

WORKSHEET

Gender issues in Czechoslovakia (1918 – 1992) and the Czech Republic (1993 – 2017)

In this worksheet you will get acquainted with:

- the circumstances of the right to vote acquisition for women in our country
- causes leading to a change in the view of gender after the World War II
- the position of women in the Czechoslovak Republic under the communist regime
- the development of gender studies taking place in our country after 1993

Situation in the Czech lands and Czechoslovakia until 1945

We have already announced that at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a gradual increase in women's self-confidence, which was also reflected in the Czech lands. Women began to long for education, better employment and legal recognition of their political and social rights. Some associations supporting the emancipation movement continued to operate, or new ones were established. In addition, a typical feature of the Czech lands was the connection between the feminist situation and patriotic ideas. However, women in what was then Austria-Hungary did not achieve radical and more complex social changes.

All the efforts of Czech feminists were suppressed by the World War I, which proved the need to change the view of the social status of women in the society. Due to the absence of men in the background, women took over their duties, and thanks to their conscientious and diligent work, many of their goals were

fulfilled soon after the end of the war and the **proclamation of the independent Czechoslovak Republic**.

The awareness of the equality needed between women and men in all areas gradually raised during the 1920s and 1930s in the Czechoslovak Republic. In both of these decades, these attempts were successful thanks to the personality of the President of the Republic, **T. G. Masaryk**, who himself was involved in removing social barriers. Thus, women gradually began to appear in active politics and after the elections they joined several times the Czechoslovak parliament.

The best evidence of these changes was the area of education. From 1921 girls could attend purely boys' secondary schools, which, on the contrary, led to the closure of the existing purely girls' schools.

Following this measure, women began to study at universities, in addition to Charles University, also from 1919 at the newly founded Masaryk University in Brno and Comenius University in Bratislava, although there were still some restrictions on their admission. In the academic year 1921/1922, women made up approximately 6% of students at Czechoslovak universities, while in 1937/1938 it was already 17%.

Unfortunately, all women's emancipation tendencies were interrupted with the end of independent Czechoslovakia. Although the German occupying power officially supported women in some spheres of life (especially in the family one), in practice it was not possible to consider other demands of feminists at all. In addition, the women had more worries to handle and work to do, so they voluntarily postponed gender issues.

1.1 Gender issues in Czechoslovakia after World War II

Czechoslovak society changed completely after the Second World War and also underwent a radical change in its attitudes to gender issues. One of the main reasons for these changes was, of course, the lower level of the war-torn economy, the lack of all goods and services, and the change in the political system. The renewed Czechoslovak Republic solved many serious problems, which also had their consequences in the area of gender.

Among other things, the company had to deal with a shortage of manpower. The former concept of man - breadwinner and female - caregiver was now completely rejected, with women taking mass positions - from heavy industry and engineering to administration and government. In part, they replaced the men missing in these branches and partly filled the posts of Germans who were expelled from Czechoslovakia after the war. The state strongly supported the wider employment of women and began to create suitable conditions for women workers. The government already in the Košice government program from April 1945 in the XIV. the chapter stated that it would provide work for all able – to- work citizens and ensure by law fixed working hours, wages and working conditions.

The construction of pre-school facilities for children from the age of two began, a new social and health system was introduced, recruitment allowances were offered for those who will work at the border, wages in the lowest paid sectors increased, etc. A benefit for mothers was also introduced, which included free health care, 18 weeks of financial assistance, children's equipment and a one-time benefit of CZK 2,500.

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In 1946, the government approved a two-year plan to raise the level of the economy. In order to meet this plan, a total of 590,000 new workers (230,000 in agriculture, 270,000 in industry and 90,000 in construction) had to join the work process over the two years. To achieve this goal, a law was passed in May 1947 on *“Some Measures to Implement National Labour Force Mobilization.”* By 1948, a total of 475,000 new workers were recruited, half of whom were women.

The political pressure on women's employment and the appropriate conditions created by the state led to the fact that in the 1960s, Czechoslovakia was the first in the world in the area of women's employment.

In 1948, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia came to power and ruled the country until 1989. Throughout its own domination, the Communist Party persecuted in various ways anyone who deviated from official structures. Many

topics were taboo, including gender issues. The state tolerated various discriminatory elements in society in relation to women and women attributed the role of caregiver while employed. State propaganda also acted in this sense. The “right” woman therefore had to take care of the household after the end of working hours and ensure its normal functioning. The idea of women fighting the prejudices of society was completely illusory. Women were forbidden to form associations outside the official National Front. Unlike in Western European countries, Czechoslovak women were not allowed to publicly fight against stereotypes of society, government measures, to publish professional articles on gender issues, or to publicly demonstrate for the improvement of their position. The qualifications for obtaining a higher position were usually not a person’s abilities and education, but his/her attitude towards the ruling party.

Although the standard of living of the population increased over time, the development of wage growth was highly discriminatory. Officially, there were uniform wage tariffs, but in reality women’s wages consistently reached approximately 2/3 of men’s wages. The discussions on some topics practically did not exist. With its generous social policy, the state tried to compensate for the shortcomings of the communist regime.

On the other hand, between 1948 and 1989, women's education increased rapidly, women became more economically independent of men, and the state helped women take care of their children. Thanks to better health care, the average life expectancy also increased. Over time, women became more emancipated, although their activities were limited. At the beginning of the 1970s, maternity support was significantly raised and a population explosion “broke out” in Czechoslovakia. However, society's basic view of women's rights did not change much in Czechoslovakia during the 1970s and 1980s.

1.1 Gender development in the Czech Republic

In 1989, a new chapter in the history of Czechoslovakia began to be written. The Communist Party’s monopoly of power ended, and in 1990 the first free elections in 44 years took place. The following elections in 1992 determined the further direction of the state, which on 1 January 1993 was divided into two separate republics - the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. One of the significant changes in society’s behaviour since 1989 is the fact that society has become interested in many things, including gender issues.

The development of gender studies was initially possible mainly by renewed contacts with foreign countries, which have been working on this topic for a long time. In the Czech Republic, it was first necessary to start breaking down experienced gender stereotypes and patterns of behaviour. We can state that in the 1990s, the Czech Republic was marked by fears and rejections of feminism. It is interesting, that even initial research and studies were supported by foreign institutions from Germany and the USA.

A qualitatively different part of the development in terms of the position of men and women in society occurred in the Czech Republic around the year 2000. The society gradually began to realize the need to change current approach and attitudes to equality and elimination of discriminatory behaviour. A larger number of non-profit organizations, university workplaces and professional journals dealing with gender studies were established. Their aim was to disseminate and promote their theses and to conduct research in the area of gender.

In today's society, these organizations already have an irreplaceable role and a certain reputation. They also participate e. g. in the creation of laws, give incentives for anti-discrimination measures through their research, and organize educational events for the public. The accession of the Czech Republic to the EU in 2004 also had an impact on strengthening the position of these institutions.

At present, several dozen civic associations monitoring gender issues are successfully operating in the Czech Republic. Whereas previously all organizations had a more or less similar goal, now each of them specializes in specific areas. The Czech Republic has also adopted many legal norms to eliminate gender inequalities – e. .g. in the area of domestic violence.

The biggest problems so far include: equal pay for men and women, equal access to leadership in the public and private spheres, and the quantitative representation of women in politics. The policy has changed the media's approach to these issues.