

# Checking the Balance between Work and Private Life





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## FOREWORD

Due to the ongoing economic recession in many European countries, the economic and social structures within these societies are undergoing fundamental changes. Whereas unemployment rates remain high, especially in the age cohort of 15 to 29-year-olds, austerity policies are still on the political agenda. The devastating situation of young people and deteriorating working conditions are putting severe pressure on the parents of young people and on their families, and make the compatibility of work and private life almost impossible.

Despite the decisive role of families for societies' development, there is no specific strand within EU social policies for family issues, which remain under the supervision and guidance of member states. Whereas families are one of the most important elements for society in the field of social cohesion, they are at the same time the most vulnerable elements of society, because family-related policies are the first to be cut in times of economic difficulties. Since 2008, the reconciliation between work and private life has become increasingly difficult, and the European Centre for Workers' Questions (EZA) is monitoring the development of reconciliation policies because of their fundamental importance for workers, workers' organisations and society.

In the 2013 budget year and under its "European Social Dialogue" education and training programme, the EZA co-ordinated projects on the issue of "Checking the balance between work and private life", putting the focus on rising awareness of society and the social partners for the topic of compatibility of work and private life in the context of the ongoing economic recession.

In terms of the themes, this was linked with the EZA project co-ordination of 2011 on the issue of “Compatibility of work and family life” and with the EZA project co-ordination of 2008 on the issue of “Equal opportunities for men and women in the labour market”. Whereas the main focus of the 2011 seminars was on the challenges for young families with children – although in times of demographic change the question of compatibility is becoming increasingly important for the ever-growing number of people who look after an elderly relative – the main focus of the 2008 seminars was on the various aspects of compatibility focusing on gender equality.

First and foremost, I would like to thank Anna Moskva, who was in charge of the project co-ordination and was responsible for evaluating the results, and for the thematic co-ordination between the member organisations involved. I also wish to thank my colleague Matthias Homey, who co-ordinated the activities from the EZA Office. The European Commission’s Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion supported our activities with content and funding.

We hope that the results of the project co-ordination reach a large group of people, and that the problem-solving approaches elaborated on the issue of compatibility can help give individuals and the various workers’ organisations in the EZA network guidance in tackling this issue.

We invite you to contact us with further suggestions of your own on this topic. Our contact details are on the back of the brochure.

*Roswitha Gottbehüt*  
*EZA Secretary General*

# 1 BACKGROUND

In 2013, the links between the labour market and the family were one of the key topics for the EZA. Why were the relations between those two spheres chosen to be analysed? Certainly we cannot speak about the family without touching upon the issue of work and vice versa. Work gives us a feeling of fulfilment, satisfaction, self-realisation and decides the living place not only of the employee but of the whole family. On the hand, labour influences the family life style. At the same time, the family brings up the young members of society and prepares them to be good workers, assures support for employees when a labour crisis occurs, the family motivates them to work well in order to keep their job, have decent remuneration to assure the family a safe and prosperous life. We could go on enumerating these relations.

The question is why was this topic chosen by the EZA for 2013 as one of the leading subjects? In times of economic difficulties in Europe, we see a strong tendency to look for potential savings and cut out all extra and unnecessary expenses. There is a great risk that family policy will be one of the first targets as a potential source of savings. The family is one of the most vulnerable elements of society. When only economic aspects are taken into account, social policies, tax policies and other family-related policies will certainly be the ones to be reformed first. In these times it is easy to forget about values.

The EZA is about values and education based on fundamental values, and the family is one of them. The main educational aim of EZA is to look for good practices and solutions and search for ways to maintain them and develop new ones. The power of EZA is its international dimension, which allows ideas to be shared and exchanged.

In 2013, there were four seminars on balancing work and family:

1. [Europejski Dom Spotkań – Fundacja Nowy Staw](#): **Work-life balance: making social partners and society aware of a healthy balance between family and job**, 23 – 25 May 2013 in Lublin / Poland
2. [AFB \(Arbeiter-, Freizeit- und Bildungsverein\)](#): **Family and job in the economic crisis – How can equal opportunities be guaranteed in the labour market despite the crisis?** 31 May – 2 June 2013 in Brixen/Italy
3. [KAP \(Hnutí “Křesťan a práce”\)](#): **Balancing the interests of family and the world of work through social dialogue**, 4 – 6 October 2013 in Velehrad/ Czech Republic
4. [YHACM - UNASM - UIATUM \(Union of Independent Autonomous Trade Unions of Macedonia\)](#): **Trade union tasks with regard to the compatibility of family and job**, 24–26 October 2013 in Ohrid, the FYR of Macedonia

Twelve countries took part: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Hungary, the FYR of Macedonia, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Altogether the seminars gathered around 200 representatives of workers’ organisations.

Each seminar presented local and national experiences as well as international experience. There was a balance of academic staff, politicians, and representatives of workers’ organisations among the speakers. One of the biggest values was the presentation of the specific good practices applied and working.

There was a balance between presentation of statistical data, research results, policies and practical solutions.

## 2 SITUATION IN EUROPE

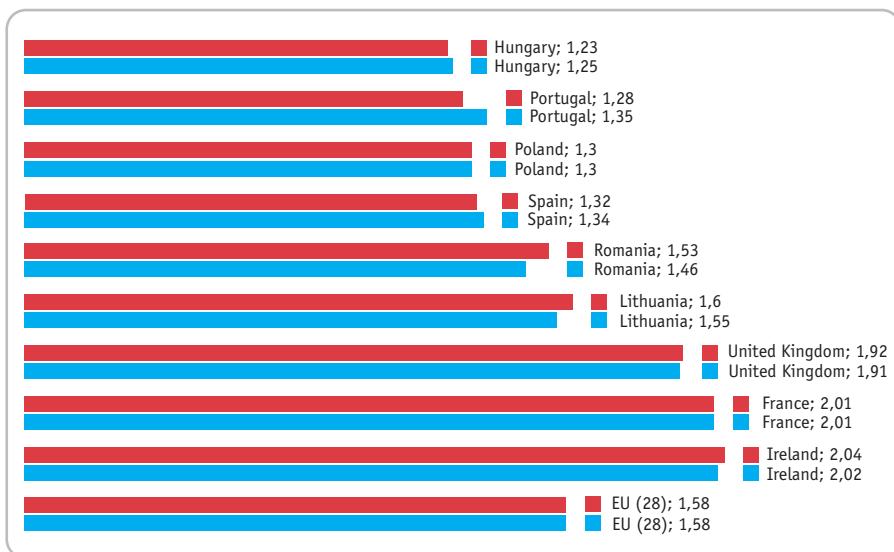
According to Eurostat data, in 2011, 5.2 million children were born in the EU-27, which equated to an approximate birth rate (the number of live births per 1,000 inhabitants) of 10.4.

In recent decades Europeans have been having fewer children; 2.1 live births per woman is the level which assures the full replacement rate. The level gradually falls below this rate; even the migrant populations among which the rate is higher than the average do not secure the replacement level.

Total fertility rates across EU Member States have tended to converge during the last few decades. In 1980, the gap between the highest rate of 3.2 live births in Ireland and the lowest rate of 1.5 live births in Luxembourg was 1.7 live births per woman. By 1990, the difference had narrowed to 1.1 live births per woman, and by 2011 it had decreased to 0.8 live births per woman. Ireland and France continued to achieve the highest birth rates for the most recent period available (2011 or 2010), with over 2.0 live births per woman. The lowest fertility rates in 2011 were recorded in Hungary (1.2 live births per woman) and in Cyprus, Latvia, Poland and Romania (all 1.3 live births per woman).



Table 1: Fertility rate in Europe in 2010 and 2011<sup>1</sup>



Red: 2010, Blue: 2011

As noted above, another reason that partly explains the downward trend in fertility rates within the EU Member States is the decision of many parents to delay starting a family. While only a relatively short time series is available for the EU-27, it is obvious that the mean age of women at childbirth continued to rise between 2002 and 2009, when it stood at 29.8 years.

The EU's social policy does not include a specific strand for family issues. Policymaking in this area remains the exclusive responsibility of EU Member States, reflecting different family structures, historical developments, social attitudes and traditions from one member state to another. Nevertheless,

<sup>1</sup> Based on data from <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/eurostat/home>

policymakers may well evaluate fertility statistics as a background for family policymaking. Furthermore, a number of common demographic themes are apparent across the whole of the EU, such as a reduction in the average number of children being born per woman and an increasing mean age of mothers at childbirth.

The employment rate is calculated by dividing the number of persons aged 20 to 64 in employment by the total population of the same age group. The indicator is based on the EU Labour Force Survey. The survey covers the entire population living in private households and excludes those in collective households such as boarding houses, halls of residence and hospitals. The employed population consists of persons who, during the reference week, did any work for pay or profit for at least one hour, or were not working but had jobs from which they were temporarily absent.

Table 2: Employment rate among women<sup>2</sup>

	2011	2012
EU (28 countries)	62.2	62.3
EU (27 countries)	62.3	62.4
Euro zone (17 countries)	61.9	61.9
Austria	69.6	70.3
Belgium	61.5	61.7
Bulgaria	59.8	60.2
Croatia	50.9	50.2
Cyprus	67.7	64.8
Czech Republic	61.7	62.5
Denmark	72.4	72.2
Estonia	67.6	69.3
Finland	71.9	72.5
France	64.7	65
Germany	71.1	71.5
Greece	48.6	45.2
Hungary	54.9	56.4
Iceland	77.9	79.1
Ireland	59.4	59.4
Italy	49.9	50.5
Latvia	65.3	66.4
Lithuania	66.6	67.9
Luxembourg	61.9	64.1
Malta	43.4	46.8
Netherlands	71.4	71.9
Norway	77.1	77.3
Poland	57.2	57.5
Portugal	64.8	63.1
Romania	55.7	56.3
Slovakia	57.4	57.3
Slovenia	64.8	64.6
Spain	55.5	54
Sweden	76.5	76.8
Switzerland	75.4	76
United Kingdom	67.9	68.4

<sup>2</sup> Based on

[http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?sessionId=9ea7d07e30e8c329294905784bcfa3e6af92b990d040.e340aN8Pc3mMc40Lc3aMaNyTb3uLe0?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=t2020\\_10&language=en](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?sessionId=9ea7d07e30e8c329294905784bcfa3e6af92b990d040.e340aN8Pc3mMc40Lc3aMaNyTb3uLe0?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=t2020_10&language=en)

Another vulnerable group in the labour market is young people. The youth unemployment rate is growing continuously. It is most visible in the southern European countries.

There are two crucial indicators reflecting the situation of young people in the labour market:

- The youth unemployment rate for those aged 15-24 ranged from 8.1% (Germany) to 55.3% (Greece) in 2012. In 2013, the situation worsened in both countries to reach 59% in Greece.
- The unemployment rate, i.e. the proportion of unemployed among the population aged 15-24 years – not the labour force – varied between 4.1% (Germany) and 20.6% (Spain) in 2012, the EU average standing at 9.7%.
- The youth unemployment rate reached a new historic level of 23.5% in February 2013, more than twice as high as the adult rate, with some 5.7 million young people affected.

All those factors do not encourage the young generation to start a family, plan to have children. Since they feel insecure on the labour market, they tend to postpone other decisions. Entering the labour market does not change the situation much. The first job and the first working years are often unstable; young people are offered short-term contracts with low wages which hardly satisfy their primary needs. All this influences the demography, late decisions result in a lower number of children per couple. There is also another aspect of the issue: young couples often choose the comfortable lifestyle, the multi-children family is less and less popular. Couples try to balance the working life where they both work and the family obligations.

### 3 SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS

The great discovery for the foreign participants at the first seminar in Poland was the domestic situation. Poland being a country with a Catholic society is experiencing one of the greatest demographic crises in Europe. The Polish young generation still rates family as one of the most important values. But when young people face the everyday economic reality of the labour market, they postpone the decision to start a family and have children. The birth rate in Poland is 1.3. At the same time, the average Polish couple living in Ireland or Great Britain has two to three children. Poland spends the lowest percentage of GDP on family policy in Europe, less than the Ukraine and Russia, only 0.9%, while the average in Europe is 2.1%.

In response to the situation, a new regulation on the duration of parental leave was adopted. It provides for 20 weeks of fully paid parental leave, which is the longest leave in the EU. It includes 14 weeks of maternity leave, while the remaining six weeks can be taken by either parent. There are six weeks of additional leave paid at 100% to be used by the mother or father plus 26 weeks of parental leave paid at 60%. The major change is that this regulation applies not only to dependent employees but also to the self-employed or workers on a temporary contract. The additional six weeks can be divided into two parts, each having a minimum length of one week. The 26-week parental leave can be split into three parts, with each lasting at least eight weeks. Parents can choose to take the parental leave at the same time and both stay at home but the duration must not exceed 26 weeks.

There must be continuity for all types of leave. The additional leave and parental leave for both parents can be combined with a part-time job if this is not more than half of the regular working time. There are also two extra weeks of leave for the father, as in previous regulations. There is a possibili-

ty of taking unpaid leave until the child is five years old. Women declaring at the start of their maternity leave that they will take 52 weeks are paid 80% of their wage throughout the whole period.

There are many voices criticising this solution. The problem is not the parental leave but the lack of jobs and the bad labour market situation – unstable contracts and low pay. The risk that women disappear from their job for 52 weeks (maternity, additional and parental leave) might deter employers from hiring them. The main problem, however, is the poor employability of young people and women, and bad contracts. At this stage, it is not possible to evaluate how effective this solution will be. Time will tell whether the new law will influence the demographic and labour market situation. In Poland and other countries in this part of Europe, a clear correlation can be seen between the labour market situation, the financial situation of the population and demographic changes.

The same issues were discussed in the Czech Republic. Both the seminars in Poland and in the Czech Republic have proved that all new EU member states face the same problems. We have seen the situation of Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Romania. Apart from the economic crisis, all countries experience an increase in the divorce rate, the number of children born outside marriage. The family patterns change; there are various types of couples, not only one model of marriage with children which used to exist. High mobility inside and outside the country (mainly work-related) also influences family life. High emigration rates are observed in Romania and Poland. People looking for a job leave the country, the family, and children, causing serious social consequences. Three million Romanians who work abroad are people of working age (between 18 and 40 years), at the peak of their biological, physical, mental and creative capacities; this number represents about 40% of the Romanian workforce of this age.

This part of Europe suffers from a lack of institutional support for families with children, such as kindergartens. The number of public institutions does not satisfy society's needs.

Another issue which was raised by participants from Visegrád countries is a lack of promotion of the good image of the family and of the family as a value in the media, in education and in the public sphere on a local, national and European level.

The seminar in Brixen concentrated on equality between men and women both at work and in private, family and social life. The focal question was if equal opportunities could be guaranteed in times of crisis. The countries presented there, such as Germany, Belgium and Austria, emphasized there was no major crisis in the labour market but the main conclusion was that the first symptoms affected the most vulnerable – women (mainly those returning to the labour market after maternity leave), young people and, as a consequence, the family. There is a tendency to replace permanent jobs with temporary, short-term and part-time contracts. In Germany women earn on average 23% less than men (source <http://www.finanzamt.pl/>). To change the situation, there is a need to promote equal opportunities not only through legislation and the implementation of laws, but also through education – constantly at every level and combined with social campaigns. It is a great challenge for social organisations, trade unions and educational institutions.

The seminar in the FYR of Macedonia presented the situation of a country starting labour market reforms. The current issues are the labour law changes, covering the regulations of maternal leave duration, pregnant women's work, and flexible working time. Each EU state has been through these changes. This is crucial to analysing the situation well and adopting the solutions which not only assure the current situation, but also lead to

positive future changes and will prevent a crisis in society. EU member states should share their best practices and solutions to support the process of smooth changes.

All seminars show there is a strong relation between the labour market and family life. There must be a stable situation in the labour market to ensure jobs for women, young people and every family member at every stage. It must be promoted with special instruments supporting families such as financial tools, friendly tax regulations, institutional support such as kindergartens plus campaigns promoting the good image of the family and equal opportunities for men and women.

One of the participants presented the Hungarian attitude towards the family. There is a special legislative procedure. Every legal act being prepared goes through a special family audit. Its task is to analyse and assess how it will influence the family and its situation. It means that every policy is perceived as family-related: tax, energy, social, and health policies. The family is treated as an important social and economic cell which deserves special protection. The objective is to tackle the issue of demographic change.

Milan Tóth from NKOS Slovakia summarised the main European challenge: "Our aim must not be to adapt family policy to the labour market but to reform the labour market according to family needs."



## 4 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is necessary to continue and develop educational initiatives, social campaigns led by educational institutions aiming at promoting families with children, equal opportunities and equal rights between women and men in the labour market and in social life. Placing the burden of having more children, working more and caring for the growing number of elderly on women is neither practical nor fair – this is why new policies, mentalities and attitudes are required to tackle the EU's demographic challenges. These campaigns and educational initiatives (seminars, conferences, and publications) should promote good existing practices.

The employment of young people and women should be a priority both at the European and national level. Without raising the employability of those groups, we cannot change the demographic situation. There was a positive assessment of the new EU programme to stimulate youth employment. The EU is aiming to reduce youth unemployment and to increase the youth employment rate in line with the wider EU target of achieving a 75% employment rate for the working-age population (20-64 years). The Youth Guarantee seems to tackle the problem from the roots.

Flexible labour solutions cannot be the tool for exploiting the most vulnerable in the labour market. Instead, there should be family-friendly solutions supporting the reconciliation of individual and family needs and the employer's interests. This issue should be watched doggedly by the trade unions.

The more instruments supporting the family by all possible means, such as tax reductions, financial support, institutional support, solutions enabling work and family life to be combined, the better the demographic situation. Family well-being means demographic growth.

To balance work and family life better, the European Social Model needs to be modernized. Europe's demographic changes mean it needs more children, a higher percentage of working women, and care for the increasing number of elderly. The EU can tackle this 'magic triangle' if everyone helps share the burden, through new ways of balancing work/family life. But failure to do so would directly lead to a deeper economic crisis. There should be long-term planning. Gender equality at work, a more flexible retirement age, fewer barriers to higher birth rates, reconciling family care and paid work, and managing migration and integration are the key solutions to all the challenges mentioned. All legal decisions should be followed by educational initiatives. All these solutions should be consulted, implemented and assessed through regular, constant social dialogue where all partners are equally involved and on an equal footing at every stage.

The economic crisis cannot be the excuse for neglecting these issues; it should be treated as a long-term investment in future EU growth and the development of social capital.