

# The au pair employers: Who are they, whom they search for and what do they await?<sup>1</sup>

Miloslav Bahna<sup>2</sup>

Institute for Sociology Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava

## The Au Pair Employers: Who Are They, Whom They Search For and What Do They Await?

The starting point of our work is the often-stated re-emergence of individual paid childcare in western countries. We begin with an overview of the dominant explanations presented in literature available. Using data from online au pair agencies we try to answer the questions presented in the title of this study focusing on the differences between countries in demand and expectations. After presenting the results we try to validate the dominant explanations of the re-emergence of housemaids in western households via a confrontation with our findings. While failing in the attempt to prove that the influence of growing employment of women, the unwillingness of men to involve in doing housework and the shortcoming and dismantling of (subsidized) institutional childcare are in an anticipated correlation with demand for paid childcare we present alternative hypothesis to explain the phenomenon discussed.

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The new boom of individual paid childcare stated by various authors (e.g. Gregson, N. – Lowe, M., 1994; Anderson, B., 2000; Henschall Momsen, J., 1999; Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., 2001; Hess, S. – Puckhaber, A., 2004) is mostly explained by growing employment of women in western countries, decrease of public expenditures into social services substituting maternal care, as well as by the disintegration of wider family and hence the impossibility to delegate the childcare to its members (e.g. Ehrenreich, B. – Hochschild, A. R., 2003). The majority of existent literature satisfies itself with a somehow vague explanation of the demand for paid domestic work and concentrates on the woman employed (whether au pair, maid, nanny, etc.). This fixation is probably connected with the fact that those women, often immigrants are in the employer – employee relation in a worse position, which could make them an object of employer's mistreatment. This point of view was also used in the author's previous works (Bahna, M., 2005a; Bahna, M., 2005b).

On the contrary, this paper focuses on families searching for domestic help. It tries to answer the question who are the families searching for this kind of help whom they are searching for and what type and volume of work they expect. Via a

confrontation of our findings with the dominant discourse on explaining paid domestic help demand we question some of the classical explanations of the re-emergence of demand for this kind of employment.

Starting point of our analysis are the publicly available data from web pages of online au pair agencies. The scope of our answers is given by the nature of the data used, but despite the limitations given by the secondary data analysis, the study offers many interesting answers and inspiring impulses, particularly thanks to the size of the explored sample and its multi-national nature. The quantitative nature of the data is supplemented by the "dear au pair" letters which are a part of every advertised au pair position.

## Demand for paid domestic work

Besides unanimous statement of the re-emergence of demand for paid domestic work – at least from the end of WW II considered to be an diminishing occupational position (e.g. Henschall Momsen, J., 1999) - the work of British and American authors in the nineteen-nineties constructs some reasons for this development:

- a) growing employment of women, the rise of dual career households
- b) unwillingness of men to involve in doing housework
- c) the shortcoming and dismantling of (subsidized) institutional childcare
- d) weakening of wide families and the unavailability of childcare within the family
- e) in Britain and in the U.S. the ideology preferring individual mother – like childcare to institutional childcare.

Most or all of the given reasons are presented by Gregson and Lowe (1994), Henschall Momsen (1999), Anderson (2000), Cox (2000), Cox – Narula (2003), Yodanis and Lauer (2005) and others. American author Hondagneu – Sotelo links them all:

*"As women have gone off to work, men have not picked up the slack at home. Grandmothers are also working, or no longer live nearby; and given the relative scarcity of child care centers in the United states, especially those that will accept infants and toddlers not yet toilet trained, working families of sufficient means often choose to pay someone to come in to take care of their homes and their children. Even when conveniently located day care centers are available, many middle-class Americans are deeply prejudiced against them, perceiving them as offering cold, institutional, second – class child care. For various reasons, middle – class families headed by two working parents prefer the convenience, flexibility, and privilege of having someone care for their children in their home."*  
(Hondagneu-Sotelo, P., 2001, p.4)

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<sup>2</sup> Address: Ing. Mgr. Miloslav Bahna, Sociologický ústav SAV, Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava 1, Slovak Republic. Phone: +421-2-5296 4355, key 108, fax: +421-2-5296 1312, e-mail: miloslav.bahna@savba.sk

Likewise Henschall Momsen defines the paid domestic workforce as someone who takes over the double burden of the employed women which men refuse to carry.

*"The contemporary demand for domestic help is very different. The dual – career family emerged in the 1960s as a new family form but one that could only function if there were surrogates to take over the wife's domestic role. Sometimes, household tasks were shared between partners, and children or kin, usually the maternal grandmother, assisted. However it is still a rare family in which women do not undertake a majority of the domestic tasks, even if they have a full time job. ... The double burden of middle – class working mothers is reduced at the expense of increasing the burdens of the servant..." (Henschall Momsen, J., 1999, p.4)*

On the basis of the analysed data, in this study we will try to dispute the above-mentioned explanations of paid housework demand and at the same time we will introduce some alternative hypothesis which, in our opinion, better match the observed facts.

### Online au pair agencies advertisements as an object of analysis

Most of the work done on paid domestic labour is based on data from interviews with employees and, to a lesser extent, with employers. Gregson and Lowe (1994) try an inspiring approach when using advertisements from the British magazine *The Lady* as one of their data sources. This magazine is considered to be the market leader in paid domestic work advertisements. Some years later, citing Gregson and Lowe (1994), also Rosie Cox (1999) works with *The Lady* advertisements. The *Lady* advertisements, usually in the form of a short text announcement, allow only to identify the work position requested and its localization. On the other hand – online advertisements of paid domestic work on which our work is based, grant in general more space to the employer when describing the concrete work position as well as the requirements a potential employee should fit-in. Moreover, the advertisements are in a standardized form, defining a certain minimum the advertiser has to fill in<sup>3</sup>. A bonus to qualitative analysis present the "Dear au pair" letters introducing in various details the family and her members, the scope of employment and many other interesting details.

This study is based on advertisements from two online au pair agencies. The number of analysed advertisements is 4925 ([www.greataupair.com](http://www.greataupair.com)) and 2885 ([www.4familycare.com](http://www.4familycare.com)). When selecting the analysed online agencies the most relevant criteria were the number of statistically workable data and the size of

<sup>3</sup> [www.greataupair.com](http://www.greataupair.com) uses 33 standardized items and [www.4familycare.com](http://www.4familycare.com) uses 28 items. Both databases embraced a possibility to describe the working conditions and introduce the family via a text of unlimited length.

their databases. The Greataupair website claims to be the biggest online au pair agency worldwide. Our background research on the database sizes of other online agencies seems to confirm this statement.

Even though the non-representative character of the data we use introduces some validity restrictions to our findings, at the same time, it has to be noted that our work is based on the so far largest studied sample of potential employers. According to our knowledge, besides our work on au pairs (Bahna, M., 2005a and Bahna, M., 2005b) this paper represents the first usage of online advertisements of domestic work in social sciences. Considering the constraints connected with this approach is therefore in place. We see particularly these following limitations:

- a) Limitations given by the nature of internet as a media and its user specifics:
  - The examined advertisements could over-represent regular Internet users.
- b) Concentrating on English speaking countries – the user interface of both analysed sites was in English.
  - The examined advertisements could over-represent families from English speaking countries and English speaking families.

Because of those methodological limits we concentrate in our paper mainly on researching trends and connectedness and we don't overestimate the strength of absolute counts. When comparing characteristics of advertising families from different countries we work only with countries represented by at least 30 advertisements<sup>4</sup>. This is an arbitrary chosen value balancing between reliability of our findings and the number of countries included into our analysis.

### The difference between an au pair and a nanny and paid childcare

In the introduction of our analysis we would like to clarify the terms au pair and nanny, which will be widely used through this study. We start from the definition used by the online agency Greataupair.

The term Au pair denotes generally a girl (rarely a boy) in the age of 17 – 27 years who is not considered to be a specialist in childcare providing and her future involvement in childcare is not assumed. The au pair is officially defined as participating in a "cultural exchange" and is not considered to be an employee<sup>5</sup>. As a reward for provided care the au pair is paid "pocket money" which is not a subject to taxation.

<sup>4</sup> This criterion leaves 15 countries with 30 and more advertisements, out of 61 countries with at least one advertisement in the greataupair.com database.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on various approaches on legal definition of au pair in Britain, U.S. and Australia see Yodanis and Lauer, 2005

A nanny is considered to be older than an au pair, has a previous childcare experience and a professional childcare involvement is assumed. Her earnings are higher than that of an au pair and are a subject to taxation. Officially the legal status of a nanny is that of an employee of the employing family.

But the boundary between an au pair and a nanny is often somehow blurred. As further analysis will show, the variant searched by most families was "au pair or nanny" and even in the advertisements those terms often replaced each other. Due to a practically nonexistent separation between an au pair and a nanny the subject to our analysis will be the demand for paid childcare as such and the differences between au pairs and nannies will be addressed only marginally. Slovak social anthropologist Zuzana Búriková who did a yearlong ethnography of 50 Slovak au pairs staying in the London region suggests that a British nanny is the preferred, but a financially inaccessible alternative to an au pair (2006). Given the high cost of a British nanny the families usually resort to an au pair, who does the same amount of work more economically (Addley, E., 2002).

### Demand for paid childcare by country

Table AA summarizes advertisements counts from European countries. Countries are ordered by the amount of advertisements per 10 000 inhabitants. In spite of some minor differences table AA shows a high degree of consistency of the data coming from different databases. Especially the accord on the top three positions is very convincing. With a high degree of probability we can say that Ireland, Luxembourg and Switzerland are the countries in which most families in 10 000 inhabitants opt for employing a paid childcare provider.

There are differences within countries too. By default, the strongest demand comes from the capital city and its surroundings. We find the most striking concentration in Ireland, where 49% of the advertisers comes from the capital city region<sup>6</sup>. In Spain 42,1% of the demand came from the province of Madrid while the share of the capital city amounted for 24,6%. In Switzerland the highest demand came from Zurich with 35,2% and the cantons surrounding the Geneva see Vaud (20,4%) and Geneve (13,0%). The demand per population ratio leader amid Italy's provinces was Tuscany. Likewise, the metropolis of Tuscany Florence is the per population leader compared to Rome and Milan which produce in absolute numbers 14,2% and 14,1% of the demand against 5% of Florence. London is a sovereign among British cities producing 19,4% of United Kingdom's demand. In the per population ratio most of the families in United Kingdom come from England and least of them are from Northern Ireland.

<sup>6</sup> This is given mostly by the fact, that the Dublin region represents about 25% of the population of the Republic of Ireland.

Table AA: Demand from European countries, per 10 000 inhabitants

Rank greataupair.com	Country	N	%	Per 10 000	Rank 4familycare.com
1	Ireland	104	2,1	0,259	1
2	Luxembourg	8	0,2	0,171	3
3	Switzerland	108	2,2	0,144	2
4	United Kingdom	661	13,4	0,109	7
5	Norway	30	0,6	0,065	9
6	Netherlands	79	1,6	0,048	5
7	Belgium	44	0,9	0,042	4
8	Denmark	22	0,4	0,040	6
9	Sweden	28	0,6	0,031	11
10	Austria	22	0,4	0,027	12
11	France	107	2,2	0,018	8
12	Finland	9	0,2	0,017	15
13	Germany	141	2,9	0,017	17
14	Italy	99	2,0	0,017	18
15	Spain	57	1,2	0,014	13
16	Greece	9	0,2	0,008	16
17	Czech Republic	8	0,2	0,008	22
18	Croatia	1	0,0	0,00	26
19	Bulgaria	1	0,0	0,00	29
20	Portugal	1	0,0	0,00	20
21	Poland	3	0,1	0,00	27
22	Romania	1	0,0	0,00	28
23	Russia	3	0,1	0,00	30

\* Not including countries with less than 100 000 inhabitants.

\*\* Pearson's correlation between demand per 10 000 inhabitants and GDP per capita in PPP is 0,647.

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005, www.4familycare.com, as of 27.11.2005, CIA World Fact Book

### The ambiguity of the au pair term: Whom the families search for?

The ambiguity of the au pair definition, her scope of employment and overall position at the labour market stated by authors devoted to this topic (e.g. Newcomb, E., 2004) is persuasively displayed in Table BB. Primarily the large scale overlapping of the au pair and nanny term is demonstrated. It has to be noted that the analysed advertisements come from a page that states even in her name it advertises au pair positions. In spite of this, most of the families are searching for

"au pair or nanny". The textual analysis of the "Dear au pair" letters<sup>7</sup> points to a conjunction of both terms. For example: a family searching for an au pair writes about her previous nanny and vice versa. Data arranged by the preference of a "pure" au pair put France in the position of a most pro au pair profiled country – apparently reflecting the fact that France is the homeland of the au pair term which comes from French. The placement of the United States, Canada and Australia at the other end of the scale corresponds well with a latter institutionalisation of au pair programmes in the U.S. (1986) compared to Europe (1969) (see Yodanis, C. – Lauer, S. R., 2005).

Table BB: Whom the families are searching for - Au pair or nanny?

Country	Au Pair	Au Pair or Nanny*	Nanny	N
France	56,1	43,9	0,0	107
Italy	53,5	43,4	3,0	99
Germany	52,5	45,4	2,1	141
Spain	49,1	42,1	8,8	57
United Kingdom	48,3	48,7	3,0	661
Norway	43,3	53,3	3,3	30
Ireland	43,3	51,0	5,8	104
Netherlands	43,0	55,7	1,3	79
New Zealand	40,0	60,0	0,0	30
Belgium	38,6	56,8	4,5	44
Switzerland	33,3	57,4	9,3	108
Australia	24,4	69,0	6,5	168
Canada	13,9	74,5	11,6	259
United States	8,1	75,4	16,6	2782
Other	27,7	62,9	9,4	256
Total	21,6	66,7	11,7	4925

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005  
\* This option is pre – selected in the questionnaire for the au pair employing family.

The un-ambiguity of the au pair term: Searching for a woman, awaiting "light housework"

An opposite to the ambiguity of the distinction between an au pair and a nanny is the gender preference. A vast majority of families from all analysed countries

<sup>7</sup> This letter is a part of every analysed advertisement. It contains a description of the working conditions and expectations as well as nearer info about the advertising family.

(ranging from 84,0% to 95,2%) prefer females. The polarized position of United Kingdom and Ireland as the most and least feminine decided hosts could be considered interesting. The answer to the question: "I am a boy. May I become an au pair?" on the website of an au pair agency seated in Slovakia suggests a relative benevolence of British families towards a concrete gender preference.

*"We are achieving best results in England, mostly with applicants with a solid English knowledge, a driving license and who are willing to take care of smaller children and are willing to stay the whole year. But even in those cases we can not guarantee a placement for every candidate. (www.aupair.sk, cited on 2.2.2006)*

Still, we have to notice, that this is not a very solid observation seeing the small percentage differences among countries as well as the fact that a practically similar question in the 4familycare.com database creates a different ranking and confirms only the position of Ireland (96% of all families searching for an au pair) as the country with the strongest female au pair preference.

Table CC: Whom the families want?

Country	Female	Male	No Preference	N
United Kingdom	84,0	1,2	14,8	661
Belgium	84,1	2,3	13,6	44
Spain	86,0	0,0	14,0	57
United States	87,5	0,3	12,2	2782
Canada	88,4	0,0	11,6	259
Italy	88,9	0,0	11,1	99
Germany	89,4	0,7	9,9	141
France	89,7	0,0	10,3	107
Norway	90,0	3,3	6,7	30
Switzerland	90,7	0,0	9,3	108
Netherlands	92,4	1,3	6,3	79
New Zealand	93,3	0,0	6,7	30
Australia	93,5	0,0	6,5	168
Ireland	95,2	0,0	4,8	104
Other	89,5	0,8	9,8	256
Total	87,8	0,4	11,7	4925

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005

It seems that, like female gender, doing „light housework“ belongs to standard expectations of families searching for an au pair (92,9%), an au pair or a nanny (92,9%) or a nanny (81,1%). Table DD compares the expectations of families by country of origin. We see that the lowest anticipations of doing housework are in

southern European countries and in France – but even here they represent a substantial 86%. It has to be noted though that the site greataupair.com itself instructs families with the item “light housework” that "Most families expect the au pair to do some light housework unless they have a maid that does all the housekeeping."<sup>8</sup> The last column of Table DD contains the proportion of time spent by men doing domestic work in relationship to the time amount devoted to this kind of work by women. The observed correlation between the men’s and women’s share in domestic work and the expectations towards doing this kind of work by the au pair is in clear contradiction to the in literature stated assumption that non participation of men in doing domestic work is a factor of paid domestic work demand. A statistically significant relationship between the anticipations of doing domestic work by an au pair and the proportion of time spend doing domestic work by men and women exists (p = 0,76, sig. = 0,05). Thus, in the countries where men participate more in domestic work the same is expected of au pairs.

Table DD: Families expecting light housework, %.

Country	Yes	N	Time per day doing domestic work men/women
Italy	85,9	99	0,30
Spain	86,0	57	0,33
France	86,0	107	0,53
United States	88,0	2782	
Canada	90,7	259	
Australia	92,3	168	
Netherlands	92,4	79	
United Kingdom	92,4	661	0,54
Belgium	93,2	44	0,58
Ireland	95,2	104	
Germany	97,2	141	0,52
Switzerland	97,2	108	
New Zealand	100,0	30	
Norway	100,0	30	0,63
Other	85,2	256	
Total	89,5	4925	

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005, Eurostat, Statistics in Focus, Population and Social Conditions, 4/2006

<sup>8</sup> We assume this instruction could have changed the absolute numbers of light housework expectations; the relative comparison between countries should nevertheless stay sound.

The above stated is also underpinned by data coming from the other analysed online agency where the families had the possibility to specify the type of domestic work the au pair is expected to do. Table EE presents various degrees of expectations on au pair’s cooking. The smallest share of families requesting the au pair to cook can be found in Spain and in Italy. On the contrary, this expectation most commonly appeared in advertisements from Switzerland and Belgium.

Table EE: Families expecting cooking, %.

Country	Yes	N
Switzerland	72,9	166
Belgium	67,5	40
United Kingdom	67,1	152
Canada	66,7	12
Ireland	65,0	160
Australia	64,3	14
Germany	61,5	52
Denmark	56,5	23
United States	56,3	80
France	54,4	171
Netherlands	53,8	93
Italy	50,0	46
Spain	35,8	53
Total	60,8	1062

Source: www.4familycare.com, as of 27.11.2005, only families searching for au pairs are included

Quality vs. quantity – differences between expectations of families with one and more children

Tables FF and GG depict the distribution of requirements of families by number of children. On the average as much as 89,6% of advertising families expect the au pair to do “light housework”. The group with relatively lowest expectations on doing this kind of work is one child families (82,1%). With more children in family the request for doing “light housework” gets even more common – up to 94,8% in the case of families with five and more children. Table FF indicates also somewhat lower expectancies of “light housework” from nannies – this finding goes along well with the notion of a nanny as a childcare professional whose engagement in cleaning would be a useless waste of her skills.

Table FF: Request to do "light housework" and nr. of children

Nr. of children	Au Pair	Au pair or Nanny	Nanny	All	N
0	93,9	95,7	80,0	94,0	84
1	86,7	83,8	67,8	82,1	1268
2	93,2	91,0	87,3	91,1	2111
3	96,0	94,4	86,4	93,9	953
4	96,1	94,5	92,0	94,7	282
5+	90,9	98,3	71,4	94,8	77
Total	92,7	90,1	81,0	89,6	4775

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005

Table GG describes the distribution of the au pair language knowledge expectations. While the average family requirement is to know 1,18 languages, one-child families are expecting 1,25 languages. Even a weak ( $p = -0,041$ ) but statistically significant negative correlation exists between the number of children in a family and the number of languages the au pair is expected to speak.

Those findings are in accord with the assumption of a higher degree of caring families will give to their only child. In favour of this argument goes also the paradox finding which reveals the one-child families as those wanting less housework and more language knowledge. For those families the au pair probably does not present a first aid for an overburden housewife but a well-considered investment into the intellectual development of their only child. The following advertisement demonstrates the formerly stated:

*We are looking for a French au pair for 1-2 years. We will pay an agency to process your J-1 visa. We will treat you with respect, as a member of our family. We have **already had three French au pairs** (highlighting – M.B.) who have been happy with us and would speak or e-mail with you. The last two loved Seattle so much they still live here (with new visas). Our daughter had a French au pair since she was a baby and now speaks French well (for a 3 year old). Your hours would be 45 hours/ week ( 4 1/2 - 10 hour days, 2- 1/2 days off). We need you to drive our one precious child to her school daily, cook meals for her. Read, play with her and take good care of her. You can either live with us in our nice home or in a separate apartment that we own near the beach (you do NOT pay for the apartment or utilities, we pay). We also have a new car for our au pair to use (in the Seattle area, not for long trips). (Westwood, WA, United States; Searching for: Au Pair, Female, Age: 18-26; Nationality: French; Family speaks: English; Religion: Christian; Number of children: 1; Children's age: 3)*

Table GG: Requested language knowledge and nr. of children

Nr. of children	Au Pair	Au Pair or Nanny	Nanny	All	N
0	1,15	1,11	1,20 <sup>9</sup>	1,13	84
1	1,42	1,23	1,14	1,25	1268
2	1,26	1,14	1,10	1,16	2110
3	1,24	1,15	1,04	1,16	952
4	1,18	1,15	1,00	1,15	282
5+	1,00	1,06	2,29 <sup>10</sup>	1,17	77
Total	1,27	1,17	1,11	1,18	4773

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005

Generally speaking, the families expected more language knowledge from au pairs (1,27 languages on average) than from nannies (1,11 languages on average). However, this difference is caused mainly by a higher preference for a nanny from the American families which in general had had lower language expectations. Nevertheless the outlined connection between number of children and the number of languages is preserved within all the three possible (au pair, nanny, au pair or nanny) advertised categories of paid domestic work.

Table HH: Correlations between language knowledge of au pair and family and nr. of children

	Nr. of languages au pair should speak	Number of children
Nr. of languages spoken by the family	,317	-,041
Nr. of languages au pair should speak	-	-,041

All correlations are significant at 0,01.

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005

Table HH summarizes the existing correlations between language knowledge of participating actors. The more languages the family speaks, the higher are the expectations for the language knowledge of an au pair. Vice versa, an already mentioned negative correlation exists between family and au pair language knowledge and number of children in the family.

There are two possible supplementary hypotheses on how to explain this difference between one and more child families. The first assumes that in the one-

<sup>9</sup> This number is of insufficient reliability as the number of cases here was only N = 7.

<sup>10</sup> Same as above.

child family case, both parents will be employed more frequently. In those cases the search would be primarily for a "supplementary mother". On the contrary – in the more children family case, the mother will be more often not employed and the au pair would be expected to be an "(au)pair of helping hands". In this case the emphasis will be on the participation in doing domestic work while the language knowledge will be of lower priority. The other possible explanation supposes a different socio-economic status and cultural capital of one-child families that would accentuate on the education of the child and leave the domestic work to another, especially for this purpose employed workforce.

### Who searches for whom? The nationality preferences

The nationality preferences of the advertising families are displayed in table II. When looking at the share of families with no concrete nationality preference we could locate the countries onto a continuum defined by two distinct groups:

- a) countries with strong nationality preference – such as Spain and Italy where only 26,3 and 27,3% of the families have no concrete idea of the nationality suitable for the position advertised
- b) countries with weak nationality preference – USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom - where 56,3 to 75,1% of the families did not specify a preferred nationality for the position advertised.

It seems that the group of countries with a weak nationality preference consists without exception of English-speaking countries which are - except USA - all members of the British Commonwealth too. Besides Britain, all those countries have been founded by immigrants. The position of Ireland is no less interesting. Even as an English speaking country, Ireland is positioned on the opposite side of the continuum. This historical country of emigration – though becoming a new destination for immigration in the recent years of massive economic expansion – probably differs in its openness towards emigrants from the traditional immigration countries<sup>11</sup>.

A look at the preferred nationalities in countries with a strong nationality preference of the advertised working positions (Spain, Italy) seems to suggest a nexus between two factors when stating a concrete nationality preference. The first one could be called "openness" and it classifies the English-speaking countries from the most open ones (USA, Canada) to the least open (Ireland). The second factor could be called "au pair as an English teacher". It is very probable

<sup>11</sup> For instance, current newsletter articles do suggest a growing resentment in the home population towards the growing numbers of foreign workforce in Ireland (Robotníci z východu desia už aj Írsko (Also Ireland is scared of workers from the east), Hudec, Š, SME 22.2.2006).

that Spanish and Italian families prefer to employ an employee from Britain or from the United States because of their mother tongue. It seems that the notion of an au pair as an English teacher is mostly common in Spain and in Italy – which goes well with the lowest "light housework" expectations of those families (see Table DD).

Slovaks rang highest in the "top 20" of preferred nationalities in Great Britain on the 4<sup>th</sup> place<sup>12</sup> together with Poland ahead of Czech Republic, Sweden and Germany. This finding is in accord with the author's assertion that the Slovak au pairs form (and have formed) the most numerous au pair community in Britain (Bahna, 2005a). The placement of Poland and Slovakia in the Irish families' preferences shows evidence of a supply generating demand – after May 2004 Poland was the most numerous workforce supplier and the proportion of Poles to Slovaks in Ireland is nearly two-fold compared to Great Britain<sup>13</sup>.

Another interesting fact is the sharp difference between the interest for au pairs from middle European countries and Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. None of the mentioned countries occurs in the "top 20" preferred nationalities. The case of Turkey is especially striking. Even though Turkey is part of the British au pair programme for more than 25 years, Turkish au pairs are markedly less requested than Slovaks, Poles or Czechs. This finding is well in accordance with the assumption on lower demand for childcare coming from a Moslem country and explains well the stagnating numbers of Turkish au pairs in Britain stated in Bahna (2005a). The stereotype of an au pair as a white European (Cox, R., 1999) is also well confirmed in the table II.

### Demand for au pairs – an attempt to verify the existing explanations

We summarized the existing explanations for the demand for paid childcare and domestic work at the beginning of our paper. Here we would like to undertake the announced verification attempt of those explanations, which we are able to operationalise at least to a certain extent by available data.

This requirement is met with those three explanations:

- a) growing employment of women, the rise of dual career households
- b) unwillingness of men to involve in doing housework
- c) the shortcoming and dismantling of (subsidized) institutional childcare

<sup>12</sup> not counting EU as a country

<sup>13</sup> Accession Monitoring Report May 2004 – September 2005, Home office, November 2005, "V Írsku pracuje v súčasnosti takmer 10 000 slovakov (There are nearly 10 000 Slovaks working nowadays in Ireland)", SITA, 22.2.2006

The results of our attempt are summarised in Table JJ. We compare the share of employed women in each country in the effort to answer the question whether a higher level of women's employment is a precondition to a higher demand for paid domestic work. It proves that no correlation between the share of women employed and the intensity of demand for au pairs exists. Likewise, the connection between employed mothers with children under 3 years of age and the demand has proven nonexistent. A long maternal or parental leave is also not a precondition to a lower au pair demand. Not even the proportion of time men spend doing domestic work compared to women – a number that tries to describe the willingness of men to do domestic chores – correlates with the demand for paid childcare<sup>14</sup>.

Table JJ includes also figures on the share of social expenditures on the country's GDP. This column has been experimentally included as an imperfect and very rough measure of the accessibility of state subsidized childcare options. Those data were the only ones with a negative correlation with the advertised demand for paid childcare. But in this case - for the sake of preciseness - we have to mention that this relationship vanishes after excluding Ireland which distorts the results by its extreme position (highest demand, lowest social expenditures).

Table KK tries to look at the problem of explaining demand in more detail for the subgroup of families who are looking for childcare for children under two years. We assume that if a relationship would exist between the proportion of employed women and the demand for paid childcare then the category where this relationship would be the strongest were families with children under two years. Even in this case table KK suggests our failure to find a statistically relevant correlation.

Likewise, we assumed, that if the driving cause for employing paid childcare was the lacking of stately support for families with small children (for example via a paid parental leave), the demand for this kind of childcare would be stronger in countries with a shorter parental leave. The confrontation of figures on demand for paid childcare for children under two years and the length of parental leave in table KK leaves this hypothesis an unconfirmed one too. The only statistically relevant correlation that has been found was between the demand for paid domestic childcare and country's GDP per capita in purchasing power parity ( $p = 0,57$ , level of significance = 0,05, tested on EU countries).

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<sup>14</sup> When comparing the 15 countries with more than 30 advertisements even a negative correlation between expecting light housework and men's share in domestic work existed! See Table DD.



**Table JJ: Demand from European countries, woman employment, parental leave and men's share in domestic work**

Rank	Country	per 10 000	Employed women, %	Employed mothers with children under 3, %	Paid parental leave (weeks)*	Public social spending, % GDP	Time per day doing domestic work men/women **
1	Ireland	0,259	55,4	51,1	18	13,8	
2	Luxembourg	0,171	51,5	70,6	40	20,8	
3	Switzerland	0,144	70,6	58,2	16	26,4	
4	United Kingdom	0,109	66,4	57,2	18	21,8	0,54
5	Norway	0,065	72,9		104	23,9	0,63
6	Netherlands	0,048	64,9	74,2	16	21,8	
7	Belgium	0,042	51,4	70,4	15	27,2	0,58
8	Denmark	0,040	70,5	71,4	82	29,2	
9	Sweden	0,031	72,8	72,9	84	28,9	0,67
10	Austria	0,027	61,5	80,1	144	26,0	
11	France	0,018	56,7	66,2	16	28,5	0,53
12	Finland	0,017	65,7	32,2	44	24,8	0,58
13	Germany	0,017	58,7	56,0	104	27,4	0,52
14	Italy	0,017	42,7	54,4	20	24,4	0,30
15	Spain	0,014	46,8	51,7	16	19,6	0,33
16	Greece	0,008	44,0	47,9	17	24,3	
17	Czech Republic	0,008	56,3	16,8	28	20,1	
18	Croatia	0,00					
19	Bulgaria	0,00					
20	Portugal	0,00	60,6	75,3	6	21,1	
21	Poland	0,00	46,2		112	23,0	0,50
22	Romania	0,00					
23	Russia	0,00					

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005, OECD Society at a Glance, 2005,

\*<http://www.childpolicyintl.org/issuebrief/issuebrief5table1.pdf>

\*\*A statistical view of the life of women and men in the EU 25, Eurostat, 6.3.2006

**Table KK: Care for children under 2, paid leave and working mothers**

Country	Yes	N	Paid leave (weeks) <sup>15</sup>	Working mothers, under 3
United States	54,6	2782	0	56,5
Belgium	54,5	44	15	70,4
Australia	51,8	168	0	80,1
Ireland	51,0	104	18	51,1
Canada	47,1	259	17	58,7
Norway	46,7	30	104	-
Germany	46,1	141	104	56
Switzerland	43,5	108	16	58,2
Netherlands	41,8	79	16	74,2
United Kingdom	36,6	661	18	57,2
France	28,0	107	16	66,2
Italy	27,3	99	20	54,4
New Zealand	26,7	30	12	43,2
Spain	26,3	57	16	51,7
Other	43,8	256		
Total	48,7	4925		

Source: <http://www.childpolicyintl.org/issuebrief/issuebrief5table1.pdf>, www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005

## Summary

In our effort to answer the questions asked in the title of this study we concentrated on the intensity of demand, nationality, requirements and preferences of families advertising interest for paid domestic work. We were interested in the kind of differences, if any, that exist in the expectations of families from different countries. Our analysis has found indeed differing requirements and preferences across the countries, which we would try to summarize in this place.

We can say that the Europeaness of the au pair concept has been confirmed. Families from Europe and especially from France were more probable to look for an au pair than for a nanny. On the other hand, the least inclination to the au pair term show the advertisements from United States. Here, a nanny has been a more preferred kind of paid domestic help than an au pair.

A relative wide consent can be found in the opinion that a paid domestic worker should be a female. The intensity of preferring women for the advertised posts ranged between 95% in Ireland to 84% in Britain. Similarly unambiguous is

<sup>15</sup> Defined as a period in which the state or employer stipulates a financial benefit (of an arbitrary height) for the caring parent.

the answer to the question whether doing light housework by a nanny or au pair is expected. Even though the majority of families in every analysed country anticipates doing housework, we can speak about lower expectations for this kind of work in southern European countries (Spain, Italy). This holds for cooking expectations too – Spain and Italy are the countries with least families leaving the cooking to a stranger in their household. Paradoxical – or not – those are the countries with greatest disproportions between men and women in time spent doing housework. Therefore it appears that in countries with a stronger non-participation of men in household chores the tendency to delegate those chores to the au pair is lower. In other words – when a woman doesn't expect her men to help with household chores, she doesn't expect the au pair to do them either.

Comparing the expected language knowledge and participation in doing housework dependant on number of children in family brings some interesting findings too. It shows that one child families form a specific group with higher language expectations and a lower expected participation in household chores. At this point, we offer two complementary explanation schemes. The first one assumes that one child families, searching for paid domestic help will be more probable families of two working parents who search for a “second mum” to substitute the busy working mum. The other one assumes a higher socio-economic status and culture capital of one child families. Those families have higher standards for childcare quality and provide for domestic work, for instance, via employing another work force.<sup>16</sup>

The nationality preferences for the advertised positions divide the analysed countries into two groups: Countries with a weakly specified nationality preference – the U.S., Great Britain and other English speaking countries – with the exception of Ireland; and countries with strongly specified nationality preferences like Spain and Italy – both strongly in favour of employees from English speaking countries. It seems that, in the latter countries, the role of an English teacher dominates and undermines the expectations for doing household chores by the au pair. A different situation in the European English speaking countries which do not search for a language teacher<sup>17</sup> manifests itself in a stronger popularity of middle Europeans – Slovaks, Czechs and Poles – when compared to other European countries. Without any doubt we can postulate a markedly higher preference for people from developed countries which form the bulk of the top 20 of preferred nationalities. A big difference exists between the more preferred new EU members states compared to the less wealthy EU

accession candidates like Romania and Bulgaria. The Europe's least preferred countries are the former Yugoslavian countries (with the exception of Slovenia) and Turkey<sup>18</sup>.

The endeavour to verify the, in literature present, reasons for employing domestic workforce stated in the preamble of this paper introduces controversial findings. An attempt to validate three of the five, in literature presented, reasons failed. On the basis of the analysed data we were not been able to prove that the growing employment of women and formation of dual career households, the reluctance of man to do household chores or the lack of and shortcoming of institutional childcare do correlate with the intensity of demand for paid domestic help.

We assume, that the collection of reasons given by the literature was determined by its mostly English origin. A feeling arises that many of those studies implicitly assumed that the employment of au pairs or other domestic help was primarily a domain of Great Britain or the United States. If Great Britain is a country with high women employment rates and low public social expenditures then according to the cited authors those were the main reasons for a demand for individual paid childcare. But, as our study demonstrates, the position of Great Britain and the United States is not an exceptional one amid the demand for au pairs. In the top 10 of countries with the highest demand per 10 000 inhabitants we can also find countries like Sweden or Denmark in whose, according to Yodanis and Lauer (2005) thanks to a generous social policy such an demand should not exist. With support from descriptions of the expectations of families on the work done by an au pair which were a part of every analysed advertisement, we could make a laconic statement that the families in countries with more accessible institutional childcare use an au pair to accompany their children into a kindergarten and to pick them up in the afternoon and to clean in-between, while in countries with no such facilities available the au pair stays with the children at home and cleans at the same time.

Our data suggest that the demand for paid domestic childcare is the strongest in the developed countries of the world. The intensity of employing domestic workers grows with the country's GDP. It seems also that the role of au pair as an English teacher is stronger in the countries in which the employing of au pairs is not very common. In favour of this statement could be used the strong preference for English speakers in Spain or Italy as well as the analyzed advertisements of Czech families who were searching for an au pair to teach them English. The correlation between men's share in household chores and expectations on au

<sup>16</sup> The so called nanny – cleaner strategy, see Gregson and Lowe (1994).

<sup>17</sup> Definitely, families searching for a French or German au pair as a language teacher do exist, nevertheless, the comparison in Table II shows that this preference is by much weaker than it is in Spain or Italy.

<sup>18</sup> We have to note here, that we are aware of the difference between preferences and real situation. Even though, the west Europeans are more preferred, in the real standing the European au pair is more likely from Eastern Europe (Bahna, M., 2005b).

pair's help with those are exactly opposite as previously anticipated. In countries with a higher participation of men in household are the expectations for the au pair to do this kind of work higher and vice versa. Hence it seems that not only women, but rather whole families shift the unpopular household chores on the shoulders of another woman<sup>19</sup>.

Although we are aware of the methodological limits of our work – partly due to the nature of our data and partly to the quantitative approach used – we would like to formulate a hypothesis which could in our opinion rival the traditional explanations for paid childcare demand: The demand for paid childcare is higher in those countries where a stronger legitimacy concept exists for delegating care for own children to a third person. A strong premise is also the great value ascribed to quality of leisure time spend – a connection assumed also by Gregson and Lowe (1993). Another key factor, besides the legitimacy for delegating the care for own child to a stranger, is a sufficient supply of available persons with expected characteristics and acceptable wage requirements. At the same time the statement that supply creates demand applies – the top three countries with the highest demand per population ratios (Ireland, Switzerland and Luxembourg) are economically successful countries with a high share of foreign workers of European origin. Table II indicates that, at least in Europe, a wide gap exists in the interest for au pairs of west and middle European origin compared to Balkan or Turkey. Data from the British Home Office reveal how after the opening of the British au pair scheme for middle European countries in the years 1992 and 1993 a sharp increase of numbers of au pairs entering Britain went hand in hand with a 50% decline of Turkish au pairs coming to Britain.

Our analysis of advertised demand for paid childcare revealed some of the characteristic of advertising families. Within the limits of the data used we tried to verify the explanations schemes for demand for this kind of work, present in the literature available. As we were unsuccessful in our attempt to verify a relevant connection between the demand and the existing hypotheses, we made an attempt to propose our own hypotheses for discussion, which in our opinion better explain the observed correlations.

*Miloslav Bahna (1975) studied Sociology at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Comenius University in Bratislava and Informatics at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology of the Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava. He is a junior researcher at the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and a PhD. student at the Department of Sociology of the Comenius University in Bratislava. His main interests are Sociology of Migration*

*and Sociology of Family. Since 2004 he participates in the creation of the Slovak Archive of Social Data.*

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<sup>19</sup> see Gregson and Lowe (1994, s. 104)

Table II: Who is looking for whom? Top 20 preferred countries of origin, in %

Spain	Italy	Ireland	France	Nether.	Germany	Belgium	Norway	Switz.	United Kingdom	New Zealand	Australia	Canada	United States	All
GB 49,1	GB 61,6	n.p. 39,4	n.p. 43,0	n.p. 44,3	n.p. 44,7	n.p. 45,5	n.p. 46,7	n.p. 48,1	n.p. 56,3	n.p. 60,0	n.p. 61,9	n.p. 71,0	n.p. 75,1	n.p. 65,2
US 29,8	US 31,3	CH 30,8	CH 34,6	GB 36,7	GB 39,7	CH 34,1	CH 20,0	CH 33,3	CH 22,2	GB 23,3	GB 19,6	CA 18,5	US 12,4	GB 11,9
CH 28,1	CA 30,3	EU 26,9	GB 29,9	CH 34,2	US 25,5	EU 27,3	DE 13,3	GB 32,4	EU 16,0	NZ 13,3	AU 16,1	GB 9,3	GB 5,1	US 11,1
n.p. 26,3	CH 28,3	PL 16,3	EU 27,1	EU 22,8	IE 20,6	GB 9,1	EU 10,0	EU 18,5	GB 11,2	CA 10,0	DE 11,9	CH 5,4	CH 3,5	CH 10,9
IE 22,8	AU 27,3	GB 12,5	US 18,7	FR 16,5	CA 18,4	PL 9,1	PH 10,0	CA 17,6	FR 8,3	AU 10,0	FR 11,9	SE 5,0	DE 2,9	EU 6,6
EU 17,5	n.p. 27,3	FR 9,6	CA 15,0	NL 15,2	CH 18,4	DE 6,8	FR 10,0	NL 15,7	PL 7,7	DE 10,0	CA 10,1	FR 4,6	SE 2,9	CA 5,9
AU 17,5	IE 26,3	ES 6,7	AU 11,2	IE 15,2	AU 15,6	SE 6,8	GB 10,0	US 14,8	<b>SK</b> 7,7	AR 6,7	IT 10,1	NZ 3,9	ES 2,8	SE 5,6
CA 17,5	NZ 23,2	IE 5,8	SE 11,2	BE 15,2	NZ 14,9	HU 6,8	AT 10,0	DE 14,8	CZ 7,6	NL 6,7	SE 9,5	DE 3,9	FR 2,6	DE 5,5
DE 15,8	SE 18,2	<b>SK</b> 5,8	NL 9,3	SE 15,2	SE 14,2	FR 6,8	US 6,7	SE 14,8	SE 7,6	CZ 6,7	CH 9,5	IT 3,9	AU 2,4	FR 5,4
NL 12,3	EU 17,2	IT 5,8	DE 8,4	FI 15,2	ES 13,5	AT 6,8	E. E. 6,7	IE 13,0	DE 7,1	IE 6,7	DK 9,5	MX 3,5	MX 2,4	AU 5,3
AT 10,5	FR 16,2	SE 5,8	IE 8,4	PT 13,9	NL 12,8	IT 4,5	UA 6,7	ES 13,0	AU 6,7	FR 3,3	NL 9,5	ES 3,1	DK 2,4	IE 5,0
FI 10,5	DK 16,2	CZ 4,8	IT 8,4	PL 13,9	DK 12,8	LU 4,5	MT 6,7	DK 12,0	ES 6,5	EU 3,3	FI 8,9	US 3,1	CA 2,3	ES 4,8
SE 10,5	NL 16,2	DE 4,8	FR 7,5	ES 13,9	DE 12,1	ES 4,5	<b>SK</b> 6,7	FI 12,0	DK 6,5	KR 3,3	IE 8,3	PH 3,1	BR 2,3	DK 4,6
ES 10,5	DE 15,2	HU 4,8	NZ 7,5	IT 13,9	FR 12,1	NL 4,5	LV 6,7	AT 12,0	HU 6,2	CH 3,3	BE 7,1	DK 3,1	IT 2,3	NL 4,5
DK 10,5	FI 14,1	NL 4,8	AT 7,5	DK 13,9	PL 12,1	US 4,5	FI 6,7	AU 12,0	IT 6,2	MT 3,3	NZ 6,5	NL 2,7	IE 2,0	PL 4,4
PL 10,5	ES 14,1	BE 4,8	BE 7,5	DE 13,9	CZ 11,3	DK 4,5	CY 6,7	FR 12,0	NL 6,1	MY 3,3	AT 6,5	BE 2,7	PL 2,0	IT 4,3
E. E. 10,5	AT 13,1	AT 3,8	CZ 6,5	LU 12,7	FI 11,3	PT 4,5	PL 6,7	BE 11,1	IE 5,6	TH 3,3	NO 6,0	FI 2,7	NL 1,9	AT 3,9
<b>SK</b> 8,8	MT 13,1	LU 3,8	PL 6,5	AT 12,7	LU 10,6	BE 4,5	IE 6,7	LU 9,3	AT 5,6	TW 3,3	US 5,4	AU 2,7	PH 1,8	NZ 3,8
LT 8,8	LT 12,1	LT 3,8	FI 6,5	CZ 12,7	IT 9,9	IE 4,5	LT 6,7	NZ 9,3	E. E. 5,3	US 3,3	ES 5,4	AT 2,7	BE 1,8	BE 3,8
LV 8,8	EE 12,1	DK 3,8	LU 6,5	AU 12,7	MT 9,9	GR 4,5	ES 6,7	IT 8,3	SI 5,1	DK 3,3	EE 4,2	IE 2,3	AT 1,8	FI 3,8

Source: www.greataupair.com, as of 21.12.2005, multiple choices were possible

n.p. = no preference, E. E. = Eastern Europe, EU = EU Nationals