (NGO, private agency, individual person). The short-term, occasional or regular childminding varied from 3 to 6 euros per hour, depending on whether childminding is performed during the day or evening/night hours, whether it takes place in the capital or in other parts of Slovenia, and whether the work is provided by Sezam, who offers more affordable childminding than do private agencies or individual care providers in the gray economy. For daily childminding, pay varies between 200 and 400 euros per child per month, which includes nursing, preparing meals (breakfast, snacks, and home-cooked lunches), and playing. These prices are the same as for the public kindergartens, but the important difference is that the payment for kindergarten is subsidized by the municipality and is based on the family's income, while private childcare is not subsidized and parents have to pay full price on their own. The subsidy is not in the form of cash-for-care paid to parents but is paid by the municipality directly to the kindergartens. This state policy of subsidizing public childcare represents a crucial element diverting parents away from private arrangements.

Interviews show that none of the three groups of informal childminders would be doing any other work for the same wages, as the added value of care work is recognized by childminders. Students mainly emphasize gaining experience when work-

ing with children that can be useful, either in their personal lives when they become parents or in their profession once they start working as teachers in kindergartens or elementary schools. As one of the students emphasized: "I don't think I would do anything else for this money, because I like it. You get a lot from this work, like experience, which is very valuable" (female student, 24 years). The older informal childcarers appreciated helping working parents as validation that they are still active and contributing to the society. The value of helping others is an important factor, as stressed by one of the interviewees: "Parents, they don't have any other option for childcare, we are here to help them" (female pensioner, 59 years, childminding with her husband in their home). Informal paid childcare represents a labor of love that just happens to be compensated with money. The ethics of care prevails over the ethics of work within this sector, as all interviewees perceive childcare to be a form of helping others. The emotional value of informal paid care is one aspect of this work, bringing satisfaction, moral reward, and added value, which works to offset the rather low wages. As Joan Tronto (2002) notes, if this work is devalued in terms of payment, it is highly valued in terms of its moral rewards, originating in the caring relationship between the person who takes care and the person who receives it.

However, interviews also show that the caring relationship is often negotiated by employers. Students emphasized that parents try to lower the prices for childminding. One of the interviewees described her experience when parents tried to negotiate the price, framing childminding as a "fun" activity rather than work:

My price is 5 euros per hour, and I always say to parents that the price is not the only important thing, that we should first meet and see if we can get along with each other. Sometimes they immediately say that 5 euros per hour is too much. And when I ask them how much they are willing to pay, they would say "Well, 2.5 euros for playing with a child," which also tells you something about how they value childminding. (female student, 23 years)

In a few cases students also reported that they were not paid the whole amount agreed upon, while elderly childcarers reported quite the opposite, sometimes receiving "tips" or little gifts. In some situations female pensioners lowered the price if they recognized that the parents really needed them but could not afford to pay for childminding.

These differences between students and pensioners and their relations with parent-employers regarding pay and other arrangements point to the importance of age in local childcare chains in Slovenia. In distinction from students, female pensioners often also cooked meals for the child and/or family, did some vacuuming, or cleaned up after a meal as part of the "package," understanding childcare and household tasks as intertwined. The difference is not only in the duration of childminding (a few hours versus a whole day), but also in the workers' differing perceptions of childminding and their role as informal childcare providers.

Students perceived childminding more as work and focus exclusively on the child, thus separating childcare from household work. They see their role closer to the professional role and some also in the context of their future professions. Child-

mindings is, for students, an additional and occasional activity they engage in alongside their studies and other activities. On the other hand, pensioners recognized childminding more as informal help to young families and as an extension of care within family, illustrated by their perception of their role as a *substitute grandmother* for whom childminding is the main daily activity. As reported by older childminders, they felt respected by parents due to their own parenting and grandparenting experiences. The flexibility and adjustability of female pensioners to parents' requests are quite common, in particular where childminding is regular (daily) and is performed in the childminder's home. Female pensioners and pensioner couples reported that sometimes parents would come to pick up a child an hour or more later than agreed, which they accepted with understanding and empathy towards working parents with whom they have good relations. In these cases, no additional hours are charged to the parent. Such situations also point to an understanding of childminding more as a support to working parents than as actual work.

In addition to class and age, gender is an important category for understanding local care chains in Slovenia. Although the majority of private childcarers are women, this work is not completely feminized, as local male students and female pensioners' partners also participate in informal paid childcare. Male students emphasized that parents largely prefer female childminders, but male childminders are in demand by parents of boys and they are expected to provide care in "a manner appropriate to boys" (Hrženjak and Humer 2011:113). While in pensioner couples, male pensioners take on an "assistant" role, helping and supporting their female partners, who are the main private childcare providers, with physically more demanding tasks. Indeed, in this way the inclusion of men in informal paid childcare does not contribute to the defeminization of the field; it rather strengthens traditional gender roles and reaffirms childcare as a "woman's domain."

## CONCLUSION

This article showed that the socialist legacy of well-developed, high-quality, and subsidized public daycare for children from one to six years of age and a parental leave scheme that has remained practically unchanged in the postsocialist period (even upgraded with paternity leave in 2003) are the two main mechanisms with which the state directly impacts informal paid childcare in Slovenia.

We have argued that the Slovene childcare system is highly socialized and defamilialistic, enabling and financially covering parents who stay home with their child for a year and subsequently offering highly professionalized, quality, subsidized public daycare universally accessible to all preschool children. The public childcare system importantly limits the extent of informal paid childcare. The figure that fewer than 4 percent of families opt for informal paid childcare is meaningful, as it confirms the marginal position of informal childcare in the context of the childcare system in Slovenia. Within paid domestic work, informal childcare makes up the smallest proportion compared to cleaning and elder care. Research shows that families, if they can afford it, increasingly opt to outsource domestic work in order to gain a few hours of family time.

For regular full-time (mostly for children under three years) or occasional informal childcare, parents more often turn to grandparents than hire an informal childcarer. This needs to be understood as a consequence of the strong intergenerational solidarity in Slovenia, in the context of a maternal ideology where care for the child in the home environment by the mother or other family member is the preferred option in most families. In addition to informal unpaid childcare provided by grandparents, informal paid childcare is usually provided by female pensioners, pensioner couples, and students, mostly in the gray economy and exclusively based on live-out arrangements.

Although this work is low paid, and none of the three groups are economically dependent on their earnings, the category of class is relevant in the informal childcare market. Female pensioners supplement their low pensions with care work in the gray economy in order to improve their financial situation, while for students the payment is more like pocket money. Informal paid childcare is highly valued work in Slovenia and is ethnicized, as childcare providers are native Slovene young and elder women. The age of the childminder influences the relationship between employer and employee, whereby on the basis of "work experience" elder childminders seem to be more respected and valued by parents but, on the other hand, are also more expected to adjust to parent's needs.

Informal paid childcare, as shown, is a morally rewarding work and desirable in distinction from other paid domestic work, such as cleaning, but also in contrast to public childcare, as it carries on the traditional notion of childcare as nonwork, or a labor of love that care providers perform not primarily for money but out of their love for children. The emotional relations with children and their joy and love for children mask the unequal relations between parents and childminders and are understood as "adding value" to the low wages. Apart from low pay, and a few cases where informal childminders were paid less than agreed upon or payment was delayed, no cases of abuse or exploitation were observed in either study. It seems that the context of informal paid childcare, which is organized as a live-out situation and on which private childcare providers are not economically dependent, gives them greater autonomy and independence.

Informal paid childcare, as argued in this article, seems to be a positive solution for both groups, parents and informal childcarers, offering specific small-scale services that are not provided by the state. However, this work is performed in the gray economy and as such puts parents, children, and private informal childcarers in a risky situation. In the wider context of the childcare system in Slovenia over the last few decades, it is clear that the state is unable to regulate the informal childcare market and ensure that this work is performed legally, thus making it a better option for parents, children, and informal childcare providers.

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## ГОСУДАРСТВЕННАЯ ЗАБОТА О ДЕТЯХ В СЛОВЕНИИ И ЕЕ ВЛИЯНИЕ НА НЕФОРМАЛЬНЫЕ РЫНКИ ДОМАШНИХ УСЛУГ

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В статье рассматривается влияние государственных мер по охране семьи и детства на организацию формальной и неформальной заботы о детях, в том числе на статус этой работы и положение работников, оказывающих услуги по нерегламентированному уходу за детьми в частных домохозяйствах Словении. Авторы анализируют современную словенскую политику охраны детства в концептуальных рамках дефамилизации воспитания детей, что позволяет им понять не только особенности этого явления в Словении (в сравнении с другими странами Центральной и Восточной Европы), но и структурные характеристики неформального рынка услуг по уходу за детьми, для которого типичны приходящие няни и высокие стандарты индивидуального ухода, обеспечиваемого в большей степени местными пенсионерками и студентками. Эмпирический материал был собран в результате проведения двух качественных исследований по изучению рынка неформальных платных услуг по уходу и процессов делегирования заботы о детях в Словении, в частности, точек соприкосновения между (бес)платным неформальным и формальным уходом.

**Ключевые слова:** забота о детях; политика заботы; дефамилизация; неформальные рынки услуг по уходу за детьми; воспитатели; Словения