




WP 5 (TÁRKI) – Family policies, working time flexibility and social cohesion

Project:

WORKCARE SYNERGIES was a support action with the aim of disseminating research findings of previous EU Framework Programme projects in the field of work and care. To do this, local information and discussion events were held in Austria, the UK, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Portugal.

Information- and Discussion Events of the Hungarian Team:

The Hungarian Team at the TÁRKI Social Research Institute held two main events in 2010 and 2011 where it presented selected research findings from EU Framework Programme projects related to family policies, working time flexibility and social cohesion and initiated their discussion in a local context.

	05.05.2010	HU	Budapest	Potential conflict between work and household, husband and wife, male and female
	24.11.2010	HU	Budapest	Family policies, flexible work arrangements and social cohesion
	27.10.2011	HU	Budapest	Work-life balance, flexible work arrangements and social cohesion (Workshop)

Internet Links:

General information about the project, local dissemination themes, all events and their contents can be downloaded from the WORKCARESYNERGIES project homepage (www.workcaresynergies.eu).

Additional information on events held by TÁRKI can be found on the HU-TÁRKI country page (<http://workcaresynergies.eu/social-cohesion/>).

Participants:

Participants in these dissemination events in Hungary were different stakeholders with very different backgrounds: politicians (representatives of the Government, MPs), members of governmental organisations, the social partners (labour and trade unions), company representatives, representatives of NGOs, service providers from the sectors of childcare, family services, parental education, women’s networks, church, as well as other local actors and interested parties.

Content of the Events:

Two main dissemination events took part in Budapest in 2010 and 2011. The first (on 24 November 2010) aimed at bringing together main stakeholders that are not directly involved in policy making. EU-level research findings were discussed at the meeting, which findings were summarised in two separate dissemination materials. The first dealt with the role of flexible work arrangements in promoting work-life balance and also discussed the main obstacles of in Hungary, while the second discussed how the Hungarian family policy affects work-life balance, as well as its outcomes as the social cohesion is concerned. Representatives of the most important stakeholders involved in the field were asked to comment on these findings, and these presentations were followed by a long discussion session.

The second main event was held on 27 October 2011, involving this time also policy makers beside other stakeholders. The presentation of the research findings were linked to the most recent policy developments in Hungary, including the discussion by the Parliament of the law on the protection of families. The presentations were followed by an open debate of the results and of the topic in general. The discussion was also facilitated by the dissemination material distributed in advance among the participants, which included the main conclusions of the previous, NGO-focused dissemination event.

Special Themes discussed in local events:

At both events the role of flexible work arrangements and that of family policies in enhancing work-family conflicts were in the focus of the discussion. Low parental employment and low fertility as main outcomes of this conflict in Hungary were explored, together with the high relative risk of poverty among children. In these events, we discussed (a) the role of part-time work and other flexible work arrangements and (b) the role of formal childcare in reducing work-family conflicts, improving outcomes and promoting social cohesion, as well as the (c) the incentives of cash benefits on fertility behaviour and the labour supply of mothers. During these events, both the presentations and the discussion largely reflected on the Hungarian situation, also by using recent local research results related to the topic.

In the Hungarian dissemination events, we presented selected research findings from the following EU Framework Programme projects:

1. WORKCARE (2006-2009), a project on the social quality and changing relationships between work, care and welfare in Europe.
http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/232_en.html;
<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/socsci/research/nec/workcare/>
2. HWF (2000-2003), a project on households, work and flexibility.
http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/057_en.html;
<http://www.hwf.at>
3. IMISCOE (2004-2009), a project on international migration, integration and social cohesion.

We also provided research results to the audience from the

4. Child poverty and child well-being in the European Union (2008-2009, DG EMPL) project,
<http://www.tarki.hu/en/research/childpoverty/index.html>

Summary of the policy maker focused dissemination event

The second dissemination event, which took place on 27 October 2011 in Budapest, policy maker, was focused on two main policy tools that in the forefront of the Hungarian public debates when the issue of the work-life balance is: the role of the part-time work and that of the formal child care. The agenda of the discussion was set accordingly, by presenting first the EU Framework Programme research results for Hungary in a comparative way. This presentation was followed by additional interventions on the possible ways and on the cost-efficiency of expanding the existing institutional setting in the field of child care, as well as on the perceptions and views of employees and employers on the employability of mothers with young children.

As for the first sub-theme, the presentation of the research results discussed in details the incidence and the main characteristics of the part-time work in Hungary, what factors do have the strongest effect on one picking up a part-time job, how being in part-time employment affects positively the perception of the work-family conflict, as well as how the part-time employment of the mother affects the risk of poverty of her child across the EU in general and specifically in Hungary. Also, the presentation listed main factors that are

responsible for the low participation rates in such working arrangements in Hungary - both on demand and supply side.

The presentation of the second sub-theme included the main results of the WORKCARE projects that show how cash benefits and child care have an effect on the labour supply of mothers with young children, not only in aggregate, but also by the level of education. Also, this research provides information on specific policy aspects as well: not only the total expenditure on family benefits is important, but also the design matters. In Hungary, spending more on childcare instead of cash benefits would benefit mainly those with secondary education, but also low educated parents. Highly educated parents have more resources to cope with the situation when the child needs care, while they also are less responsive to financial incentives. The presentations also highlighted the policy alternatives to increase the number of child care places across the country and to improve their availability for those either living in disadvantaged regions or communities or having low social status or both.

In parallel, in order to create synergies between the research findings and ongoing policy developments, policy makers also gave presentations at the event. The floor leader of the Christian-Democratic party, as the submitter of the 'Law on the protection of families' initiative to the Parliament, shared the main strategic aspects of the forthcoming legal regulation with the audience. The representative of the Government was invited by us to provide information on the actual programmes and initiatives in this field and how the above mentioned developments in the regulations may affect the policy practice.

A long and vivid discussion followed these presentations of research findings, which involved all participants. When summarising the debate, we concluded that the Nordic/Scandinavian model is seen by participants as an *ideal type*, a best practice of how a society can adapt to changing societal processes and improve outcomes by adjusting the institutional environment to the key challenges they face. During their interventions, almost all participants in a way or in other highlighted how and to what extent the Hungarian situation differs from that characterising in general the Scandinavian countries, even though the public spending on family policy is almost as high as it is in the Nordic Member States. In accordance, one of the main conclusions that came out from this debate, was that while all interested parties should monitor the practices followed by the most successful countries, these cannot and should not be implemented without a deliberate analysis of the local peculiarities. The need for a flexibly institutional and benefits system was also raised which would be a large extent able to reflect on individual settings and would provide a calculable environment for couples to follow their own ways.

Below, we summarise the main observations made by the participants of the dissemination event in more details.

The role of part-time work:

- Part-time jobs provide low earnings - this is the main factors that bottleneck the spread of these work arrangements in Hungary (and the same might hold for other Central and Eastern European countries). In addition, recent research results show that the incidence of the part-time jobs is highest among those already having an income from the welfare state, mainly in form of pensions or child care allowance.
- These findings can be interpreted in both absolute and relative terms. First, the wages related to part-time work are low in nominal terms, which cannot guarantee a reasonable standard of living for families. This leads to the situation in which if a second earner were in the household, he or she would prefer to rake up a full-time job instead of a part-time one. As a consequence, income from part-time job cannot be seen as an effective tool of avoiding poverty, which provides disincentives for mothers to pick up such jobs. On the other hand, their level is also low compared to the cash benefits (including family allowance, maternal benefits, unemployment benefit, social assistance, etc.), which again provides a strong disincentive for a part-time employment. Being the main reason, it may overcome the positive effects of policy initiatives on demand side (law regulation, wage subsidies, etc.).
- A repeated concern about part-time jobs, which has been raised at this event as well, is their precariousness and their possible negative effects on women's carrier.
- Part-time work is associated with high fix cost both on demand and supply side. Part-time jobs are often not available in the vicinity of the settlement or cannot be reached due to poor transport infrastructure. Employers are not always interested in creating part-time jobs instead of full-time jobs.
- The above mentioned factors being a widely shared understanding of the driving factors behind the low incidence of the part-time employment, the effectiveness of the new legislation being in force since January 2011 can be also questioned at some extent. The new policy tool ensure a 7 percentage points reduction in the wage-related employer's contribution if the mother returned during the maternal leave period is employed part-time by her workplace. This measure replaced a similar, but more general regulation, which was not conditioned on the part-time employment.
- The attitudes and social norms widely shared by the members of the Hungarian society are supportive for mothers staying at home until the age of 3 of the child, although there were registered some changes in this respect during the last decades. However, when

employment is supported, part-time arrangement is preferred instead of full-time, when the well-being of the child and of the mother is considered. According to some participants, policy initiatives should reflect on these norms, while others claim that in effect policies contributed to the spread of such norms in the society.

- The role of the public sector was also debated, whether it should take the lead in promoting part-time jobs or not.

The role of child care:

- Recalling one of the points made previously, the main issue here is whether at what age the child should participate in child care. Some participants highlighted that this much depends not only on the relationship between the quality of parental and institutional child care, but also on the needs of the child.
- The availability and the affordability of public child care are the main problems in Hungary. The supply lags far behind the demand and is a real obstacle for increasing the labour market participation of mothers with young children. While the public service is free of charge (excepting the food), affordability turns to be a real problem when private arrangements are considered. Some form of such services, like family crèches are extremely costly, since they need to cover all the costs from fees collected exclusively from families.
- The flexibility of public institutions has been largely debated. Some views were expressed that the opening hours of these institutions sometimes do not match the needs of the parents being in specific working time regimes. On the other hand, such schedules (let's say before 7 am or after 6 pm) would strongly hamper the well-being of the child.
- Innovative and non-standard forms of child care arrangements were also discussed. In some cases, large companies can afford to run such institutions for their workers, or to buy in individual places in existing private institutions. However, the spread of such arrangements would require policy measures, providing vouchers thru the cafeteria system for example.

Some additional final conclusions from all local discussions:

- An important general point was made on the extremely fragmented of the Hungarian society. Highly educated parents, working in some specific branches of the private sector, could afford a Scandinavian way of ensuring work-life balance, while realising their aims in terms of fertility and labour market carrier. On the other hand, low educated parents with weak or non-existent attachment to the labour market, follow a

life pattern that is closer according to some aspects to the developing countries instead of the Hungarian average. Taken more generally, the differences in employment rates and in the number of children by social status are much larger in Hungary than in the Nordic Member States.

- Some stakeholders working in the field claimed the lack of family planning, of thinking in terms of life trajectories, or simply to foresee the long-term implication of some decisions. For this reason, they cannot cope with the situation when they should care for their children and should make earnings in the labour market at the same time, and they lose their contact with the latter, sometimes completely.
- The role of fathers was also largely discussed. Several participants reported on an increased activity of father in caring for their children, even if is mostly restricted to leisure time activities and at a much smaller extent to the household work. On the other hand, even if there is the possibility to fathers to stay at home with their children in the period of the parental leave, low wages in general and the wage gap between men and women often makes a rationale choice for the families to avoid this option.
- As a final point, the question of what the future of ongoing projects started within the frame of development programmes supported by the European Social Fund, was raised. It would be crucial to ensure that the experience of these projects will be processed in a systematic way and that the best practices will be made part of the standard institutional and policy system.