The reconfiguration of welfare arrangements across Europe is taking place in tandem with an increased policy focus on volunteering. Volunteering is often depicted as promoting all kinds of social ‘goods’, from expanding civil society, promoting social cohesion and a sense of community belonging, to providing new routes to employment and reviving public services (or at least, making them cheaper). In this paper, I explore the emergence of new discourses about volunteering in the Czech Republic in the 1990s. Non-governmental organisations and religious groups promoted volunteering as part of a broader critique of professional, institutionalised welfare provision. Volunteering was seen as a way of ‘humanising’ health care, for instance. These ideas about volunteering became embedded both at national and local levels. I argue that one important effect of these transformations is that they change and reproduce women’s unpaid caring roles in society, and articulate older class inequalities in new ways.

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