



## „RECALL: A Study of Central European Places of Memory for Collective Remembrance”

2023-1-HU01-KA220-HED-000154286

**Module Title:** The Emancipation of Women – A Central European Journey to Women’s Rights (*Topic 5*)

**Target Duration:** 34 minutes (video) + 15-20 minutes (e-learning tasks)

**Target Audience:** University students, researchers, and history enthusiasts

This 34-minute module explores the complex history of women’s emancipation in Central Europe, focusing on Czechia, Hungary, and Poland. It looks at how women’s fight for equality connected with national revival, industrialization, war, socialism, and democratization—from Enlightenment ideals to changes after 1989. Presented by Denisa Nečasová, Dóra Fedeles-Czeferner, and Joanna Dufurat, the session covers the origins of the women’s movement in the 19th century through the interwar and socialist periods to today’s challenges.

It starts with Nečasová, who discusses how Enlightenment and early modern ideas laid the groundwork for women’s emancipation based on justice, equality, and education. The module then shifts to the 19th century, highlighting organized efforts to improve women’s education and social involvement. Throughout the region, women like Eliška Krásnohorská, Rosika Schwimmer, and Eliza Orzeszkowa established schools, associations, and journals that connected gender equality to national progress.

The Czech section, presented by Nečasová, emphasizes the growth of women’s education as essential to emancipation, from the founding of the Minerva Girls’ Grammar School in 1890 to influential writers like Božena Němcová and Milena Jesenská, who used literature and journalism to challenge traditional gender roles. The Hungarian perspective, led by Fedeles-Czeferner, centers on Hermin Beniczky Veres Pálné, Vilma Glücklich, and early female students at the Universities of Budapest and Kolozsvár, whose activism opened doors to higher education and professional opportunities. In Poland, Nečasová and Dufurat examine how the women’s movement gradually shifted focus from education to political rights. This culminated in early 20th-century feminist publications, organizations like the Związek Równouprawnienia Kobiet Polskich (ZRKP), and trailblazers like Paulina Kuczalska-Reinschmit and Kazimiera Bujwidowa.

During the interwar period, women’s roles grew significantly after World War I. Across Central Europe, women gained the right to vote—Polish women in 1918, Hungarian women in 1919, and Czechoslovak women shortly after—and began engaging in public and professional life as teachers, doctors, journalists, and parliament members. Leaders such as Františka Plamínková, Milada Horáková, Margit Slachta, and Anna Kéthly represented the initial stages of women’s political engagement and civic activism. However, as Nečasová highlights, legal equality did not eliminate traditional gender hierarchies, and women still faced structural obstacles.



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The socialist era from 1948 to 1989 marked a new phase. The official ideology claimed gender equality as part of the socialist agenda, which expanded women’s access to education and jobs. However, Nečasová notes that this emancipation was complex: women dealt with a "double burden" of working outside the home and managing domestic tasks, while traditional stereotypes persisted even with legal equality. Women were celebrated as tractor drivers, engineers, and factory workers, but they still encountered a "glass ceiling" in politics and management.

After 1989, the transformation brought new challenges. The decline of state-supported equality policies and the resurgence of traditional values weakened the foundations for women’s rights. Despite this setback, women’s organizations, scholars, and activists revitalized discussions on equality, highlighting ongoing issues such as pay gaps, lack of political representation, and reproductive rights.

By examining these perspectives, the module shows that women’s emancipation in Central Europe was not a straight path but an ongoing negotiation between ideology and reality, law and practice, tradition and reform.

### Primary Goals of the Module:

- **Contextualize** women’s emancipation as a long-term historical process shaped by political, social, and ideological transformations.
- **Compare** Czech, Polish, and Hungarian developments to identify shared milestones and national specificities.
- **Explore** how women’s education, work, and political participation evolved from the 19th century to the post-communist era.
- **Demonstrate** the interplay between women’s movements and broader national, socialist, and democratic ideologies.
- **Encourage** critical reflection on the unfinished nature of equality and its modern manifestations.

### EU Key Competences Addressed in This Module:

- **Cultural awareness and expression** – Understanding the intertwined development of women’s rights and national modernization in Central Europe.
- **Critical thinking and digital literacy** – Evaluating written, visual, and audiovisual sources (memoirs, legislation, press, films, propaganda) to trace gender discourse.
- **Social and civic competence** – Recognizing how gender equality contributes to democratic participation and social justice in past and present contexts.



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### Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the session, learners will be able to:

- Identify the intellectual and social roots of women’s emancipation in Enlightenment and 19th-century Central Europe.
- Describe the key milestones in women’s education and activism across Czech, Hungarian, and Polish contexts.
- Analyze how industrialization and national revival movements provided frameworks for women’s participation in public life.
- Explain the gradual extension of political rights, including suffrage, as a transformative outcome of the First World War.
- Evaluate the complex impact of socialist policies on gender equality, work, and domestic life.
- Assess the persistence of gender stereotypes, unequal burdens, and underrepresentation despite legal equality.
- Compare how different regimes—liberal, authoritarian, socialist, and democratic—interpreted and implemented women’s rights.
- Reflect critically on the tension between state-imposed and grassroots emancipation during the 20th century.
- Discuss how post-1989 societies redefined feminism and women’s rights in relation to democracy, economy, and identity.
- Apply historical reasoning to contemporary debates on equality, inclusion, and gender justice in European contexts.

The emancipation of women in Central Europe developed through a lively exchange between ideas and real-life experiences. It started with the initial demands for education and voting rights, leading to the contradictions of socialist equality and the difficulties of post-communist change. By looking at the paths of Czech, Polish, and Hungarian women, this module shows how the fight for women’s rights has reflected and driven societal change. Learning about these histories helps students connect more with the ongoing search for equality and the complicated legacy of women’s emancipation in Europe.

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