

# 3 Women, Families and Policies



One of the main promises of the transition is to increase the ability of individuals to determine their own well-being. This new emphasis on persons having the responsibility and the capacity to make choices and realize goals extends naturally to family life.

The individual may be the basic political unit of democratic society, but families remain the basic social unit. In this regard, it is important to understand what is happening to women and families during the transition and what measures need to be taken – by individuals, partners, families, communities, and the state – to support women in their roles within and outside the home.

UN documents and international agreements accord a woman the same rights and responsibilities as they do a man during marriage, including reproductive rights related to the number and spacing of children. Women have maternity rights on and off the job and the right to own and manage adequate housing. Agreements also call for recognition of the shared responsibility of women and men in the upbringing and development of children. It is likewise clear that, although parents have the primary responsibility for ensuring their children have an adequate standard of living, the state has a duty to support the ability of parents to carry out this responsibility.

Women have many roles within the home, and the interplay among these roles is complex. Women are partners in household unions, paid and unpaid workers in the household, mothers, and often primary caregivers. The activity of women in these various functions is a major determinant of the health, education and economic welfare of family members, especially children, and also provides role models for the adults the children will become.

Under communism, women in the region exhibited notably high participation in the paid labour force, though there was greater variance across countries than is usually presumed. Overall, women's earning capacity and labour position have weakened with the emergence of more competitive and less regulated labour markets during the reform years. Still, the relative position of women to men – the gender balance – has often changed less than might have been expected, and the difference in earning capacity has at times narrowed. Given the dire economic reality in most countries, these outcomes are clearly the result of considerable

individual effort with, no doubt, associated personal and social costs.

The family dimension of women's lives has also changed appreciably and often unexpectedly during the transition. This change is the focus of the present chapter, particularly women's roles in family formation.

Under communism, women were constitutionally guaranteed the same rights and responsibilities as men in marriage and child-rearing. Furthermore, the communist state provided a wide range of family support measures – including nurseries, kindergartens, after-school programmes, and parental leave benefits – as much to keep women in the workforce as to keep up fertility rates. However, the letter of the law did not necessarily translate into progress in gender equality in the private sphere of the home. The state's appropriation of many parental duties, especially childcare, meant that individual women and men were not compelled in their own homes and partnerships to address the gender balance related to household work and family responsibilities.

Family support measures, aimed largely at women, have been deeply affected by the new economic and social conditions of the transition. The functions and the resources of the state have changed tremendously. The state is no longer the single or predominant employer and provider of welfare services and benefits. In many countries, the state's resources and its ability to raise revenues are greatly diminished. Not only has there been less to go around during the transition – fewer jobs and less purchasing power, but the social and economic environment is much more diverse and, in some ways, more fragmented. The profound changes in social and economic expectations and conditions have acted upon the relative positions and inter-relationships of women and men in the region. Kinship networks and communities have increasingly taken over the social support functions formerly performed by the state.

This chapter looks at demographic trends relating to women and families during the transition and at changes in family policies. Section 3.1 examines women, family formation and related social policies in the region at the outset of the transition. This offers a useful context for understanding emerging trends. Section 3.2 presents an overview of changes in family formation. Section 3.3 looks at changes in family policies. The Conclusions outline some policy implications and areas that merit special attention. ■

### 3.1 Women, Families and State Policies at the Outset of the Transition

Patterns in family formation not only depend on individual circumstances and decisions, but are shaped by public policy and community supports, as well as by traditions, social values and the economic environment. In highly industrialized and urban areas, family size tends to be smaller than it is in more agricultural and rural areas, where families with many children are more frequent, where women are often engaged in unpaid household production, and where the extended family is an important source of social and economic support. These varying circumstances influence attitudes, cultural norms and the roles related to gender.

Nonetheless, although countries in Central Europe, the Baltics and the western CIS tend to be more industrialized and urban than nations in the south from the Balkans to Central Asia, demographic and family profiles often show striking consistencies among these sub-regions. In part, this is due to the conformity of approach by governments to family-related policies and investment in education and health services. This has been the result of a common goal of central planning: to expand industrialization by expanding the labour force through the promotion of population growth and the entry of women into the formal economy. So, governments encouraged

women to have both babies and jobs, and in areas where the kinship networks were weaker the state provided the childcare bridge that allowed women to manage these competing demands.

#### High marriage rates and early childbearing

In Western industrialized countries, growing female education and labour market participation rates in recent decades have been accompanied by changing patterns of family formation and reproductive behaviour. Known as the “second demographic transition”, the new patterns are characterized by later age at first marriage and childbirth and a diversification of family forms, including more single parents and cohabiting couples. (The “first demographic transition” refers to the decline in fertility associated with the shift from rural agrarian life to urban industrialized society.)

As explored earlier in this Report, women in the region also had good access to education and employment, and, up to 1990, their labour force participation was comparable to or even higher than that in most Western economies. So, is there evidence that trends associated with a “second demographic transition” have occurred? In many important respects, it would appear that the answer is “no”. As Figure 3.1 shows, at the onset of the transition, women were entering their first marriage at a relatively young age. The average age was closer to that in Turkey or Greece – countries exhibiting much lower female labour force participation rates, as the previous chapter illustrates – rather than to that in France or Sweden – countries with comparable education and labour patterns.

Not only did women marry early, but marriage was virtually universal. At the beginning of the transition, roughly eight in ten women in the region were married by age 24, compared to two to four in most Western countries. Cohabitation was rare. Many countries had high divorce rates, as in the West, but they also had high remarriage rates, so that women in the region were more likely than Western women to remarry after divorce.

At the outset of transition, women in the region were also bearing children at a relatively young age. In most cases, however, this demographic characteristic was not associated with high fertility rates, as it is in more traditional societies. Figure 3.2 shows that, in the early 1990s, total birth rates in Central Europe, the western CIS and the Baltics were similar to those in Western Europe. At the same time, in contrast to Western Europe, fertility rates among teenagers in the region were strikingly

Figure 3.1

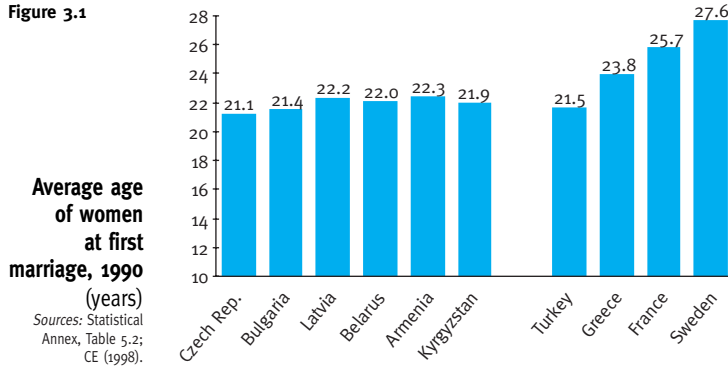
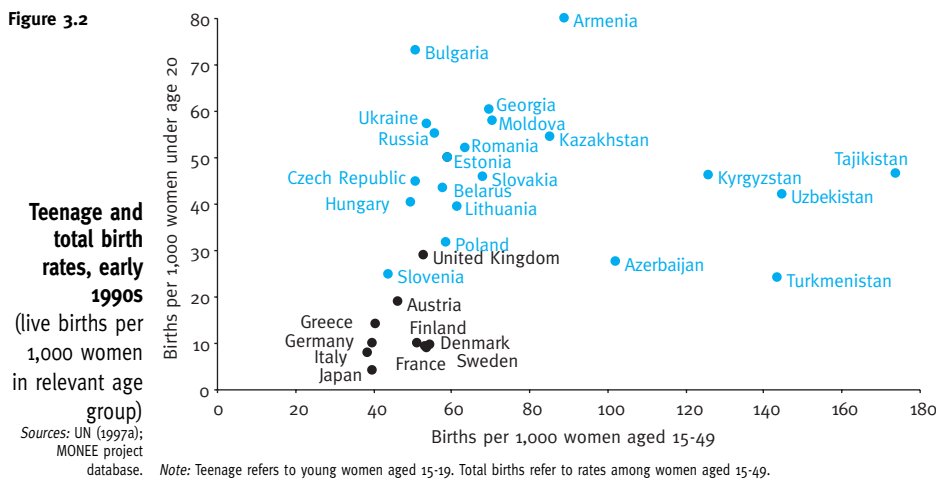


Figure 3.2



ingly high. Only Slovenia and, less convincingly, Poland are grouped with Western European countries in the lower left part of the graph where low overall birth rates and low teenage birth rates are represented. Countries in the upper left, including those in the Baltics, the western CIS and parts of Central and Southeastern Europe, present low total birth rates relative to Western Europe, but a range of higher teenage birth rates – up to several times higher.

This difference in teenage birth rates emerged between 1970 and 1990. The rates rose across the former Soviet Union, from 35 to 57 births per 1,000 teenagers in Ukraine for example, while in Central Europe they remained stable or declined, for example in Hungary from 50 to 40 births. In Western countries, the drop was far more dramatic. Thus, in Sweden the rate fell from 34 to 14 births over the same period.

Most countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus still had high birth rates at the beginning of the 1990s, despite the relatively high labour force participation rates among women in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, or Tajikistan. Yet, this part of the region has a wide range of teenage birth rates, from relatively low rates in Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to extremely high rates in Armenia.

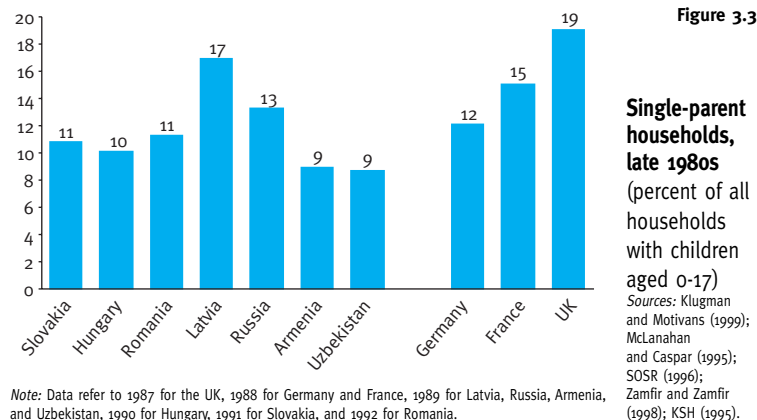
As shown by census data, the countries of the former Soviet Union did experience high single-parent rates even before the pronounced growth in this phenomenon in Western countries. In the early 1970s, single-parent families were more prevalent in Russia (13 percent) and even in Georgia (10 percent) and Turkmenistan (10 percent) than in France (9 percent) or Germany (8 percent).

However, while the share of single-parent families settled around 10 percent of all households with children in the final years of communism (with the exception of the Baltic States), it grew steadily in the West and, in the late 1980s, often exceeded the rates in the transition region, as presented in Figure 3.3.

### Liberal family laws and ambitious family policies

The early Soviet marriage code attempted to establish equality between husbands and wives, secularize marriage and make divorce simple. Benefits and taxation were linked to women's employment rather than to their status as spouses. Marriage remained a popular institution, partly because family laws made it easy to enter and to leave a union and partly because the state attached a range of incentives to registered marriage, including better access to housing, in-kind services and cash benefits. Not only did social norms support the tradition of marriage, but the state saw the institution of marriage as a way to produce the next generation of workers. Six of the eight countries in a UN survey conducted one year before the collapse of state socialism were still pursuing pro-natalist objectives in social policies.

The ease of marriage and of divorce and the legal



equality in the ownership and division of (patently limited) family assets were favourable conditions for gender equity. However, as Chapter 2 notes, the gender division of household chores and childcare added long hours of unpaid work to women's full-time jobs, a situation exacerbated by the relative lack of consumer appliances. This "double burden" (see Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2) and a relative lack of choice and flexibility in employment may partly explain the anticipation some felt that one of the benefits of the transition would be the opportunity for women to be full-time parents.

Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev made headlines in 1987 when he said perestroika offered Soviet women what they really wanted – the chance to stay at home with their children. Similarly, a 1988 survey found that the statement "what women really want is a home and children" was endorsed by 75 percent of women and 79 percent of men in Hungary, though it was strongly rejected by Dutch, British and US respondents.

At the onset of the transition, family support programmes were widely available across the region and tended to be generous and comprehensive. Most programmes were designed by central authorities, but were delivered through state enterprises, agricultural collectives and local governments. As Table 3.1 shows, relative public expenditure on cash and in-kind benefits exceeded that in many Western countries. In some ways, countries like Hungary and Czechoslovakia had systems similar to the Scandinavian or French family support model, offering universal family support benefits, generous maternity and parental leave benefits, and services such as widely accessible childcare. Non-cash programmes (such as services and subsidies for child-related goods) were more important in the Soviet Union than in Central or Southeastern Europe, where cash benefits were more popular.

Many programmes, such as childcare and children's summer camps, were attached to the workplace, a circumstance that supported women's participation in the labour force, but also made employment the main access route to childcare and related services. Women were entitled to maternity leave of four to seven months, often at

**Table 3.1**

**Public expenditure on family programmes in 1989**  
(percent of GDP)

	Czechoslovakia	Hungary	Poland	Sweden	Germany	US
Total	4.4	5.5	3.0	4.4	1.9	0.6
Cash benefits	3.1	4.4	2.3	2.1	1.3	0.3
family/child allowance	2.2	3.0	2.0	0.9	0.9	0.3
maternity and parental leave	0.5	0.8	0.2	1.0	*	*
other family support	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.2	0.2	*
In-kind benefits (mostly childcare)	1.1	1.1	0.7	2.3	0.6	0.2

Sources: OECD (1996); Fajth (1996).  
Note: \* = low or negligible amount.

full wages. Many countries also offered paid or unpaid parental leave with a guarantee of re-employment. This leave was usually available to either parent and in some countries also to grandparents.

At the beginning of the transition, health and education services were free or available at low cost throughout the region. Kindergarten enrolment was especially high in Central Europe, with four in five children enrolled in 1989. Coverage tended to decline further east: three in five children were enrolled in Russia and Ukraine, and only one in five was enrolled in Central Asia. The quality of public childcare varied widely, too, both across the region and within countries.

While the communist state took an active interest in women and children, the perspective was not invari-

ably family-friendly. In both the education and the child protection systems, the child was seen as an individual in relationship with the state, rather than as a member of a family. Consequently, families were often blamed rather than supported, and not infrequently state institutions were considered preferable.

Numerous supportive services that exist in Western countries – from awareness initiatives and education to counselling and crisis support – were simply missing in Central and Eastern Europe, leaving family members to cope with stress and with mental health and lifestyle problems on their own – a situation

that often exposed women and children to higher risks of family violence. Indeed, the nuclear family became a strongly guarded refuge against the pervasive intervention of the state. Given the weakness of kinship networks and the suppression of community life, this retreat could sometimes be a source of tension and isolation.

During the transition, women have faced both opportunities and challenges. The functions of the state are changing; the economy is being transformed, and diversity is flourishing, including the re-emergence of an awareness of national and ethno-cultural identities. These shifts are being reflected in public policies and in the private responses to the new social and economic conditions that are reshaping family life and gender roles. ■

### 3.2 Changes in Family Formation since 1989

Trends in the way families form, dissolve and re-form have important implications for women's equality. Responsibility for children is a major determinant of women's status in society, and the family is a key social institution through which gender roles and status are communicated and validated.

Prior to the transition, demographic behaviour had a specific profile. Marriage was universal; both marriage and childbearing usually took place at a comparatively young age, and the share of single-parent families was significant (and had been stable since the 1970s). Given this inheritance, how have demographic trends evolved during the transition? How do they match women's aspirations? Are they becoming more like those in Western countries, or have they taken a different path?

A sociological survey conducted at the outset of the transition in Poland, Hungary and Russia, as well as in Germany and Sweden, showed strong differentiation among these countries. For example, especially Polish, but also Hungarian mothers were more likely than mothers in Germany and Sweden to rank family and private life as more important to their identity than work and profes-

sional opportunities. The responses of Russian respondents fell between those in Western and Central Europe.

However, when survey respondents were asked whether women with children or women without children have better lives, only Hungarian women said overwhelmingly (89 percent) that mothers have better lives. They may have been influenced by the family support system in Hungary, the most generous in the region. Polish women were divided, and, interestingly, more than three in five Russian and German women felt that women without children have better lives.

In all countries, most women expressed the desire to maintain an attachment to the labour force. In fact, most mothers in Poland, Hungary and Russia were engaged in full-time employment. However, they showed a strong preference for part-time employment – a reality in Western countries, where the majority of mothers with small children were working part time.

While these survey results can be interpreted in many ways, they suggest that, despite women's significant commitment to labour force participation, they consider family life and children very important. It appears that

women feel torn between the competing interests of work and family.

## Large shifts in demographic behaviour

The economic and social changes during the transition have been accompanied by huge demographic shifts. Birth rates have plummeted across the region, and the marriage rate is down substantially in almost every country. Divorce initially increased in countries with already high divorce rates. The share of teenage births and births outside marriage has risen in some cases, and so has the prevalence of single-parent households. The deterioration in adult life expectancy in several countries has contributed to and may also have been partly caused by the greater fragility of families.

Table 3.2 summarizes current marriage, fertility and divorce rates, as well as overall changes in these rates since 1989. At the level of sub-regional averages, the data make the following main points.

- Marriage, fertility and divorce rates were far from identical across the region in 1989. All parts of the former Soviet Union – the Baltics, western CIS, the Caucasus, and Central Asia – had very high marriage rates. However, these high marriage rates were associated with high divorce rates only in western CIS and the Baltics and with high or moderate fertility levels only in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Most countries in Central and Eastern Europe exhibited low fertility rates (with the notable exception of Albania and the southern parts of former Yugoslavia).
- Substantial change has taken place in all areas of the region, and the patterns and directions of change often show a striking consistency across all sub-regions. The number of births has decreased everywhere. In Central Europe, for example, where fertility rates were already low, the drop in relative terms has been similar to that in Central Asia. Marriage rates have declined in line with fertility rates in most countries.
- The magnitude of the change has been dramatic at times. Marriage rates have halved in the Baltics and the Caucasus – sub-regions in which countries have very different cultural traditions. Both areas have experienced large population movements and ethnic enmity, even conflict, in addition to economic hardships. Here (as well as in Romania which had aggressive pro-natalist policies before the transition), the number of births fell sharply after 1989.
- By contrast, divorce trends have taken different directions. In the Baltic countries, divorce rates soared during the mid-1990s before decreasing thereafter. In some countries, such as those in

Table 3.2  
Summary of main trends in family formation, 1989-97

	Crude marriage rate (per 1,000 population)			Total fertility rate (children per woman)			Crude divorce rate (per 1,000 population)		
	1989	1997	% change	1989	1997	% change	1989	1997	% change
Central Europe	7.0	5.2	-26	1.95	1.37	-30	2.1	2.1	2
Former Yugoslavia	6.3	5.3	-5	1.83	1.65	-10	0.8	0.8	1
Southeastern Europe	7.1	5.4	-31	2.05	1.21	-41	1.3	1.6	-12
Baltics	8.9	4.3	-52	2.08	1.25	-40	3.8	3.1	-19
Western CIS	9.4	6.9	-27	2.10	1.81	-14	3.5	3.7	5
Caucasus	8.4	4.2	-49	2.70	1.76	-35	1.4	0.6	-57
Central Asia	9.8	8.6	-31	4.01	2.89	-28	1.8	1.7	-7

Source: MONEE project database.

Note: Rates are unweighted national averages. Marriage and divorce rates calculated using the 15-59 population show larger variations across regions due to different population structures, but the levels of change over the period are similar. Former Yugoslavia excludes Bosnia-Herzegovina. Southeastern Europe excludes Albania. End year is 1995 for Central Asia. Starting year is 1991 for former Yugoslavia. See Glossary for the definition of total fertility rate.

Central Europe, divorce rates fell during the initial years of the transition before rising more recently.

Marriages rates – falling sometimes after an initial positive “euphoria” effect at the outset of transition – are now stabilizing in some countries. The decline in marriages (and remarriages) can be interpreted as a delay in family formation due to economic circumstances. However, it is more difficult to judge whether this change also entails a more profound shift in lifestyle patterns. For example, in the Caucasus and Central Asia, the delays in marriage may be due partly to the inability of families to finance the traditional marriage feast or to pay dowries. In Central Europe and the Baltics, they may reflect a decision by couples to live together prior to marriage or to pursue education or career opportunities before marriage.

Figure 3.4 presents another measure of family instability – the general divorce rate, or annual number of divorces per 100 marriages. The diagram reinforces the finding that regional differences in divorce rates have grown during the transition. In countries with the lowest initial divorce rates – Uzbekistan and FYR Macedonia in the graph – divorces fell as much as or more than marriages. The general divorce rate climbed substantially in western CIS and the Baltic States. In Estonia over 1995-97, there

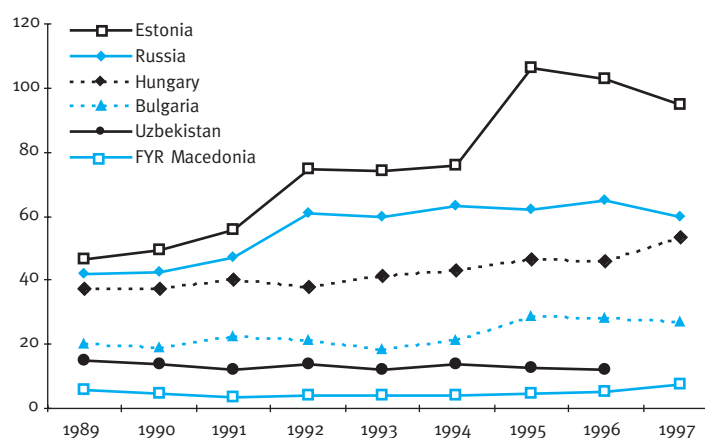


Figure 3.4

Change in general divorce rates, 1989-97 (divorces per 100 marriages)  
Source: Statistical Annex, Table 5.5.

were as many divorces as marriages. This reflects a decline in marriage and an increase in divorce and signals a growing prevalence of cohabitation.

Aside from the steep drop in marriages, several factors are contributing to the higher general divorce rates. The increase in family breakups in some countries during the transition may have resulted from the economic and social stress of unemployment and poverty, changes in lifestyles and social values, liberal family laws, and newly streamlined divorce procedures.

Trends in marriage and divorce have also contributed to plunging fertility rates, which have continued to fall in most countries even in recent years. Figure 3.5 shows the pattern of the changes over time in a cross-section of countries.

The sharp drop in fertility in the region has gained international attention and, in some countries, has provoked calls for pro-natalist policies and a return to conventional family models. In some, it has undermined the political support for better access to modern family planning, an issue of concern for women's health, as Chapter 4 details.

It is worth noting that fertility rates in the region began to decline before 1989. At the start of the transition, fertility rates were already below the population-replacement rate in some countries (the dotted line in

Figure 3.5). It could be argued that, in the longer view, the trends in the region are part of the historical downward drift in fertility rates among industrialized countries, or that they are part of a response to the baby-booms occurring in certain countries in the 1980s.

Still, in many countries fertility is now at extremely low levels in absolute terms, and, if this trend continues, it will have significant social and economic repercussions. This may also reflect the heavy price women and families have paid as they try to support their children despite the economic hardships of the transition. The rise at the beginning of the transition in the number of children born in countries like Hungary, the Czech Republic and Uzbekistan suggests that there was an initial anticipation of a more child-friendly environment, though such an anticipation quickly faded.

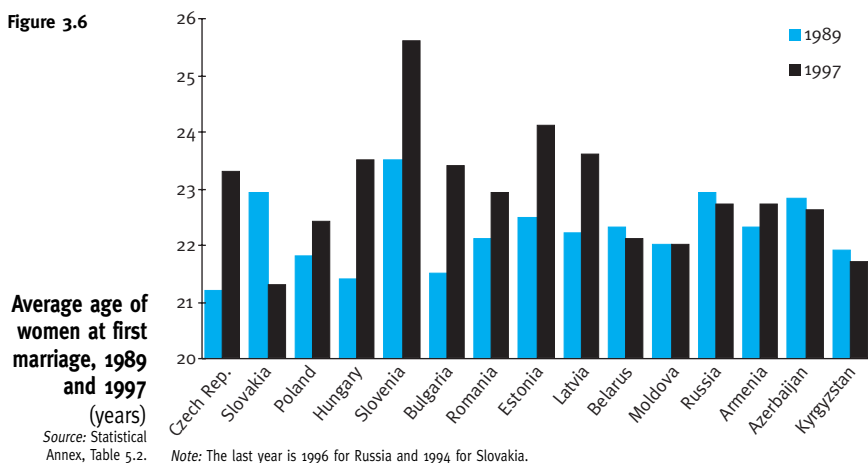
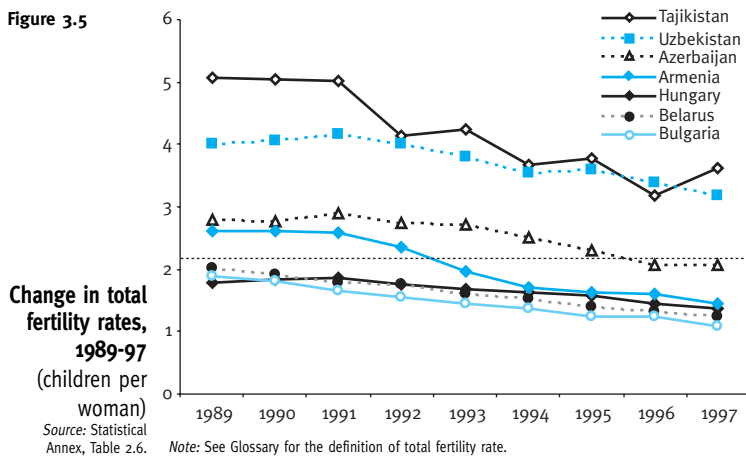
### Contrasting changes in age at first marriage

The average age at first marriage is a useful indicator of women's circumstances, with both positive and negative implications. In North America and Western Europe, the age at first marriage for women has risen during the past few decades. This is linked to the growing economic opportunities for women and the greater social acceptance of cohabitation and non-marital unions.

Marriage has been a popular institution across the transition region, with women tending to marry and to have a first child at relatively young ages. Until 1993-94, the average age of women at first marriage remained largely the same and even declined in some countries, including Russia. This stability suggests that marriage rates fell among all age groups. In the last few years, however, the average age has started to climb. Figure 3.6 shows that the average had increased in 9 of 15 countries of the region between 1989 and 1997, but women were still marrying at a younger age relative to the situation in Western countries. For example, the average age in the European Union was 26.3 years in 1994.

The average age of women at first marriage rose in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, FR Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Latvia and stayed relatively the same in western CIS, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Slovakia, where data are available only to 1994, reported a significant drop in the age of women at first marriage – from 22.9 to 21.3 years, a decline echoed among men.

It is worthwhile investigating how the gender gap in age at first marriage has changed. It is conventional around the world that men are older on average than women at marriage – perhaps because of long-held perceptions that an older age for the man reflects economic advantage, while a younger age for the woman suggests more reproductive years ahead in which to produce many children.



In 1989, the gender difference in marriage age was around two years in western CIS, the Baltic States and Central Europe – a small gap by international standards. Little change had taken place in these countries by 1997: the age gap was about the same or less, except in Russia and Belarus, where it grew slightly. However, in countries in the southern part of the region, the gender gap was initially about four years, and recent data, where available, tend to show it widening.

### Increases in non-marital births and cohabitation

Previous Regional Monitoring Reports called attention to the rising numbers of children born outside marriage. Figure 3.7 shows that the share of births to unmarried mothers ranges from less than 5 percent in Turkmenistan in Central Asia to more than 50 percent in Estonia in the Baltics, where it has doubled since 1989.

The increases indicated in Figure 3.7 imply that during the 1990s the number of births to unmarried parents – single mothers or cohabiting partners – has declined much less than the number of births to married couples. One influential element in this outcome is the larger share of first-borns among all births. Since 1989, more parents who already have one or two children have been deciding to delay or forgo the birth of an additional child. The share of first-borns in Russia, for example, rose from 46 to 59 percent between 1989 and 1997. Parents having their first child are more likely to be unmarried than are those having a second, third, or fourth child. Moreover, the incidence of single motherhood and cohabitation has gone up in many countries.

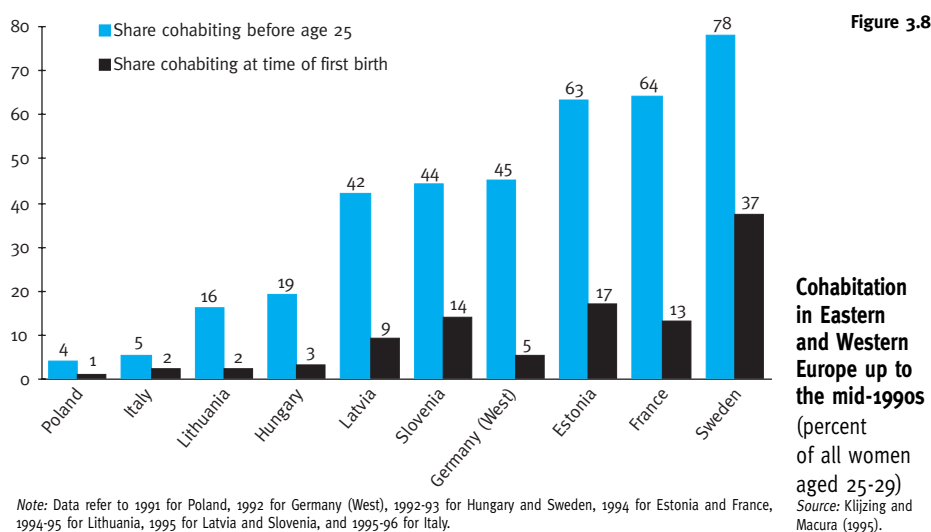
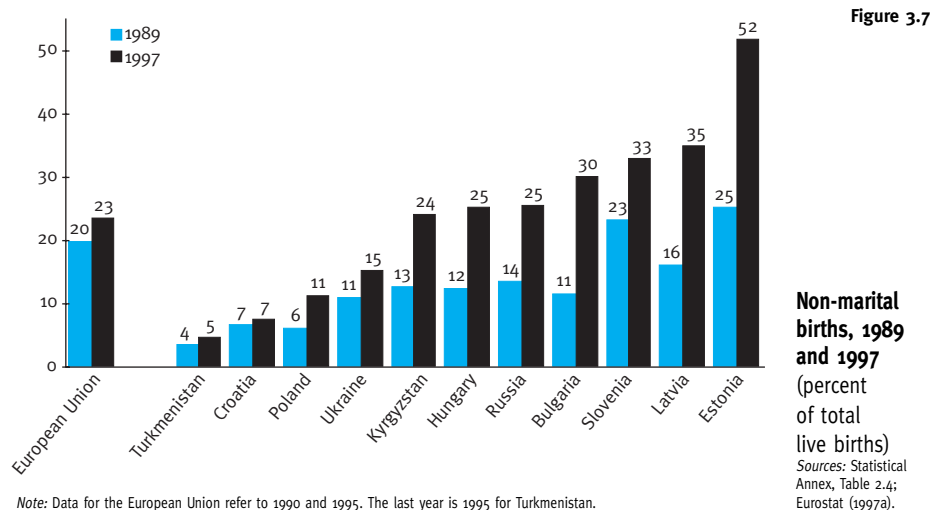
These factors make it difficult to interpret extra-marital birth rates. The implications of childbirth outside a registered marriage are certainly quite different for women and their children depending on whether a mother is alone or cohabiting. Unfortunately, demographic registers in the region still largely overlook the fact that marriage is becoming a poor indicator of parental partnerships. In some Western countries, about half the births outside marriage are registered to both parents who are living at the same address.

Figure 3.8 summarizes the results of family and fertility studies from a selection of Western, Central and Eastern European countries in the mid-1990s. It allows a comparison of the incidence of cohabitation that, as it turns out, varies greatly. More than 60 percent of women in Estonia and almost half in Slovenia reported a cohabitation experience by age 25, rates which are relatively high by Western European standards. In other

countries, such as Poland, cohabitation represented no more than a small percentage of all couples in the mid-1990s, a rate similar to that reported for Italy. However, in all transition countries, only a small share of women were bearing children during cohabitation. This suggests that, as in Western Europe, cohabitation often serves as a sort of “trial marriage”.

The data on cohabitation obscure considerable differences in the behaviour of younger and older generations. The 1991 census in Slovenia reported that about 5 percent of women aged 20-34 were cohabiting and that 77 percent of these were living with a partner and a child or children, compared to less than 2 percent of women aged 35 or older. Data from a 1997 fertility study in Estonia showed that only about 15 percent of married women aged 15-19 had married without first experiencing cohabitation, compared to more than 60 percent of married women aged 45-49.

However, it appears that births to cohabiting mothers are relatively uncommon and so do not account for the rising ratios of non-marital births across the region (Figure 3.7). In Slovenia, where cohabitation rates grew rapidly, 13 percent of all births in 1996 were to unmarried couples



living together. This compares with the 32 percent share accounted for by all out-of-wedlock births in that year, suggesting that cohabitation explains barely more than one-third of all non-marital births. However, in most cases of extra-marital birth in Slovenia, fathers do register themselves as a parent of the child even if they do not live with the mother of the child. This is not the case in Russia, for example, where about half the births outside marriage are not registered to both parents.

### High rates of teenage childbearing

As noted, women in the region marry and have a first child at a relatively young age. While the average marriage age has climbed recently, the average age at first birth has remained the same across much of the region and, in several cases, has even gone down.

Figure 3.9 charts teenage birth rates during the transition. It confirms that the rates were high in the region at the outset of transition in 1989. In four of six sub-regions – the Baltics, western CIS, the Caucasus, and Central Asia – teenage births rose immediately after transition, even against a backdrop of falling fertility rates. Since 1992, teenage birth rates have declined and in 1997 were lower – if only slightly in some sub-regions – than they had been in 1989. Still, the rates remain well above those in Western Europe.

Figure 3.9

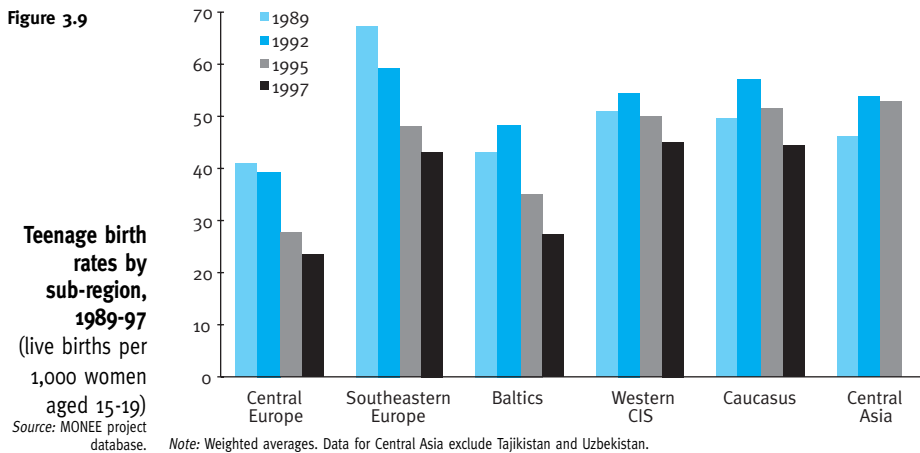
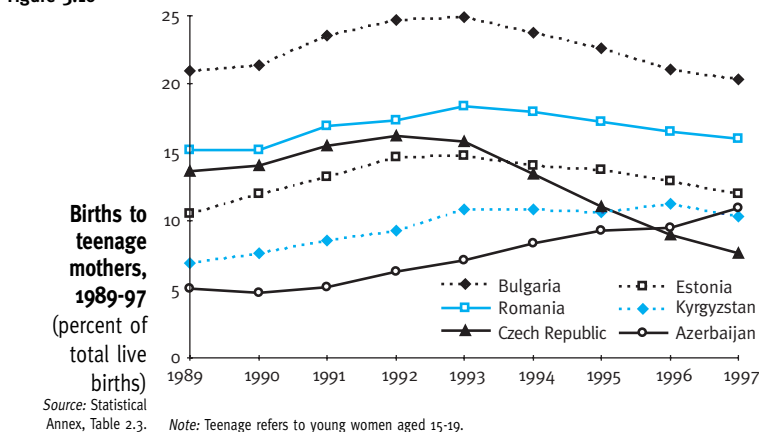


Figure 3.10



Teenage parents and their children are at higher risk of poverty because they have typically had less opportunity to develop their “human capital” through education and work experience. Generally, fertility rates are inversely related to education or socio-economic status, that is, the lower the level of education, the higher the level of fertility. Early childbearing limits the opportunities of girls and young women to pursue education and careers. This, in turn, may promote a decision to have a greater number of children. In effect, teenage motherhood can restrict the choices available to these young women and make it more likely they will require social supports.

Figure 3.10 shows, for a selection of countries, that the share of teenage births among total births climbed early in the transition and has since receded, but, with the exception of a few countries, like the Czech Republic, is still higher than it was in 1989. In some countries, like Azerbaijan, the share of teenage births has continued to rise. Sharp drops since mid-transition have brought rates in the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Croatia close to those in Western Europe.

In Bulgaria and Romania, teenage fertility is still very high. The narrower economic opportunities and the influence of traditional values among the Roma ethnicity in these countries may play a part in this outcome. Early childbearing, large families and a pronounced gender division in household labour are frequently reported especially among Roma families in Central and Southeastern Europe.

For example, in a 1992 study in Bulgaria, more than half the Roma women who responded said they hoped to have three or more children, more than double the number desired by ethnic Turkish women, another minority in Bulgaria, or by ethnic Bulgarian women. Roma women tend to start having children in their early teens and have many children, often with a relatively short interval between births. These young women face daunting economic disadvantages, and, as a 1995 survey noted, behaviours such as early sexual activity (at younger than age 15),

low educational attainment and extra-marital birth are frequently transferred from one generation to the next.

Of course, high teenage birth rates also mean high rates of teenage sexual activity and pregnancy and, in many countries of the region, high rates of adolescent abortion. In four countries, each year more than one in 10 teenagers becomes pregnant. (The issue of family planning and abortion is discussed in Chapter 4.)

Before the transition most teenage births occurred within marriage. This suggests that both the marriages and the pregnancies were planned or that the pregnancies triggered the marriages. Studies in the Czech Republic and Russia show that the majority of babies born to teenage mothers were conceived before the parents married.



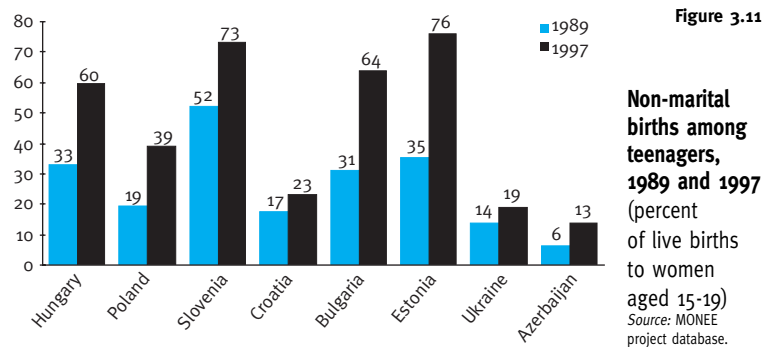
There is evidence, however, that during the transition there has been less inclination to marry because of pregnancy. Figure 3.11 shows that the share of extra-marital births among teenagers rose substantially between 1989 and 1997. Births among unmarried teenage mothers now represent more than three of four teenage births in Slovenia and Estonia. In most countries, meanwhile, the share of births to unmarried women has increased among both teenagers and older women.

### Changes in family and household structure

Demographic trends such as the rising share of births outside marriage, increasing divorce and, in several countries, premature parental mortality are having an impact on household structure. The extent to which the number and share of children living in various types of family arrangements have grown during the transition is difficult to gauge because the relevant data are usually collected in population censuses which only take place periodically. In countries where data are available, there are signs that more and more children are not living in dual-parent households, but in single-parent households or extended family households.

For example, a comparison of the data from the 1989 population census and the 1994 micro-census in Russia shows a rise in the share of single-parent households from 14 to over 16 percent. In addition, a growing number of single mothers were living with their parents. These two factors were each responsible for about half the increase of 1.7 million in the children in Russia living in households without both parents in 1994 relative to 1989.

It is difficult to judge how much single parenthood has grown in the region in general, but it appears that, even in countries where divorce rates and non-marital birth rates are lower, there has been an increase in single parenthood. In Poland, for example, the number of children living in single-parent families rose by more than 100,000 between 1988 and 1995, with almost 12



percent of children living with single mothers (while only 1 percent were living with single fathers).

Single-parent families are hardly a new phenomenon in the region. What has changed during the transition is that single parents, most of whom are women, face a tighter job market and less accessible childcare, including after-school care. For women, balancing their roles as breadwinners and primary caregivers has become especially difficult. Unemployment, poverty and income disparity have risen at the same time that the presence of the state in social protection has weakened. As state intervention shrinks, more responsibility is shifted to individuals, who, in turn, appear to rely more heavily on kinship systems and local support networks.

Social protection legislation in the region usually defines single mothers as women whose children have been born or adopted outside marriage. In reality, however, divorce is also a main route into single parenthood. During the transition, the relative number of children experiencing parental divorce has increased in many countries. (See Statistical Annex, Table 5.6.) The number is high in countries where divorce rates are high, such as the Baltics and western CIS, and low where divorce is less common, such as former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. However, several Central European countries show a mixed profile of low divorce rates with high rates of children involved in divorce, suggesting that couples with more children may face greater chances of divorce. ■

## 3.3 The Changing Landscape of Family Policies

Before the transition, family law accorded women and men equal rights, and families received considerable public support through cash and non-cash benefits. Women's family commitments and functions were influenced by these policies, but also by public health and education services which were widely accessible and which were offered free or at low cost.

However, this seemingly strong network of family supports was particularly vulnerable to the forces of transition because it was financed and operated by the state and because many of the benefits and services were deliv-

ered through the workplace. This points to the need for reforms. Furthermore, given the emerging conditions, the family laws drafted under the former governments and still in force do not pay adequate attention to the new dimension that private property brings to the issue of family assets and to the matter of private child support to be paid by partners. Also missing is the whole environment of intermediary support and prevention services, including social care and counselling, that strengthen families and bolster the capacity of women to prevent or cope with risk situations in the household.

### The weakening state role in income support

A sociological survey carried out in Poland, Hungary and Russia around 1990-91, near the outset of transition, included a question on the importance of various family policy measures. More than half of the mothers with small children in the survey ranked income support (or tax relief) first. Only a small share of women gave top priority to more childcare services, and fewer still said measures encouraging men to take on more family responsibilities were the most important.

In the early years of transition, public policy steps were taken to improve income supports. Most countries in the region introduced or enhanced universal cash benefits to families with children. The intention was to cushion the impact of the removal of the non-cash support, such as price subsidies, that came with market reforms. However, high inflation and the erosion of employment-related services reduced the mitigating effect. Nevertheless, a World Bank study on five transition countries found that the cash benefits did help families, especially poor ones, and in some countries were more effective at reaching poor families than unemployment benefits or targeted social assistance.

Using data from the Luxembourg Income Study, other research revealed that child poverty in relative terms was often more well contained in the post-communist region than in Western countries. (The research defined child poverty in terms of equivalent per-capita disposable household income which is less than 50 percent of the overall adjusted median.) In the early 1990s, Czech or Slovak children were to be found below this threshold less often than children in neighbouring Austria or Germany. Hungarian and Polish children with two parents were at lower risk of being in relative poverty (respectively, 11 percent in 1994 and 14 percent in 1992) than children with two parents in the UK (18 percent in 1995). While several factors may have been responsible for this outcome, it is clear that efforts during the first years of transition to protect the generous pre-transition

levels of family benefits had an important effect. It is worth noting, however, that child poverty rates in dual-parent households were much higher in Russia even in these relative terms: 26 percent in 1995, about twice as high as in Hungary or Poland.

Generous public transfers are usually critical to the efforts of single parents to keep their households out of poverty. The low incidence of poverty among children in single-parent families in Sweden or Denmark is generally attributed to generous welfare systems. In this regard, research has found a striking difference between the post-communist countries and Western countries outside Scandinavia. The child poverty rates among the children of single parents in Poland, Hungary and Russia during the early 1990s did not appear to be very different from those among children living with couples, but in Germany, the UK and the US the children of single parents are at much higher (40-60 percent) risk of poverty.

Families in the region received a large part of their child-related benefits – larger than in Western countries (see Table 3.1) – through regular family allowances. As the transition progressed, countries spent relatively less and less. For example, in 1997 the Czech Republic spent 0.8 percent of GDP on family allowances, half what it had spent before transition; Bulgaria spent 0.6 percent of GDP on allowances in 1997, compared to 2.2 percent in 1991.

Table 3.3 compares the per-child family allowance to the average wage for eight transition countries. The results show considerable erosion of the value of the benefit in all countries. Allowances are especially small relative to wages in those very countries – in Southeastern Europe and the former Soviet Union – where wages have also plunged in real terms. This implies an even bigger fall in the purchasing power of family benefits than the figures indicate.

Over the course of the transition, most countries have switched from universal cash benefits to family allowances targeted at low-income households, and in some countries, such as Georgia or Armenia, family allowances have been dropped altogether. In a few countries, targeted coverage has helped the benefit value of allowances to rebound. However, as the international experience shows and studies in the transition region confirm, moving from a model of universal benefits to one of social assistance entitlement raises the risk that a portion of the needy population will be excluded.

A survey of 10 countries that was carried out for this Report found that it was the mother who actually received the family allowance, usually attached to her wages. Research in Western countries documents the advantages of this arrangement for child welfare. For example, a UK study concluded that shifting the benefit from men to women

Table 3.3

#### The value of family allowance benefits, 1990-97

(per-child benefit for couples with two children, percent average wage)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Slovakia	10.3	9.1	7.4	5.9	9.2	8.9	8.1	7.1
Hungary	16.1	14.3	13.9	12.0	9.6	8.2	6.8	7.7
Slovenia	9.5	9.0	8.1	9.2	8.2	7.5	6.3	5.6
Estonia	–	–	10.0	8.3	6.3	5.3	4.9	4.7
Latvia	–	–	10.8	8.8	5.8	4.6	5.1	4.0
Russia	–	–	10.2	3.5	5.5	6.6	6.3	6.1
Azerbaijan	–	–	–	5.4	3.7	2.5	7.6	6.4
Turkmenistan	–	–	–	–	1.9	2.7	1.7	1.3

Source: MONEE project database.

had a measurable positive effect on child-related family expenditures. In this light, reducing public spending on family allowances can mean less money for women.

Likewise, the shift from universal to targeted family allowances in the region may actually leave many women in a less autonomous financial position. For example, in countries where public administration is now left to local officials, women may be subjected to the discretion of patriarchal community structures and suffer when allowances are distributed in favour of more “traditional” households headed by men.

On the other hand, the effective targeting of public benefits can help fill the financial gap left when non-custodial parents, most often fathers, default on child support. The increases in divorce and single parenthood suggest that more women are finding themselves in this difficult position, as Box 3.1 discusses. Certainly, public social assistance is not an adequate replacement for the private support to which children are entitled and which parents have the right to expect and the responsibility to provide. However, establishing paternity, setting appropriate levels of support and enforcing payment are often difficult and need to be addressed through concerted effort. An intermediate solution would involve differentiating benefit values so as to favour vulnerable groups. Thus, in Russia, never-married or widowed single mothers are entitled to double benefits, and divorced parents whose partners default on child support receive 1.5 times the allowance.

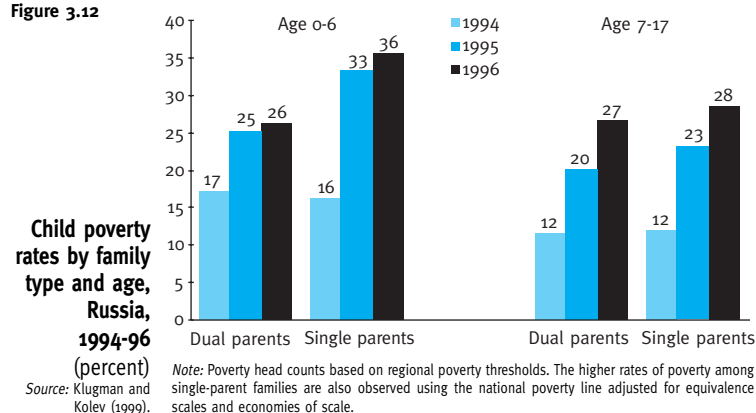
However, substantial erosion in the value of family cash benefits limit the effectiveness of targeting. Since

most single-parent households are headed by women, this erosion raises concerns about the “feminization of poverty” and about the implications for children and for child development.

Using absolute poverty thresholds, a study in Russia found that the poverty rates among children living in single-parent households had risen more sharply than the rates among children living with both parents, particularly, in recent years, among children under age 6, as shown in Figure 3.12. In 1996, more than one in three children under age 6 who were living with a single parent were living in poverty.

Although this finding cannot be generalized to other countries, it is reasonable to suppose that single-parent families everywhere face greater hardship. This may also explain why single mothers increasingly live in extended family households in many countries. There is

Figure 3.12



### Box 3.1

#### Default on child support by non-custodial parents

Securing child support from a parent who does not live with the child is often difficult. Given the demographic trends in the region during transition, including increased divorce and single parenthood, it is likely that more women and children are facing the financial challenges of inadequate child support.

In many countries, the state provides a child support payment in case of default by the non-custodial parent – the father in the vast majority of cases – and uses the courts to collect arrears. In Bulgaria, this approach appears to be effective, and the number of court cases for non-payment of child support has declined since 1989.

According to survey data in Russia, in almost one in five divorces the level of child support is determined by the agreement of the parents and without court involvement. In such cases, the average support payment has been twice as much as that in court-ordered cases and is paid more regularly. In general, however, the survey reveals a bleaker picture for many custodial parents and their children after divorce:

more than half the children do not benefit from child support, and, on average, payments are one to two years in arrears.

It seems likely that the incidence of non-payment of child support has risen during the transition, and available data on court cases for non-payment seem to confirm this contention. Lithuania, Estonia, Russia, and Poland report that the number of cases grew twofold between 1989 and 1997, and Belarus registered three and a half times as many cases. However, in other countries, such as Latvia, Bulgaria and Hungary, fewer cases have reached court. This may simply reflect less will to take such cases to court, or it may mean that such cases have a lower priority in over-burdened justice systems.

Certainly, better enforcement of child support payments requires individual and political will, as well as an efficient administrative system and coordination among the institutional actors involved – the judiciary, the police, social welfare agencies, and local authorities. Still, the most important factor is changing social attitudes to recognize parental rights and responsibilities.

also a greater chance now that very young children are living with single mothers who have never married or cohabited. Older children are more likely to be living with mothers who are divorced or widowed. This distinction may be important in shaping the levels of risk and therefore also in the development of policy options.

Income tax policies affect family income and can thus influence family decisions related to women's participation in the labour force. Accordingly, they have implications for gender equity and for the distribution of net household incomes, though these are often less overt than the impact of policies on cash benefits.

Personal income tax systems in which the tax unit is the individual rather than the household tend to promote female employment, especially if the pooling of the income of spouses for tax purposes is not allowed. In contrast, tax systems based on family units, pooling, or allowances for low-income spouses create incentives for the lower income earner in the household – most often women – to take other than full-time work or withdraw from the labour market entirely.

Government revenues from income taxes are often relatively modest in the region, and the pressure for tax reform is bound to grow. As wage taxes are replaced by income taxes and as the tax base expands, the importance of ensuring that the tax structure is fair and efficient will also rise.

The brief review of existing tax arrangements in the region provided in Box 3.2 suggests that current tax systems are friendly to women's labour force participa-

tion and tend to offer concessions to families with children. However, it appears that the concessions benefit mainly middle-income rather than low-income households and that the tax systems do little to help single parents meet those costs of running a home that are similar for all households, including households with more earners.

### Maternity and parental leaves: childcare choices

Balancing work and family responsibilities is a major challenge for most parents, but especially for women. A variety of measures – maternity and parental leaves and nursery and kindergarten services – exists in the region to help alleviate the conflict between work and family roles. Most options involve some kind of explicit or implicit income support, and most have a gender dimension.

Maternity and parental leaves serve different purposes and have distinctive gender implications. Maternity leave (which, as Table 3.4 shows, usually covers a period of months before and after childbirth) is based on an immediate concern for the physical survival and health of mother and child and, as such, is similar to a social insurance benefit. In keeping with this goal, maternity leave offers full-wage compensation or sick leave pay and is available only to women.

Extended maternity leaves or parental leaves, on the other hand, are generally considered more custodial in nature and therefore less significant for the well-being of the child, despite growing evidence underlining the

Box 3.2

### Income tax systems and family support

A survey carried out for this Report on 10 countries in the region (the Czech Republic, FR Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) found that most countries levy taxes on the income of individuals. Only Estonia permits wives and husbands to pool their incomes and tax-free allowances. (Romania is reportedly considering a similar scheme.)

When the tax-rate structure is progressive (the rates increase with income level), pooling can substantially reduce the total tax paid by spouses with unequal incomes. In Estonia, the tax rate is constant above the tax-free threshold, so that the advantages of pooling are limited. In many countries, couples with businesses can choose which family member pays the tax on the business income, effectively permitting pooling of this part of household income.

Progressive tax systems often also provide concessions to taxpayers with higher incomes. Most countries provide tax allowances to persons with dependent children, reducing the income subject to tax. However,

in Russia and Ukraine this gain is offset by a reduction in the tax allowance for higher income earners. Tax breaks increase with the number of children, except in Estonia and Georgia. Romania levies an additional tax of 10 percent on people with no dependent children. While it is usually left to the spouses to decide which of them takes advantage of the concessions, in none of the countries surveyed is this option available to cohabiting partners. Also, none allow tax credits for children. Such credits reduce the tax payable by a constant amount, irrespective of income, and so represent a relatively greater benefit to lower income earners.

In many countries, taxpayers are entitled to a tax allowance for low-income spouses that is similar to the allowance for dependent children. This is the case in the Czech Republic, Russia, Tajikistan, and FR Yugoslavia. Only Uzbekistan gives tax concessions to single parents in addition to general concessions for dependent children. In Uzbekistan, single mothers with two or more children under age 16 do not have to pay taxes on income up to four times the minimum wage.

**Main features of maternity leave schemes in selected countries, 1998**

Table 3.4

	Duration	Value	Eligibility	Changes since 1989
Czech Republic	196 days (259 days for multiple births and for single mothers)	67% of last wage	270 days of health insurance eligibility in last 2 years	1993: cut in replacement rate from 90% to 67%; benefit ceiling cut from 162 to 131 crowns 1994: ceiling raised to 186 crowns, but not indexed
Slovakia	196 days	90% of last wage	270 days of health insurance eligibility in last 2 years	Benefit calculated from maximum daily wage; since 1989 it has gradually risen from 150 to 250 crowns
Poland	112 days for 1st child, 140 days for 2nd, 3rd, etc. child	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	–
Hungary	168 days (28+140)	60-70% of last wage depending on length of employment	180 days of employment in last 2 years	Replacement rates lowered from 65-100% to 60-70% of last wage
FR Yugoslavia	393 days (28+365)	100% of last wage; 80% for 4th child	Linked to employment; reduced benefit available on social assistance basis	1992: leave extended from 270 to 365 days
Albania	365 days (35+330)	First 185 days: 80% of salary in last year, then 50%	Employment record more than 1 year	1994: duration of 2nd part of leave raised from 6 to 12 months
Bulgaria	120-80 days, depending on number of children	100% of last wage; minimum wage for uninsured mothers	Available on both social insurance and social assistance basis	–
Romania	112 days (56+56)	50-85% of last wage, depending on time employed; 94% for 3rd or following child	Linked to full-time employment	–
Estonia	126 days (70+56), or 70+70 in special cases	100% of last wage (average of last 2 months of employment)	Linked to employment	1993: leave extended from 56+56 and 57+70
Lithuania	126 days (70+56)	100% of last wage; 60% of last wage until child is age 1	Linked to employment	1991: benefit indexed to state minimum subsistence level
Latvia	126 days (70+56), linked to prenatal checkups	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	March 1991: period before birth raised from 56 to 70 days
Belarus	126 (70+56) to 140 days, depending on number of children	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	1991: benefit indexed, and period before birth raised from 56 to 70 days
Russia	140 days (70+70)	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	1992: increase in duration from 112 days 1993: extended to women laid off during pregnancy 1995: extended to full-time students 1997: leave extended to 156 days for multiple births
Ukraine	112 days (60+56), 60+70, depending on number of children, health	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	1991: leave raised from 112 to 126 days; increase from 50% to 100% of last wage, depending on length of employment
Armenia	140-80 days	–	Linked to employment	1991: leave raised from 122 to 140 days
Georgia	126 days (70+56)	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	–
Uzbekistan	126 days (70+56)	100% of last wage	Linked to employment	Since 1991, financed from pension fund
Tajikistan	140 days (70+70)	100% of last wage (paid in full, regardless of actual leave used)	Linked to employment	–

Sources: UNICEF (1997a); Posarac (1998); Papp (1998); Kupriyanova (1998); MEG (1998); Marnie (1998); ABW Khujand (1998).

importance of early childhood development. Parental leave in the region is most often available after maternity leave expires. It can be taken by either parent and typically offers time off work and a flat-rate benefit until the child is 2 or 3 years old. In some countries, like Bulgaria, a grandparent can also exercise this leave option. Parental leaves usually provide a guarantee of re-employment and can be used as a tool to reduce the labour force, at least in the short term.

Certainly, these leave options place less demand on government budgets than did the former widespread practice of providing nurseries for infants and toddlers, and many parents prefer staying home with young children, especially given the rising concerns about the quality of public care in the region. However, access to low-cost public childcare is important for parents, especially mothers who are raising children alone, have weak social support networks, or have low incomes and face pressure to return to work soon after childbirth. Kindergartens and pre-schools – usually available for children from age 3 until they enter primary school – not only help parents return to work, but also help children develop cognitive and social skills and prepare for school.

The fact that maternity entitlements – generous by international standards – have remained relatively untouched in the region since transition began indicates that governments recognize the importance of this support. Only a few countries, like the Czech Republic and Hungary, have trimmed benefit entitlements.

However, with the emergence of the private sector, it remains to be seen how maternity and parental leaves will fare. Employers may associate indirect costs (for example replacement workers) with these leaves, and this may fuel discriminatory practices in hiring, promotion and layoffs. The length of leaves may also become an issue. The amount of time off allowed has not been cut back in any country and has even been extended in some. In Russia, for example, the maternity leave has been raised from 16 to 20 weeks since 1992 and, in 1997, was further extended in special cases, such as multiple births and birth problems. Overall, it seems that governments are creating a generous framework for family-related leaves, but that the actual terms are being nego-

tiated at the individual level directly between employers and employees.

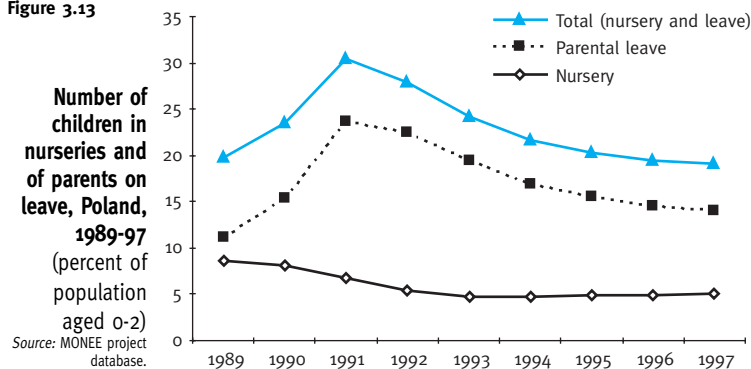
This situation puts many parents in a poor bargaining position, especially working women, who are still the primary users of family leaves. One study has found a growing gap since 1989 between parents who are entitled to benefits and those who actually take advantage of the benefits. In the Czech Republic, for example, 23 percent of the maternity leave days permitted by law remained unused in 1993, compared to only 5 percent four years earlier. This was partly due to women returning from leave early. Since maternity benefits are typically delivered through the workplace, the loss of jobs in the region has also affected women's access to these benefits. As a result, countries like Bulgaria or Lithuania have introduced maternity benefits on a social assistance basis as well. In some countries of the former Soviet Union, maternity benefits are, like wages, in arrears, and the value of maternity benefits has frequently eroded with high inflation.

Figure 3.13 compares the share of children looked after by parents on leave and the share of those cared for in nurseries in Poland – two childcare options available after maternity leave expires. The graph reflects a trend seen in many countries: a shift from nursery care to parental leave. The big surge in parental leave around 1991-92 in Poland clearly reflects government efforts to buffer the impact of cutbacks in workplace nurseries by promoting parental leave.

As with maternity leave, extended parental leave can have both positive and negative effects for women. The leave may provide an effective bridge between the workplace and home, but not without consequences for careers and earnings. It is predominantly women who take advantage of parental leave, and there are differences among the women who do. Women with good employment opportunities are less likely to take the full parental leave because the extended absence disrupts their career development. In Poland, more than two-thirds of women with higher education returned to work before the end of their parental leave.

Even though the law creates the basis for equal opportunity in parental leave, male participation remains negligible, often less than 1 percent (although some countries report a slight rise in recent years). Men's relatively higher wages and social expectations as regards gender roles influence this outcome, but laws and public attitudes can also reinforce it. For example, in some countries, like the Czech Republic, legislation makes it easier for women to use parental leave as an extension of maternity leave, whereas men have to pursue a different legal avenue to get parental leave from work. In others, the laws offer women better job protection. In Russia, for example, the law is written specifically to protect women with children under age 3 from dismissal. Fathers are only legally protected when they take parental leave where there is no mother present. Mothers may also have the right to engage in

Figure 3.13



part-time work or work at home while receiving leave benefits, but fathers are not permitted this option.

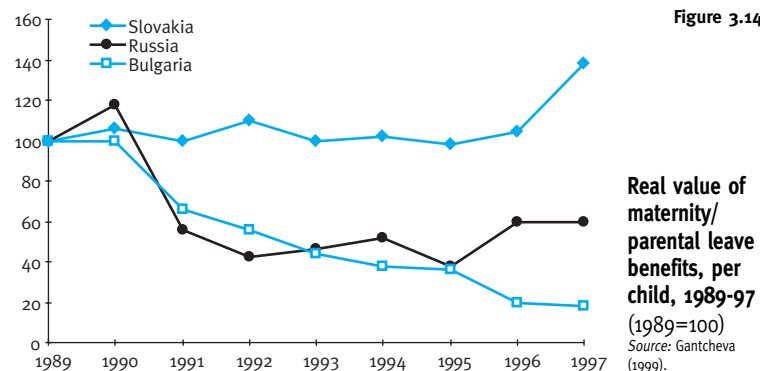
Some observers voice concern that extended parental leave may diminish the chance that a woman will return to the labour market. Again, the potential absences may be viewed by employers as a disincentive to hiring women and, thus, can represent an obstacle to women's economic improvement. Despite legal protection, there is growing evidence of dismissals from work that are related to parental leave. A survey in Hungary showed that about one in 10 women on leave said they could not return to their former employment. Almost one in three said their employers would not want to re-employ them. The survey also found many cases where employers tried to dismiss workers who took parental leave.

In recent years, some countries have restricted parental leave to low-income families, and others have dropped leave programmes entirely. For example, Armenia and Georgia, where extended families are common and the economic losses during transition huge, abolished parental leave in 1994. On the other hand, some countries have recently sought to bolster the value of benefits. As Figure 3.14 shows, the value of the parental leave benefit has eroded considerably during transition in Bulgaria and Russia, though not in Slovakia.

For families with pre-school children, adequate, accessible and affordable childcare is crucial to balancing employment and household responsibilities. Without childcare, one of the parents – typically the woman – has to stay home for a period of years, a circumstance that affects not only immediate household income, but the woman's lifelong career development and earnings. Children undoubtedly benefit greatly from the full-time care of an at-home parent in their early years, but, after age 2 or 3, there are also important social and cognitive developmental benefits associated with group environments outside the parental home, such as daycare or kindergarten.

Still, there has been a post-communist philosophical bent to “de-institutionalize” children and support stay-at-home parenting. For example, in 1993 Hungary introduced “maternity fees” for mothers with three or more children who stay at home with their children until the youngest reaches 8 years of age, and in 1995 the Czech Republic extended parental leave for childcare until the children reach age 4.

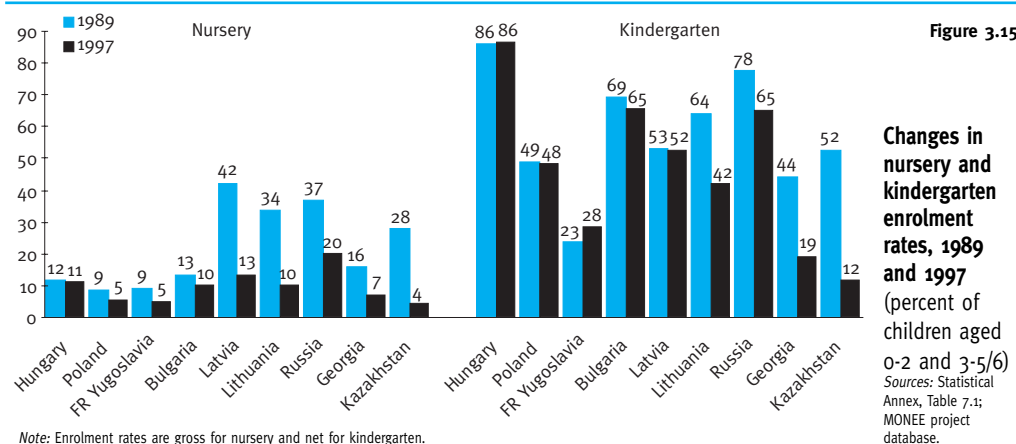
As Figure 3.15 presents, enrolment rates in nurseries (children up to age 2) have fallen throughout the region during the transition – most clearly in the Baltics, western CIS, the Caucasus, and Kazakhstan, where enrolments were considerable. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, nurseries have practically ceased to exist. Many factors have



converged to produce this outcome. The workplace childcare provided by state enterprises has greatly diminished or disappeared, and government policies, such as extended parental leave, and job loss are promoting the idea of stay-at-home parents.

Enrolment rates in kindergartens seem to have been much less affected, as Figure 3.15 shows, although enrolment has declined or is low in the southern part of the region, with the notable exception of Bulgaria and Romania. A recovery in enrolment rates has taken place in most Baltic and Central and Southeastern European countries, despite sharp declines in the number of places available in kindergartens. This is because the overall decrease in fertility has reduced infant and young child populations by 10-50 percent over the transition period. Moreover, in many countries, as Box 3.3 presents, governments have tried to curb rising fees, and local communities have made successful efforts to save kindergartens from closing.

Over 1996-97, kindergarten enrolments stabilized or improved in most countries, but declined further in Moldova, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. (See Statistical Annex, Table 7.1.) Current kindergarten enrolment rates reflect a sharper north-south urban-rural division than earlier. Interestingly, however, the changes in enrolment rates do not closely follow the changes in female labour force participation, suggesting that the interplay of household income, family structure, cultural patterns, and policy choices is becoming more important in childcare solutions.



### Sharing the responsibility for childcare: state, community and family

Every society must answer the question, who pays for childcare and how? The way individuals and communities answer this question is both a cause and a consequence of the balance of gender power in the home and in society. Responsibility for raising children is a fulcrum about which gender equality pivots. Certainly, women have a special and, usually, primary role in raising children; the challenge to progress is to support women in this role without compromising women's equality.

This challenge is particularly acute in the transition countries, where the forces of transformation have upset the former equilibrium among women, work and state-provided childcare. Under communism, childcare was widely available and widely used, particularly in countries where women's participation in the labour force was high. Since the transition began, the availability of public nurseries and kindergartens has decreased; quality has often deteriorated, and user costs have risen.

These conditions mean difficult choices for parents, especially mothers, as they weigh the trade-offs of bleaker job prospects, lower real wages, lower childcare quality, and higher childcare fees in public and new private facilities. (See Table 3.5.) Evidence suggests that households are often unwilling or unable to pay the higher childcare fees in public facilities, creating a chain reaction of dropping demand, empty seats and even less impetus for government to commit further resources. Far fewer can afford higher quality private nurseries and kindergartens. In Hungary in 1997, registered private kindergarten enrolments made up 2 percent of total enrolments, and in Poland 3 percent – less than 2 percent of all children in the 3-6 age group. It is increasingly common for families in Central Europe and western CIS to turn to relatives. This is especially so in the Caucasus, former Yugoslavia and Central Asia, where extended families are still prevalent.

Childcare costs for pre-schoolers are frequently the single highest expenditure on services for families with young children. Often, family decisions come down to a trade-off between the woman's wages and the cost of childcare. Since women's wages are typically significantly lower than men's, it is usually women who give up paid work to stay home. This can be an especially critical decision in lower income and poor families, where the mother's earnings have added importance, and, indeed, may make the difference between low income and poverty for the family. To support gender

equality, therefore, policy makers might look at childcare fees as a percentage of women's average wages rather than simply as a percentage of overall average wages.

In response to the difficulties faced by low-income families, some countries have made efforts to contain fees and offer pre-school care based on need. In Kazakhstan, a 1992 decree set user fees in municipal kindergartens at 30 percent of the average per-child food costs in the facilities. A regulation introduced in Russia in 1992 limited user fees to 20 percent of costs and 10 percent for families with three or more children.

Significant numbers of children attend pre-school on a social assistance basis. In Moldova, the families of 18 percent of the children enrolled pay no fees. In FR Yugoslavia, 1996 data show that the fees for 25 percent of the children enrolled were subsidized by up to half of the value of the fee and that the fees of 23 percent were subsidized for more than half this value; overall, parents paid just 15 percent of the average total cost of care per child per month. Nevertheless, many gaps remain in the quality and availability of childcare, and access has become increasingly polarized according to family income level.

Two areas that obviously need development are the status of new private-sector employers in promoting family-friendly workplace policies and programmes and the explicit public policies that encourage the growth of registered home-based childcare services. The one-size-fits-all approach of communism needs to be replaced with a flexible widespread network of childcare options that responds to the diversity emerging in the work and family lives of women and men.

Table 3.5  
Monthly fees for public and private nurseries and kindergartens, 1998

	Enrolment rate % (1997)	Public fees		Private fees
		% average wage	% minimum wage	% average wage
<b>Nurseries</b>				
Romania	2	13	37	65
Estonia	18	2-14	n/a	28-84
Uzbekistan	n/a	8-41	40-200	n/a
<b>Kindergartens</b>				
Czech Republic	83	2-5	6-20	n/a
FR Yugoslavia*	28	25	n/a	120-80
Romania	63	26	79	81
Russia	65	10-14	117-57	no private
Georgia	19	38-47	120-50	118-40

Sources: Hendrichova and Kucharova (1998); Posarac (1998); Zamfir and Zamfir (1998); Papp (1998); Kupriyanova (1998); MEG (1998); Marnie (1998).

Note: n/a = Not available. \* Data on fees refer to Belgrade only.



### 3.4 Conclusions

The role of women in families and of the family in women's lives is one of the defining dimensions of gender equality and human development. This chapter reviews the evidence presented by demographic statistics and sociological surveys with the aim of shaping a portrait of women's changing aspirations and functions related to the family at a time of massive economic transformation. The chapter also examines changes in family-related policies and how they reflect and reinforce social attitudes, public goals and local and individual responses to the competing interests of work and family. The portrait of women and family drawn from the data, though sometimes faint and necessarily incomplete, reveals some noteworthy gaps between women's expressed desires and women's realities.

Certainly, women in the region are diverse in their ambitions and their circumstances. The constraining uniformity of ideology and social policy under communism is fading. In the more open environment of the transition, women and men are becoming more receptive to new ideas and influences, while, at the same time, they are rediscovering their cultural traditions. From this mix, different realities for women are emerging across the region. Divorce rates are higher than marriage rates in Estonia; cohabitation among young couples is more widespread in Slovenia, and single parenthood is rising in Russia. On the other hand, divorce rates are falling in the Caucasus, and marriage and fertility rates are lower but still vigorous in Central Asia. A greater variety of demographic and family behaviour is often appearing within countries as well.

Although the conditions supporting early childbearing have changed drastically during transition, teenage parenthood remains relatively common in most countries. This may simply reflect an ingrained expectation about the appropriate time to have a first child, an expectation many young women hold despite economic and, possibly, personal uncertainty. However, as recent evidence from the Czech Republic shows, teenage girls are increasingly recognizing the personal opportunities lost by following the family formation patterns of earlier generations, especially given current economic conditions in the region. Teenage fertility rates are, however, proving to be more persistent in areas where early childbearing seems to be rooted strongly in ethnic or national culture.

The review of family policies in the region clearly demonstrates that women are less able to count on regular support from the state. Child-related benefits and services represent an implicit and sometimes explicit income support for women, and, with a decline in this support, the gender gap in wages is also being more acutely felt. At the same time, emerging income tax systems do not provide particularly strong incentives for women to withdraw from the labour market and stay at home to raise their young children. Many governments have made considerable efforts to maintain or extend family supports, but both the functions and the resources of the state are weakened, and, therefore, so is the state's capacity to act. Fresh approaches are needed

to balance work and childcare responsibilities, especially in the area of workplace policies and programmes in the new private sector and in the area of community-based solutions.

Under communism, the women of the region lived in a unique environment that shaped their choices and decisions about work and family commitments. There was full employment, generous family supports linked to the workplace, and a state with strong pro-natalist goals. However, beyond state-run programmes, there was a glaring absence of organized community or grassroots support for women with children and, in the private realm of the home, little discussion or movement on the gender balance of power and the equitable distribution of family responsibilities. With the retreat of the state from daily life, these societies must now fill in the blanks in the interdependent arrangement of work and the family.

There are a number of opportunities to seize in this new territory, and parts of the inheritance of the past are worth building on. For example, it will pay to maintain the high levels of education and health care enjoyed by women as these are prime determinants of women's and children's welfare and contribution to society. Government still has an important part to play in the work-family balancing act, and the new democratic institutions of the region can develop fresh family policies that are not simply tools to promote women's participation in the labour force, but flexible mechanisms which support a wide range of choices that women and men make about work and family and which, in so doing, enlarge the capacity of individuals to make choices.

To survive the turmoil of the transition, women have drawn on social networks of family and friends, neighbours and acquaintances to keep their households running: trading goods and services, making job connections and soliciting childcare. These spontaneous networks offer a good beginning for the development of organized efforts in civil society to support parents and children. Certainly, since the transition is largely about economic transformation, the new marketplace has a significant part to play in achieving a reasonable equilibrium between work and family. Workplace policies and programmes that enhance the capacity of parents to manage work and family responsibilities – maternity and parental leaves, flexible hours and work arrangements, family leave days, and childcare supports – represent an investment in human resources, including the next generation, and build equal opportunities for women.

It is important that both women and men be given the support they need to make choices about work and family. Just as it is increasingly recognized that women play economic and social roles in society that are equally important to the role they play as mothers, it is being recognized that men have a role to play as fathers that goes beyond their role as breadwinners. The equitable sharing of the responsibility for raising children is not only a fundamental condition of gender equality, it expands the choices of both women and men and must therefore benefit all. ■