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# FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE V4 COUNTRIES

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**Abstract:** *The study examines the countries of the Visegrad Group from the point of view of how widespread family-friendly working arrangements are in their labor market. The paper highlights that the labor market of the V4 countries in the past decade was characterized by continuous rise of employment rates. As the role of women in the labor market increases, employees have to face constant challenges in reconciling their professional and family obligations. However, flexible working arrangements that could help employees combine work and private life, are still not widespread in the V4 countries. The study primarily examines the proportion of part-time employees and remote workers of the Visegrad countries in the light of Eurostat data. The paper emphasizes the role of the governments, companies, and civil society in creating ideal workplaces for employees with family.*

**Keywords:** *V4 countries; work-life balance; family-friendly working arrangements; part-time employment; telecommuting*

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## Introduction

Nowadays, reconciling family life and work obligations is a constant challenge for employees in developed countries. With the increasing employment of women, the two-earner family model spread, and traditional family-roles were transformed (Czibere, 2020). At the same time, more and more attention was focused on examining the relationship between family and work. Research has shown that these two areas of life are related to each other, as what happens at work affects family life and vice versa (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Today, most people have to stand up both at workplace and in family life, which can often cause conflicts between their professional and family roles (Gregor, 2008). Aspiration for a harmonious relationship between the two areas

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of life is becoming more and more important, not only for employees, but also for employers and society.

Furthermore, the priority aim of the European Union is to create equality between men and women in all areas of life, including employment. The Work-life Balance Directive (EU) 2019/1158 states that the participation of women in the labor market should be increased and all employees should be supported in balancing work and family-related obligations. Research proves that the successful reconciliation of professional and family roles can result in higher female employment and/or higher fertility rates (Engelhardt et al., 2004; Thévenon, 2011). Besides, there is a positive relationship between women's labour force participation and economic growth (Jaba et al., 2017).

Reconciliation of work and family can be supported at the national level with family policies (e.g. childcare leaves and childcare services), and at the company level with flexible working arrangements (Matysiak & Węziak-Białowolska, 2016). Organizations can offer their employees reduced working hours (e.g. part-time employment), remote work (e.g. working from home) and other flexible arrangements which contributes to reducing work-family tensions (Allen & Shockley, 2009; Hill et al., 2010).

In recent decades, the countries of the Visegrad Group (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) have faced the same demographic challenges, and similar labor market trends characterized the labor markets of the four countries. In the V4 countries, the employment rate of women is much lower compared to Western and Northern European countries (Cukrowska-Torzewska et al., 2020), however it has been steadily increasing in recent years. For the Visegrad countries, the family is of fundamental importance, therefore supporting families and creating an ideal environment for them are prioritized both at national and local levels (Pátkainé Bende, 2022).

Previously, several studies have examined the family policies of the V4 countries (e.g. Czeglédi et al., 2022; Duda et al., 2022; Pátkainé Bende, 2022) and also their labor market situation (e.g. Białowas et al., 2019; Horbulák, 2022; Zieliński, 2015). The purpose of this paper is to reveal how widespread flexible working arrangements that support work-family reconciliation are in the labor market of the Visegrad countries, and what tendencies are typical in this regard in the last decade.

The first part of the study reviews the family-friendly workplace arrangements that promote the balance of work and family in the light of the literature. The following sections examine labour market statistics of the Visegrad countries, based on the Eurostat database. Since among the family-friendly workplace practices, part-time employment and working from home are the most noticeable based on the available international statistics, the study primarily focuses on them. The final part of the paper presents the conclusions and the summary.

## **Family-friendly Workplace Arrangements – Literature Review**

The study first looks at what the literature means by the concept of family-friendly workplace practices and what are its most common implementations.

According to OECD (2007), family-friendly workplace arrangements are those practices that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life. Several studies state that one of the most important categories of workplace initiatives supporting work-family balance is flexible working arrangements (e.g. Dulk, 2001; Mesmer-Magnus & Viswesvaran, 2006). Researches prove that workplace flexibility contributes to reducing tension between work and family (Allen & Shockley, 2009; Hill et al., 2010). On the other hand, the introduction of flexible work is beneficial not only to employees, but also to employers, since workers become more efficient, their loyalty and motivation increase, which can lead to better economic results (Živčicová et al., 2017). Therefore, it is very important that organizations provide flexible arrangements to their employees.

Flexibility can be achieved both in terms of time (e.g. part-time employment, flexible working hours) and location of work (e.g. working from home) (Van Steenbergen et al., 2018; Kotera & Vione, 2020). Part-time employment means shorter working hours than normal working hours. More specifically, part-time workers are those who work less than 30 hours per week (Hárs, 2013). Part-time work is often chosen by those who are raising small children, or taking care of sick, elderly family members, as well as because of other family reasons (Eurostat, 2019). Research shows that although part-time employment has negative aspects, one of its main benefits is that it can reduce the conflict between work and family life (Van Breeschoten & Evertsson, 2019).

In her study, Vernon (2009) mentions several possibilities for the implementation of time flexibility which can contribute to combining work and family responsibilities for employees. Flexible working hours are one of the most popular workplace practices among the flexible arrangements which allows employees to adjust start and end times of work. Employers can offer compressed hours, which means that employed persons work 40 hours per week in four days, in exchange for one rest day. Term-time work is also worth mentioning, when employees only work during the school year, while they get leave during the summer holidays. Furthermore, a popular form of flexible arrangements is job-sharing, when two people split a full-time job, jointly assume responsibility for the job, and duties can be divided in various ways, such as weekly or daily sharing.

Flexibility can also be realized in the location of work, the best-known form of which is telecommuting/remote work, especially working from home (Hill et al., 2008). The main characteristics of telecommuting are that the employer and the employee are spatially distant from each other, the employee performs independent and regular work, and contact with the employer is carried out electronically (Takács, 2010). Based on research, working from home has a positive effect on reconciling work and family (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007).

Part-time employment or telecommuting can be considered atypical forms of work, as they differ from the traditional eight-hour-a-day work performed at workplaces (Hárs, 2013). In recent decades, we have witnessed the rise of atypical works in the labor market of the European Union (Artner, 2018), however there are significant differences in their prevalence by region and gender. Atypical forms of work, especially part-time work, are more common among women than men. Furthermore, this type of work is most widespread in the countries of Northern and Western Europe, whereas it is less common in the labor markets of Central and Eastern Europe (Allmendinger et al., 2013; Artner, 2018). However, as a

result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prevalence of flexible working arrangements has risen sharply throughout Europe (Sinclair et al., 2020).

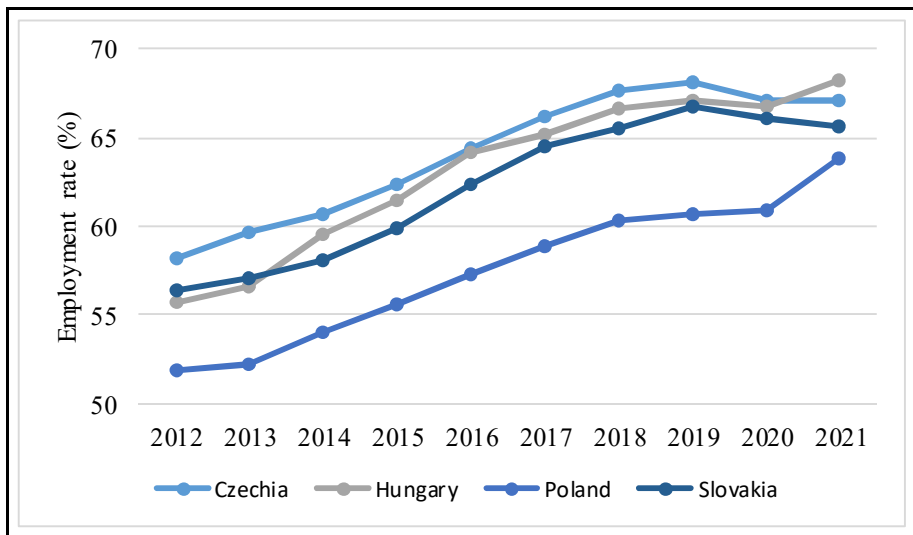
## Numbers in the Light of Statistics – Employment Rates in the Visegrad Countries

The following parts of the study examine the employment rate of the Visegrad countries in the light of Eurostat data, and highlight the labour market changes that have occurred in the last few years.

As can be seen in Table 1, the employment rates of the V4 countries, with the exception of the period of the Covid-19 pandemic, have been continuously increasing in the past decade. Moreover, the employment rate exceeded the European Union average in all the countries of the Visegrad Group in 2021. The largest value was recorded in the Czech Republic while the lowest one in Slovakia.

Compared to Western and Northern European countries, women in the Visegrad countries participate in the labor market at a lower rate, however, in the past decade, more and more women have been working in the examined countries as well. Figure 1 illustrates the growth of the female employment rate in the four countries between 2012 and 2021. During this period, the largest change was in Hungary, where the employment rate of women increased by 12,5 percentage points.

*Figure 1. Employment rate of females, aged 15-64, 2012-2021*



*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

**Table 1: Employment rate, aged 15-64, 2012-2021**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	62,6	62,5	63,2	64,1	65,2	66,4	67,3	68,1	67,0	68,4
<b>Czechia</b>	66,5	67,7	69,0	70,2	72,0	73,6	74,8	75,1	74,4	74,4
<b>Hungary</b>	58,6	60,1	63,6	65,9	68,5	70,2	71,4	72,2	71,9	73,1
<b>Poland</b>	58,0	58,4	60,2	61,6	63,5	65,3	66,6	67,5	67,8	70,3
<b>Slovakia</b>	61,4	61,6	62,7	64,5	66,7	68,1	69,5	70,4	69,5	69,4

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

In 2021, among the V4 countries the highest share of employed women was recorded in Hungary while the lowest rate was reported by Poland, however, the Polish value also exceeded the EU average. Despite the positive changes related to female employment, women are still underrepresented in the labour market of the Visegrad countries. As we can see in Table 2, the gender employment gap in 2021 was the largest in the Czech Republic, with 14,2 percentage points, while it was below 10 percentage points in Hungary and Slovakia.

**Table 2: Employment rate, aged 15-64, by gender, 2021**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	73,3	63,4	9,9
<b>Czechia</b>	81,3	67,1	14,2
<b>Hungary</b>	77,9	68,2	9,7
<b>Poland</b>	76,8	63,8	13,0
<b>Slovakia</b>	73,3	65,6	7,7

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

It is also important to examine the employment rates of parents raising at least one child less than six years old (Table 3), as this is the group that significantly faces the challenges of combining work and family. It can be concluded that men who raise at least one child are characterized by a high rate of employment. In most of the V4 countries, the employment rate of fathers is, like the EU average, about 20-23 percentage points higher than that of mothers. The Czech Republic is out of line, where the maternal employment rate is much lower than the EU average: in 2021, only 42.3 percent of Czech mothers were employed while 95.4 percent of fathers worked, which means a difference of more than 50 percentage points. It can be concluded that in the Czech Republic traditional male-female roles still dominate, and mothers mostly stay at home with their children while fathers work.

**Table 3: Employment rate of people aged 18-64 with at least one child less than 6 years, by gender, 2021**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	87,5	64,0	23,5
<b>Czechia</b>	95,4	42,3	53,1
<b>Hungary</b>	91,1	67,3	23,8
<b>Poland</b>	84,1	61,9	22,2
<b>Slovakia</b>	87,2	66,8	20,4

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

Below, the study provides an overview of the prevalence of family-friendly working arrangements, especially part-time employment and telecommuting, in the labour market of the V4 countries.

## Part-time Employment in the V4 Countries

Among the atypical forms of work, part-time employment can be considered one of the most widespread in Europe, however, when examining the statistical data, we find that it is not popular among the employees in the Visegrad countries.

Table 4 shows the part-time employment rate of the European Union and the V4 countries between 2012 and 2021. As it can be seen, the share of this type of employment fluctuated between 17,7 and 18,7 percent in the EU which was significantly higher than the rates of the Visegrad countries. In 2021, the highest part-time employment rate was measured in the Czech Republic among the four countries, 5,7 percent, while the lowest value was reported in Slovakia, where only 3,1 percent of employment was comprised of part-time jobs.

**Table 4: Part-time employment rate of employed persons, aged 15-64, 2012-2021**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	18,1	18,6	18,6	18,7	18,6	18,5	18,3	18,3	18,2	17,7
<b>Czechia</b>	5,0	5,8	5,5	5,3	5,7	6,2	6,3	6,3	5,7	5,7
<b>Hungary</b>	6,7	6,4	6,0	5,7	4,8	4,3	4,2	4,4	4,8	4,6
<b>Poland</b>	7,2	7,1	7,1	6,8	6,4	6,6	6,4	6,1	5,9	5,2
<b>Slovakia</b>	4,0	4,5	5,1	5,8	5,8	5,8	4,9	4,5	4,6	3,1

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

Across Europe, reduced work schedule is primarily associated with female employees. In 2021, the proportion of women employed part-time in all V4 countries constituted below 10 percent, which was far from the EU average. Table 5 shows the differences between the part-time employment rate of men and women. Among the countries of

the Visegrad Group, the gender gap was the highest in the Czech Republic, where 2.5 percent of men and 9.6 percent of women worked part-time, whereas it was below 5 percentage points in Hungary, Poland and Slovakia.

**Table 5: Part-time employment rate of employed persons, aged 15-64, by gender, 2021**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	8,1	28,8	20,7
<b>Czechia</b>	2,5	9,6	7,1
<b>Hungary</b>	2,7	6,7	4,1
<b>Poland</b>	3,3	7,6	4,3
<b>Slovakia</b>	1,8	4,6	2,8

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

We need to examine how widespread part-time work is among parents, as they can particularly benefit from this type of employment when reconciling work and family obligations. Table 6 contains the share of part-time employed adults who are raising at least one young child. It can be concluded that the part-time employment rate of women with one or more children in the V4 countries is quite low, below the EU average. At the same time, we find differences related to the four countries, since 24.5 percent of Czech mothers take on part-time jobs, but only 5.6 percent of them in Slovakia. The part-time share of men raising children is extremely low in these countries. As a conclusion, primarily female employees prefer this type of work.

**Table 6: Part-time employment rate of employed persons, aged 18-64, with at least one child less than 6 years, by gender, 2021**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	5,7	33,9	28,2
<b>Czechia</b>	1,8	24,5	22,7
<b>Hungary</b>	2,0	8,2	6,2
<b>Poland</b>	2,0	8,3	6,3
<b>Slovakia</b>	not available	5,6	not available

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

There can be several reasons for deciding to work in reduced hours. Table 7 illustrates why part-time workers in the EU and V4 countries chose this form of employment. In the four countries, the proportion of involuntary part-time employees, who would like a full-time job but cannot find it, was observed below the EU average, between 14.4 percent (Poland) and 23.0 percent (Hungary). The other employees need reduced work schedule by their own preferences, for example due to raising children, caring for family members with disabilities or other family/personal reasons. For example,

although the proportion of part-time workers in Slovakia is very low, nearly 30 percent of them decides on this form specifically because of family reasons. Part-time employment due to personal or family reasons is more or less typical in the other V4 countries.

**Table 7: Main reason for part-time employment, aged 15-64, 2021**

	EU-27	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
No full-time job founded	23,3	17,6	23,0	14,4	20,8
Education or training	12,4	11,8	7,7	10,0	9,7
Own illness or disability	5,4	20,1	20,2	7,7	14,1
Care of adults with disabilities or children; other <b>family reasons</b>	26,3	25,2	16,4	11,4	28,1
Other personal reasons	10,6	12,7	1,5	49,2	18,7
Other reasons	22,0	12,6	31,2	7,3	8,5

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

## Working from Home in the V4 Countries

One of the most popular implementations of spatial flexibility is telecommuting, especially working from home. Table 8 demonstrates how the percentage of employees usually working from home has developed over the past decade in the EU and the V4 countries.

It can be observed that in the years before the Covid-19 pandemic, this type of work was very rare: in the EU, approximately 5 percent of employees worked from home during that period while even lower values were measured in the Visegrad countries. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the prevalence of telecommuting has risen sharply throughout the EU: in the period between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of people working from home has more than doubled. The pandemic also affected the labour market of the Visegrad Group, where the proportion of remote workers increased significantly, but still remained below the EU average. In 2021, 7.2 percent of Czechs, while 4.5 percent of Hungarians performed their work duties from home.

**Table 8: Percentage of employed persons usually working from home, aged 15-64, 2012-2021**

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	5,5	4,9	4,8	4,9	4,8	5,1	5,2	5,4	12	13,4
<b>Czechia</b>	3,4	3,3	3,4	3,5	3,8	3,9	4	4,6	7,2	7,2
<b>Hungary</b>	3,1	3,9	3,4	3,4	3	2,5	2,3	1,2	3,6	4,5
<b>Poland</b>	4,6	4	4,6	5,6	5,3	4,5	4,6	4,6	8,9	6,9
<b>Slovakia</b>	3,5	3,5	3,5	3,2	3,2	3,5	3,6	3,7	5,7	6,6

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*



Telecommuting is more typical for women than men, but the statistical data show that this trend was more significant before the pandemic.

As seen from Table 9, 14.4 percent of women and 12.5 percent of men in the EU reported in 2021 that they usually work from home, which means a difference of only 1.9 percentage points. In the Visegrad countries, the percentage of female employees working from home was below 10 percent: it ranged from 5.0 percent (Hungary) to 8.6 percent (Czech Republic). In the four countries, the difference between the percentage of men and women who usually work remotely is very small: in Slovakia, for example, it is only 0.7 percentage points.

**Table 9: Percentage of employed persons usually working from home, aged 15-64, by gender, 2021**

	Male (%)	Female (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	12,5	14,4	1,9
<b>Czechia</b>	6,0	8,6	2,6
<b>Hungary</b>	4,1	5,0	0,9
<b>Poland</b>	6,2	7,8	1,6
<b>Slovakia</b>	6,3	7,0	0,7

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

Table 10 shows statistics on remote workers raising young children, by gender. Among the V4 countries, the Czech Republic had the highest percentage of mothers working from home: every fifth Czech women with small children worked remotely, but even this value is below the EU average (25.8 percent). In the Visegrad countries, the percentage of fathers raising at least one young child and working usually from home was between 15.0 percent and 19.2 percent, moreover in Hungary and Slovakia the rate of fathers exceeded that of mothers. In conclusion, we can no longer claim that a woman with small children is more likely to work from home than a father.

**Table 10: Percentage of employed persons usually working from home, aged 18-64, with at least one child less than 6 years, by gender, 2021**

	Males (%)	Females (%)	Gender gap (percentage points)
<b>EU-27 countries</b>	24,7	25,8	1,1
<b>Czechia</b>	15,3	20,5	5,2
<b>Hungary</b>	15,0	9,5	5,5
<b>Poland</b>	15,6	16,3	0,7
<b>Slovakia</b>	19,2	12,7	6,5

*Source: Author's representation based on Eurostat data (2022)*

## Discussions and Conclusions

This study presented how widespread those family-friendly working arrangements are in the labor market of the Visegrad Four that support the balance of work and family, especially part-time employment and working from home. The paper highlighted that the labor market of the V4 countries in the past decade was characterized by continuous rise of employment rates which exceeded the EU average in the case of each country in 2021. It can be concluded that men are more likely to work than women, however the labor force participation of female is constantly increasing: more and more women and mothers are working in the Visegrad countries.

As the role of women in the labor market increases, the two-earner family model becomes common, and employees have to face constant challenges in reconciling their professional and family obligations. Although the governments of the V4 countries support families with a number of family policy measures (e.g. Czeglédi et al., 2022; Duda et al., 2022), flexible working arrangements that could help employees combine work and family, are still not widespread in the four countries. The study presented that the rate of part-time and remote workers, even among employees raising young children, has remained quite low in these countries over the past decade. Only the Czech Republic has quite high rates of mothers working in family-friendly forms of employment, but also below the EU average. At the beginning of the 2020 decade, the Covid-19 pandemic caused changes, as a result of which the share of employed persons working from home has significantly increased in the countries of the Visegrad Group as well. At the same time, further investigations are required to reveal whether companies will retain the workplace flexibility caused by the pandemic in the long term, recognizing its benefits.

Furthermore, the question arises as to what measures would be necessary in order for family-friendly working arrangements to be more widely spread in the labor market of the Visegrad countries. The study emphasizes the role of the governments, companies, and civil society in creating ideal workplaces for employees with family.

The actors of the government can encourage employers to introduce family-friendly, flexible working arrangements in several ways, for example with more favorable labor laws and economic incentives. In addition, the author of the paper considers it important that the state participates in the widespread dissemination of the family-friendly approach, by drawing attention to family-friendly workplaces and emphasizing their advantages. This is very significant because the leaders of the companies may prevent the introduction of these forms of employment because they are not sufficiently aware of their benefits.

Civil organizations and companies that have already introduced family-friendly practices can play a role in making others aware of the positive effects of family-friendly working environment. In this regard, we can already find good examples among the Visegrad countries. In Hungary, a non-governmental organization, the Three Princes, Three Princesses Movement, founded the “Family-friendly Company of the Year” award in 2013, with the aim of recognizing those participants of the corporate sector who support their employees in reconciling work and family obligations by introducing family-

friendly workplace practices. The movement and award-winning companies consider it important that family-friendly working arrangements spread through their knowledge-sharing activities as widely as possible in Hungarian workplaces.

Overall, the study states that promoting flexible working arrangements is key in the Visegrad countries to further increase female labor force participation, and for employees to achieve a better work-family balance, and, last but not least, for employers to also benefit from them, achieving better economic results.

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## Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

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