INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETY
ČLOVEK A SPOLOČNOSŤ

Individual and Society | Človek a spoločnosť
ISSUE 1, YEAR 2026, VOLUME 29
RECEIVED 2 June 2026 | PUBLISHED 31 July 2026

Conference Report „Woman and the World of Work, 1918–1968", Košice September 17 – 18th, 2025

—

Mária Ďurkovská | durkovska@saske.sk
Institute of Social Sciences, Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences SAS, Slovak Republic

On 17–18 September 2025, the Ján Bocatius Public Library in Košice hosted the scholarly conference "Woman and the World of Work, 1918–1968." The event was organised by the Institute of Social Sciences of the Centre of Social and Psychological Sciences, Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Faculty of Public Administration of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, and the Ján Bocatius Public Library in Košice, as part of the research project VEGA No. 2/0089/23, "Woman and the World of Work: Changes in Women's Education and Employment in Slovakia, 1918–1960." The conference brought together historians from Slovakia and the Czech Republic, representing, among other institutions, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, the Czech Academy of Sciences, several university departments (in Košice, Brno, Olomouc, Liberec, and Nitra), and memory institutions such as the National Museum in Prague, the Moravian Museum, the Archive of the National Museum, and the Archive of the Czech National Bank.

Following the registration of participants and the opening addresses that formally inaugurated the conference, proceedings moved to the first thematic panel. *Bohumila Ferenčuhová* examined the professional career of Dr. Helena Turcerová-Devečková and its transformations across successive political regimes; *Petr Kaleta* discussed the figure of Bohumila Smolařová-Čapková and her activities within the Union of Slavic Women; and *Adéla Jůnová Macková* presented the story of the Blechová sisters in relation to the orientalist Alois Musil, raising the question of how career, work, and domestic obligations intersected in their lives. *Dalibor Státník* analysed the cases of Pavla Šimonková and Lumíra Kotrchová as an illustration of the heterogeneity of the postwar Communist Party of Czechoslovakia with regard to women's position within the party.

After lunch, the programme turned to the theme of women's industrial and domestic labour in the postwar period. *Miroslava Gallová* addressed the mobilisation of the female workforce in Slovakia after the Second World War under the slogan "Through Work Towards a Joyful Future"; *Marianna Tkáčová*, *Zlatica Sáposová*, and *Iveta Jeleňová* presented joint research on the female workforce in the shadow of heavy industry, using the case of Košice and the East Slovak Ironworks (Východoslovenské železiarne) in 1960–1970; and *Martin D. Hrtus* discussed electric power as a factor shaping so-called women's domestic labour from the 1940s to the 1960s. The subsequent afternoon panel featured four further contributions: *Katarína Lukáčová* described cases of women dismissed from employment upon marriage and the broader problem of female unemployment in interwar Czechoslovakia; *Magdalena Grešová* addressed the phenomenon of women's so-called "second shift" and attempts to alleviate it in postwar Czechoslovakia; *Lenka Vrchotová* discussed the position of female clerks in financial institutions in both peacetime and wartime; and *Libor Jůn* concluded the panel with a paper on women's work at the National (Provincial) Museum during the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 Licence

The first day's programme continued in the evening with the presentation of Sári Pollák's book "We Were Innocent People" (*Boli sme nevinní ľudia*), held at the synagogue on Puškinova Street in Košice, and concluded with an informal dinner for the participants.

The second day of the conference opened with a fifth panel devoted to women's education and professional advancement. *Marie Bahenská* presented the professional placement and careers of the first Czech female physicians; *Mária Ďurkovská* and *Soňa Gabzdilová* jointly discussed the education of girls in Slovakia between 1918 and 1960; *Marta Švoliková* examined the fates and career paths of graduates of the Levice grammar school between 1918 and 1938; and *Ivan Puš* concluded the panel with a paper on girls at business schools in interwar Czechoslovakia. Following a break, the conference's sixth and final panel took place, in which *Jitka Gelnarová* interpreted the wooden cooking spoon (*vareška*) as a museum object representing the relationship between women and work between 1918 and 1968, particularly in the context of the struggle against strikebreakers; *Hana Krutílková* analysed the concept of the "new working-class woman" in the discourse of the social-democratic journal *Žena* (*Woman*) between 1911 and 1923; and *Patrizia Šušová Prando* addressed the political manipulation of gender and upbringing in the propaganda of the Slovak State in a paper entitled "Shaping an Obedient Future."

Taken as a whole, the two-day event offered a rich, interdisciplinary examination of the history of women's work and education in Slovakia and the Czech lands between 1918 and 1968. The contributions combined a biographical approach — tracing the individual fates of women physicians, clerks, factory workers, and school graduates — with a broader social and institutional framework encompassing the education system, industrial mobilisation, propaganda, and women's engagement in political parties. The conference thus confirmed that the gender history of work and education in Central Europe remains a subject of vigorous scholarly interest.