

WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT IN LIGHT OF THE EU 2020

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Abstract

In this paper we aim to analyse the impact of the work-family conflict on achieving the goals of EU 2020 Strategy.

Whatever the historical period or geographic area, adults' activity is mainly dedicated to profession and family, domains that increasingly frequently are in conflict, as a result of the actual demographic context (changes of family structures, increased professional requests, new technologies that replace human resources or migration, for example).

Numerous studies show remarkable differences among member states in terms of professional activity - working hours, the work done, earnings, working conditions, women involvement in labor. All these facts led the Council of Europe to recommend member states „to take appropriate measures to promote a better balance between work and private life for women and men“ (The European Pact for equality between women and men 2011-2020). These recommendations are made in light of the guidelines set by the EU 2020 Strategy, which considers inclusive growth, increased participation in the labor market, acquiring new skills and poverty alleviation as essential pillars to develop a United Europe.

Given these considerations, we focused attention on the relationship between work-family conflict and the desires of EU 2020.

Key words: work-family conflict, EU 2020, smart growth, sustainable growth, inclusive growth, labor market

Introduction

Analysing Europe's structural weaknesses, the European Commission considers that „In spite of progress, Europe's employment rates – at 69% on average for those aged 20-64 – are still significantly lower than in other parts of the world. Only 63% of women are in

work compared to 76% of men. Only 46% of older workers (55-64) are employed compared to over 62% in the US and Japan. Moreover, on average Europeans work 10% fewer hours than their US or Japanese counterparts^{“1”}.

Furthermore, decision makers often complain about the aging of our continent’s population, migration challenges, negative birth rates, growing imbalance between the working population and the social assisted ones, all of these aspects affecting the finances and obviously union of the European Union. Women are the ones frequently responsible for childcare, housework, and their careers suffer more often compared to men, who usually complain about too much time spent at the office.

In Europe, the number of working females is smaller than the one of men (63% compared to 76%), and decision-makers see this fact as a weakness for the goals of EU2020 Strategy, as the non-working women are considered to be depending on others (state, husband or family of origin, for example) and therefore vulnerable.

The EU 2020 Strategy

The European Commission proposes to the European Union five main targets that are measurable and aimed to be reached in 2020. Following, these goals will be translated at national level, into specific targets and trajectories. The main areas include: high rates of employment, research and innovation, climate change and energy, education and poverty fighting.

Thus, the three priorities assumed through EU 2020 are:

- Smart growth: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.
- Sustainable growth: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.
- Inclusive growth: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion^{“2”}.

These 3 priorities are seen as interconnected, and in their addition, the Commission proposes the following five main targets:

- 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed.
- 3% of the EU’s GDP should be invested in R&D.
- The „20/20/20“ climate/energy targets should be met (including an increase to 30% of emissions reduction if the conditions are right).
- The share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree.
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty^{“3”}.

¹ European Commission, EUROPE 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels, 2010.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

All these goals are seen in the light of the actual demographic context that characterises the continent: changes of family structures, increased professional requests, new technologies that replace human resources or migration, for example. European countries suffer from allocating significant proportion of national budgets to social support systems, and this expense is increasingly difficult to sustain, as the imbalance between the social assisted and the working ones is growing in the undesired direction. These trends are determined by the falling birth rates, population aging (the baby-boom generation is about 60 and retires), migration and the high number of refugees, all causing shrinking of the active population. Those reasons determined the European Union to emphasise the target of achieving an inclusive labor market, considering such barriers as: access to employment for certain categories, return to work after an interruption caused by pregnancy, maternity, caring for a family member, cases of disease, for example.

Analysing the effects of the recent economic crisis, the European Commission considers that „the 27 EU economies are highly interdependent: the crisis underscored the close links and spill-overs between our national economies, particularly in the euro area. Reforms, or the lack of them, in one country affect the performance of all others, as recent events have shown; moreover, the crisis and severe constraints in public spending have made it more difficult for some Member States to provide sufficient funding for the basic infrastructure they need in areas such as transport and energy not only to develop their own economies but also to help them participate fully in the internal market“⁴.

Work-family conflict

In 1964 Kahn conceptualised role conflict as: „simultaneous occurrence of two (or more) sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other“⁵. Starting from this point of view, and given the socio-economic conditions, with an increasing number of mothers who had jobs, many researchers focused their attention on how family and work interfere. In 1985, Beutell and Greenhaus discussed for the first time about „work-family conflict“, considering it a „form of conflict between roles where requests from work roles and in the family are incompatible to that extent that participation either in roles related to work or in the family is more difficult because of their participation in the other role“⁶.

The conflict between personal and professional roles can be analysed on three main levels: time based conflict (when the time necessary for achieving a role makes it difficult accomplishing the requests of the other role); tension based conflict (the stress born from one role affects the performance of the other one) and behavioral conflict (the behavior

⁴ European Commission, EUROPE 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, Brussels, 2010.

⁵ Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. Organisational stress. New York: Wiley, 1964.

⁶ Greenhaus J. H., Beutell N.J., Sources of Conflict between Work and Family Roles, The Academy of Management Review, Vol. 10, No. 1 (Jan., 1985), p. 76-88 (<http://www.jstor.org/stable/258214?seq=1#page>).

required by one of the roles becomes an impediment in performing the other). Both work environment and family issues may affect each other and contribute to high levels of work-family conflict. Thus, work problems such as role ambiguity, overloaded employees, too much time spent at the office, poor relationships with superiors or colleagues are some of the negative aspects of the job that may contribute to work-family conflict. On the other hand, family can be a coping tool for one's professional strains, but it can also bring a series of sources of conflict. We can mention here taking care of children or other dependent relatives, daily housekeeping, emotional problems between family members, or low levels of support between the two partners.

The imbalance between work and private life may attract many unwanted consequences at the individual, family, and organisational level. Thus, the work-family conflict affects physical and mental health of the individual⁷ is positively correlated with decreasing satisfaction with life⁸ and increased levels of stress and emotional exhaustion⁹. Those who feel affected more by this imbalance also report high levels of anxiety and depression fatigue and have a higher probability of alcohol consumption.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of living and working conditions manages several surveys concerning working conditions across Europe. The Fourth European Working Conditions Survey was carried simultaneously in 31 European countries, and emphasised that 235 million people were employed in the 31 countries studied, 50% of them being concentrated in 5 countries: Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy and Spain. Significant differences are recorded in terms of unemployment rates, percentage of part-time workers, and different rates of female participation in the workforce or the amount of temporary contracts.

, The survey also shows that a higher proportion of men than women are self employed, 63% compared to 37%. When talking about part-time jobs, things change between sexes: 29% of women work part-time compared to 7% of men, from the total of 17% of part-time jobs in Europe. United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries lead the ranking, while the prevalence of partial working decreases in Eastern countries, being often associated with temporary work.¹⁰ Half of households have 2 wage-earners; while a third have only one wage-earner. 6% of men and women hold second jobs.

The above mentioned survey shows us that workers from eastern and central countries of the Europe spend a greater number of hours at work, compared to the northern and

⁷ Frone M. (2003), Work-family balance, *Handbook of occupational health psychology*, Washington DC, American Psychological Association, 143-162

⁸ Kossek. E., Ozeki C. (1998), Work-family conflict, policies, and the job-life satisfaction relationship: A review and directions for organisational behavior-human resources research. *Journal of Applied Psychology*. Vol 83(2). Apr. 1998. 139-149

⁹ Rupert. P., Stevanovic. P., Hunley. H. (2009), Work-family conflict and burnout among practicing psychologist. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*. Vol. 40. p. 54-61

¹⁰ Pogan L., Impact of organisational environment on job satisfaction and job performance, *Annals of the 'Constantin Brâncuși' University of Târgu Jiu, Letter and Social Science Series*, Issue 4/2014 'ACADEMICA BRÂNCUȘI' PUBLISHER, ISSN 1844 - 6051 152, p. 150-155.

western areas, where were noted the lowest number of hours worked per week, while their earnings are significant smaller.

This is a very important aspect because the study shows us that the prevalence of physical and mental health problems increases for those who spend more than 48 hours per week at work. In this case family and social relationships are also affected.

In Eastern and Central Europe economic problems determine people to accept harder working conditions, lower earnings, and longer schedules, while in the western parts of the continent workers have better conditions. The legislative measures are also different in many areas, such as holidays, part-time programs, occupational health, working from home or earnings and family-friendly practices, for example.

Connections between work-family conflict and EU 2020

Article 136 of the Treaty of Rome promotes employment and improving working and living conditions as the primary objectives of the European Union and its member States.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of living and working conditions considers that „as the European Union continues to expand its borders, the differing norms in terms of both working and living conditions across the continent become increasingly apparent. For Europe's policymakers, such differences present serious challenges as they seek to increase productivity, boost employment and improve quality of work“.¹¹

The expansion of the European Union and the changes of labor market brought by the Lisbon Strategy were the main causes of an important wave of new-comers to the western countries, especially for jobs with minimal training. This new challenges were increased because of the personal features of those categories of persons, facts that determined the receiving countries to search and apply new politics. Therefore, employment models have been diversified, with part-time contract, fixed-term, seasonal work, the schedule is sometimes very flexible and can take various forms, enabling work from home or by using modern means of communication from almost anywhere. Another area of intervention was that of building centers to facilitate care for dependents, such as children, disabled or elderly.¹²

As EU2020 Strategy proposes that the main pillars of the development of a united Europe were inclusive economic growth, increased participation in the labor market, acquiring new skills and poverty reduction, new measures were required, especially because the crisis confirmed the need of an inclusive labor market, with jobs fit for a large variety of people, with different skills and needs.

Thus, in France since 2002 was decided the decrease of maximum permitted number of hours worked per week, because, as it also happens in our country, employees often

¹¹ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, The fourth European Working Conditions Survey, Ireland, Dublin, 2007.

¹² Pogan L., The need to address work-family conflict from an inclusive labor market perspective, UNIVERSITARY JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY, Year XI - no. 2(22)/2015, ISSN: 1841-6578, Beladi Publishing House, Craiova, 2015.

worked 10-12 hours a day. This measure was not regarded favorably by employers, but statistical data obtained after apling this change showed that the unemployment rate fell because new jobs were created, full or part time, and for workers the work-family balance have won.

In Italy the working week was also reduced with 4 hours and in the Nordic countries the problem of reducing the number of days worked per week was issued. Through various funding opportunities youth entrepreneurship and social economy or associative economy manifestation forms were also promoted. All these measures aimed to achieve concrete aspirations of EU 2020 Strategy¹³.

Conclusions

The three main priorities assumed through EU 2020 - smart growth, sustainable growth, inclusive growth are assigned to the following areas: high rates of employment, research and innovation, climate change and energy, education and poverty fighting. High rates of employment are obviously connected with education and poverty fighting. The differences between the countries forming the European Union are remarkable, under several aspects: unemployment rates, earnings, working conditions or schedule. This is somehow a normal phenomenon, as every country has its particular history, cultural background, political characteristics and other specific features that influence its performance in the Union.

But the European Commission considers that „the 27 EU economies are highly interdependent: the crisis underscored the close links and spill-overs between our national economies, particularly in the euro area. Reforms or the lack of them, in one country affect the performance of all others, as recent events have shown; moreover, the crisis and severe constraints in public spending have made it more difficult for some Member States to provide sufficient funding for the basic infrastructure they need“¹⁴.

We aimed at the beginning of this paper to analyse the connections between work-family conflict and the goals of EU 2020. From the previous exposed considerations, we see that a poor balance of private and professional roles will negatively affect the individual as a human being (physic - somatic, psychic and behavior manifestations), the organisation on the other hand (absenteeism, low productivity, high costs generated by illness, personnel fluctuation and turn-over) and the society as a whole.

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