

Andrea Korén
Department of Corporate Economics
University of West Hungary Sopron
koren@ktk.nyme.hu

SUPPORTING AND OBSTRUCTIVE FACTORS OF RECONCILIATION WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE IN HUNGARY

Abstract

The society needs women not only as a mother but as an employee as well. Women participate in higher education in higher extent and the paid workplace could mean the source of economic independence. Their employment influences the role in the family, power position; and it does not only mean the income but a role-model for children.

Women face several difficulties in the labour market such as pay gap, stereotypes, 'glass-ceiling'-syndrome, female poverty, one-parent families' problems, special situation over 40 with intermediate qualification, family roles and work, combination of work and family life. Considering the last mentioned factor, having children mean a risk for parents from this point of view. Without solution to this problem, a woman cannot be a sterling person as a mother nor as an employee.

This paper is going to describe the situation of employees having children and the employers as well. In long term, the reconciliation of work and private life is a common interest of both of them, which should be a part of business strategy.

Key words: Labour market, employment, reconciliation, work-life balance, flexibility

Introduction: social state

In Hungary, the inactivity rate is extremely high (2,6 million people in 2007). It has got two meanings: it is a loss from one hand, and it could mean a valuable, precious labour reserve. Actually, the employment rate of men is around 63%, and 51% of women. The employment rate of women aged 25-34 – who has got children - is lower than the European average.

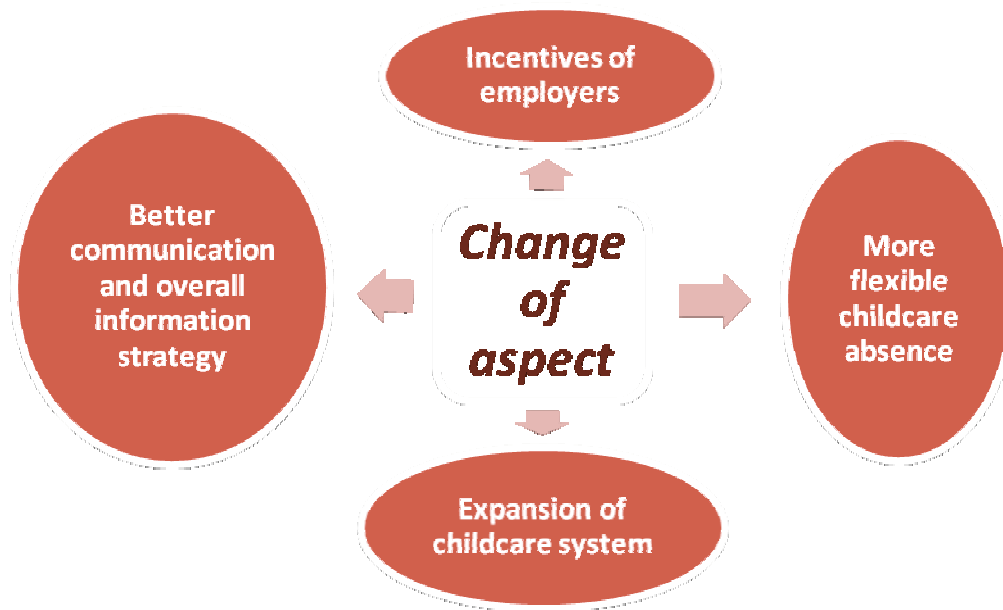
The mothers are off the labour market for a long time because of the childcare. After 3-5 years of maternity leave, they can easily be unemployed even if they have got higher education; aggravating the situation of bad employment rates of women. Having children worsens the employment rates of women with 37%, and raise the employment rates of men with 8%.

In 2005, 270000 women got childcare allowance in the country. 40% of women could work again in the previous workplace and at about 100000 women were in the situation that the previous workplace ceased.

Stereotypes in the labour market and unawareness make things worse. Because of these barriers, it is very difficult for women to return to (or even enter) the labour market after maternity leave.

To solve this problem, change of aspect is in need. Therefore, communication should be developed, working out and introduction of the areas of responsibility are necessary.

Figure 1: Considered areas of return to the labour market after childcare



Source: own compilation

Practically, the change of aspect contains four essential areas as the Figure 1 shows.

- Up-to-date and practical information are necessary, that is why an overall information strategy will prove better communication between employers, employees and the society.
- Enlargement of childcare system mean raise of room in childcare institutions and flexible childcare services.
- Stimulation of employers because of absence of part time jobs (4,5% in Hungary -18% in EU) and aversion of atypical jobs. There are a low number of workplaces which are committed to family friendly policies. Supports should be reconsidered, enlargement of atypical employment and development of new incentive system (allowances, vouchers).
- Make the childcare more flexible: the absence in the country is one of the longest in the Union; the childcare system should be reconsidered.

Aspects of employees with children

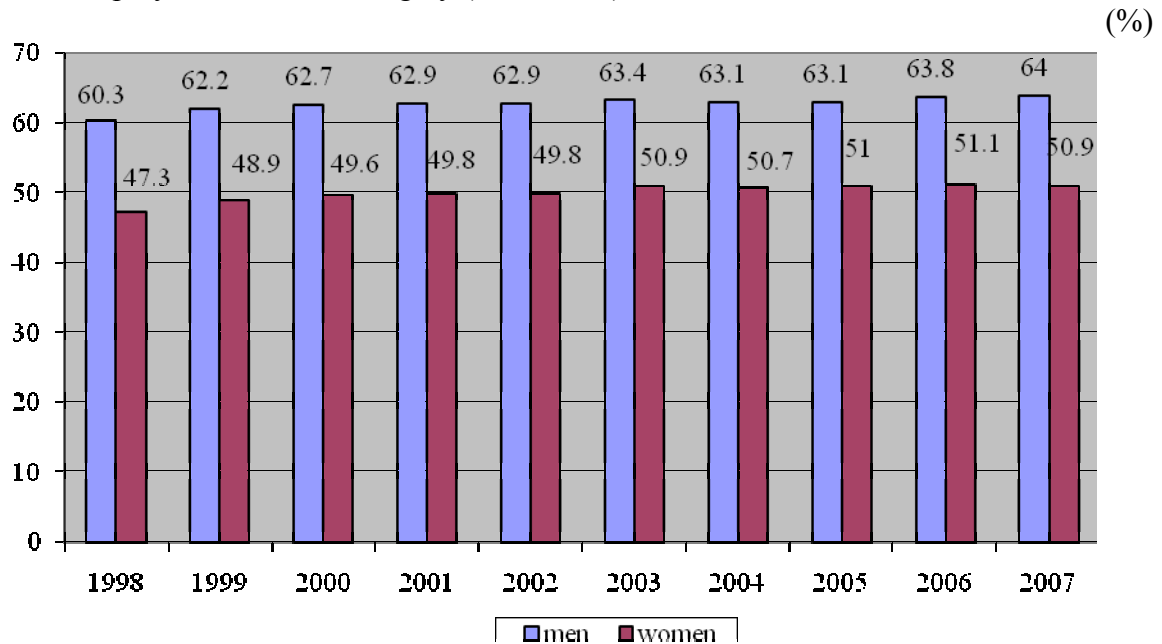
Legal environment regulating the prohibition of discrimination and equal opportunities; other labour regulations are the following:

- Gender equality – basic principle ; 1975
- Constitution (66§)
- Equal compensation and career path (75/117/EGK, 75/207/EGK)
- Safe working conditions for pregnant women (92/85/EGK)
- Right for parental leave (96/34/EK)
- Part-time employment (84/A §, 97/81/EK)
- Bias – indirect, direct, harassment (97/80/EK)
- Law of Equal Treatment and Opportunities , 2003 CXXV, 96/97/EK Authority of Equal Treatment (examination in 2005)

Women's state in the Hungarian labour market changed a lot during decades. Before the transition, - similarly to other post-socialist countries – the economic activity of women had continuously increasing and the dual-earning family model was typical. In 1989, the activity rate of women was 85,8%, which was higher than the rate of men (84,7%); moreover, it was higher than the high rates of Scandinavian countries.

In the 90s, the change of economic structure made the employment rates decrease. The nadir was in 1995, and a slow improvement can be seen since then. (Figure 2) The employment of women fell from 75,5% to 47,3% by 1998, since 2004 it is approximately 51%.

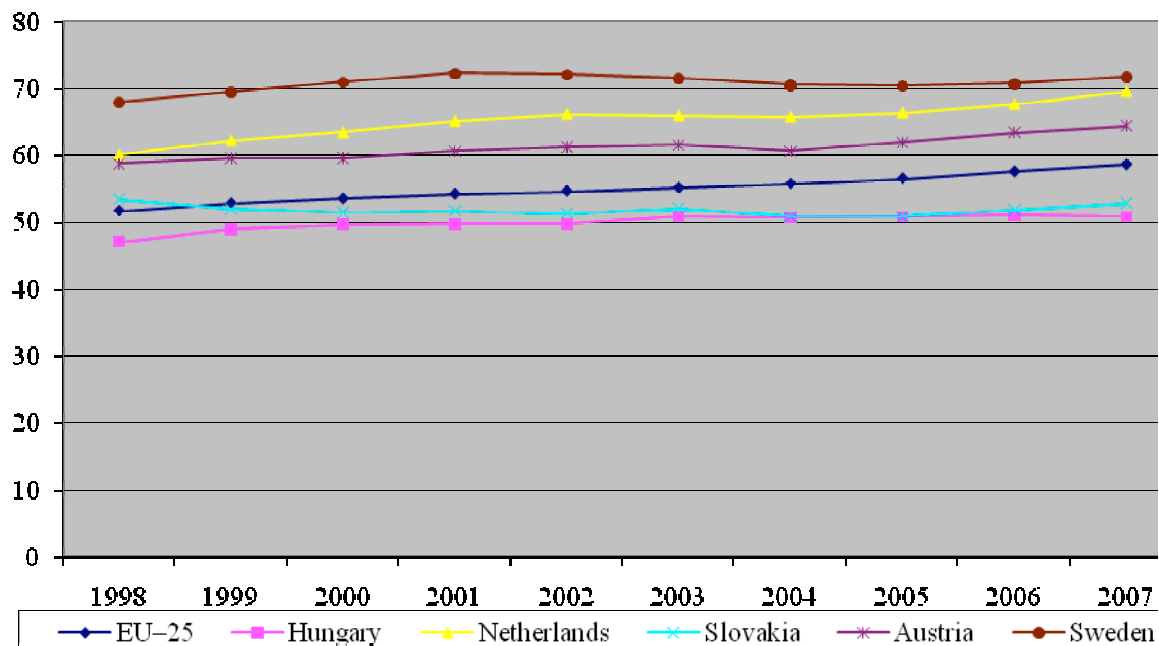
Figure 2: Employment rates in Hungary (1998-2008)



Source: own compilation based on the data of Hungarian Central Statistical Office

The rate of employed women is lower than the EU-average rate; it is shown by Figure 3. Similarly to the member-states which joined to the EU in 2004, the employment rate is under the average: at around 51%. The employment rates in Sweden and the Netherlands are the highest: at around 70%.

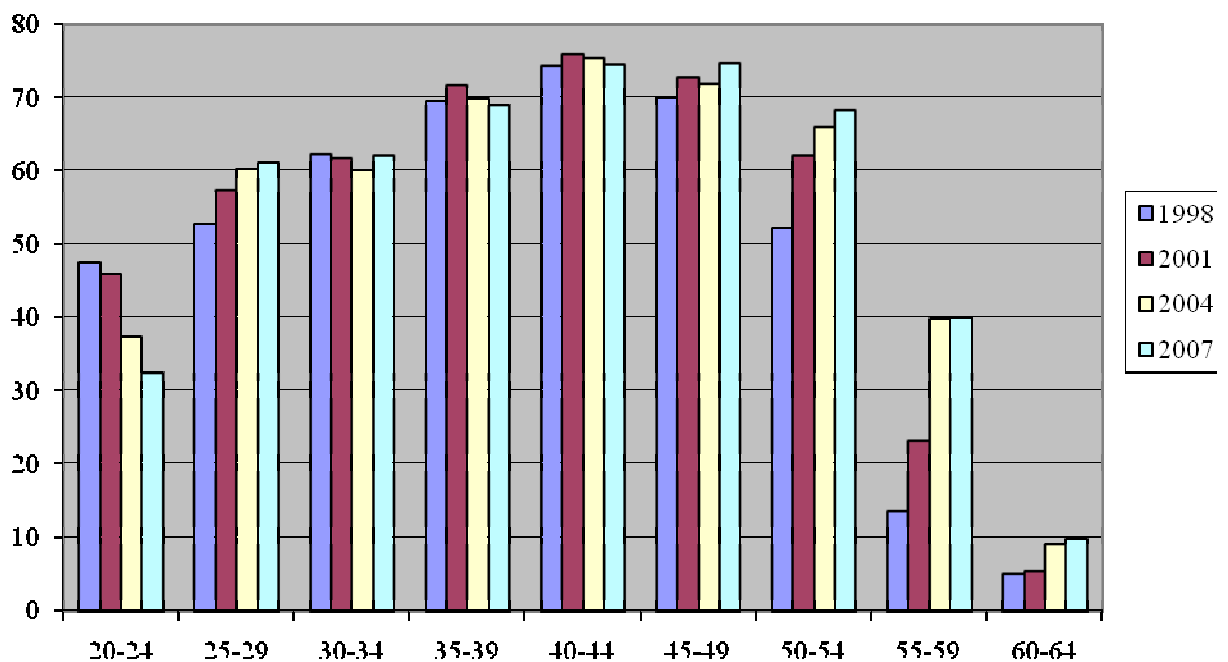
Figure 3: Employment rates in some EU-members states (1998-2007)



Source: Statat

The following figure shows the female employment tendencies since 1998 in age groups. The employment decreased in the age of 20-24 by 15%, which could mean that they participate in higher education in greater extent. It is also proved by the continuous growing employment rate of the age 25-29.

Figure 4: Employment rates of women in age groups in Hungary (%)



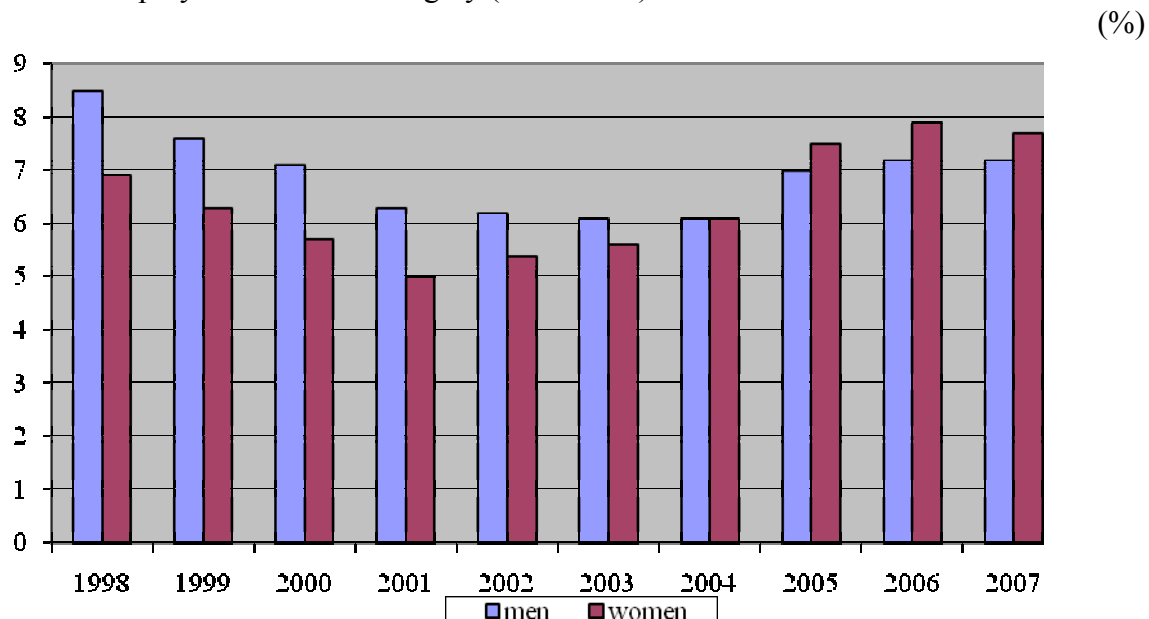
Source: own compilation based on the data of Hungarian Central Statistical Office

These preceding figures underpin that low employment rate, its proportion according to age groups and economic activity demonstrate notable gender difference in the Hungarian labour market; which is originate in different family roles. *Most of all, possibilities and risks of women in the labour market are affected by age and number of children.* (Bukodi, 2005)

It is interesting, that the rate of women was always lower in the registered unemployed since the mass unemployment, but in the recent years, it exceeds the men's rate (Figure 5).

There is also a higher rate of women participating in labour market trainings; because of better conformation skills and higher willingness to learn.

Figure 5: Unemployment rates in Hungary (1998-2007)



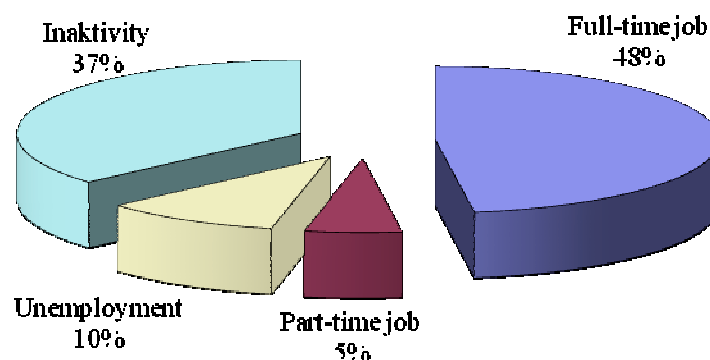
Source: own compilation based on the data of Hungarian Central Statistical Office

Main matters related to female employment:

- Glass-ceiling syndrome: This can be seen when the career suddenly cranes. The glass ceiling is sooner for women than for men. It means that they have got lower career path in case of same qualification. For this reason, more women are in managerial position, but their rate is not higher in top-managerial spheres. The barrier is the tradition, that these positions can be filled by men.
- Income inequalities: In the EU, women earned 83% of men's income, in Hungary this rate is 81% in 1995. Since then, there has been a slow increasing tendency. Higher improvement can be seen in the country than in the EU; by 2006, women's average income was lower by 11% than men's. In tendencies, the gender pay gap is decreasing; the most significant equalization can be seen considering in case of the lowest qualification, whereas the gap is still increasing in managerial positions, jobs with higher education and in public sector.
- State of women over 40 with secondary qualification: The highest employment rate of women is in this age (40-49), and the difference is the lowest comparing to men. Nevertheless, there is a layer which cannot make up the arrears. They are the women over 40 because of absence of computer and foreign language skills. If they become unemployed, it is very difficult to return to the labour market. The demand for continuous knowledge is an expectation for them as well, although they are the core of the unemployed.

- Family roles and doing housework: Home, non-paid tasks mostly fall on women; unequal share of tasks, reconciliation is the problem of women only
- Female poverty – one-parent households: In line with the economic development, the rate of poor women became much higher. One-parent households are behind the financial independence; and their risk of poverty is three times more than the average.
- Having child, child rearing: Family-friendly workplaces, flexible working hours, part-time jobs and other atypical work systems are all help for mothers who have children. After the maternity leave, almost half of women will have full-time job, and it means that they have to solve the problem of combination of work and family life (Figure 6). The figure below demonstrates well that part-time job is not typical solution – unfortunately - in case of them.

Figure 6: Directions of quit from childcare system (1993-2005)



Source: own compilation based on data of labour surveys of Hungarian Central Statistical Office

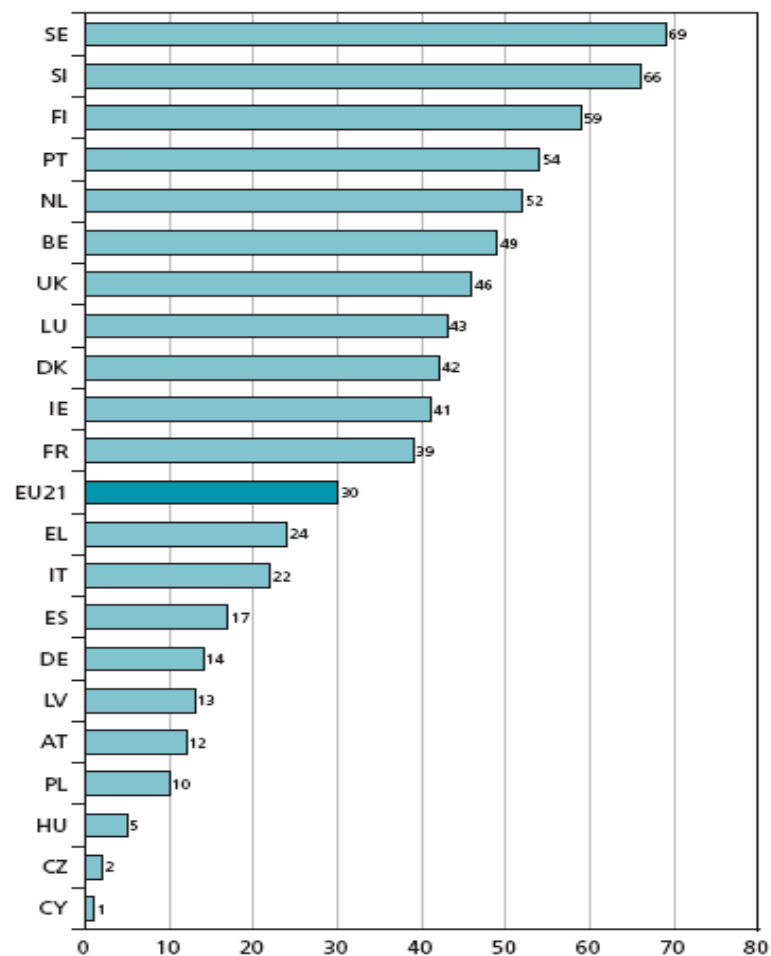
Family allowances promote the growth of population, stimulation of having children and confirm the willingness to have a child. In Hungary, the willingness is still higher than in the surrounding countries and other member states, however the number of birth does not increase significantly: it does not even reach the reproduction level. (The entire rate of productivity was 1,32 in 2005.)

Forms of family allowances are the following:

- There are three types of parental leave, and the parent is entitled to get for aternity benefit (GYES=gyermekgondozási segély, GYED=gyermekgondozási díj, GYET=gyermekgondozási támogatás; it depends on the age of children). The first benefit can be taken by mother or father.

Figure 7 shows the rate of parental leave taken by fathers in some countries. Cultural differences of sharing childcare duties is an explanation for the variation between countries. This form of maternity leave is not typical in Hungary: it is only 5% comparing to the EU-average 30%.

Figure 7: Establishments taken by male employees taking parental leave, by country (%)



Source: ESWT, 2004-2005

- (Monthly) family allowance is the benefit which can be received up to age 23.
- There is tax allowance if there are 3 children or more in the family.
- Since 1 Jan 2006, there is a new possibility: baby bond. It means savings and tax-allowance until the children are 18.
- Support system: contains free catering in crèche and kindergarten, catering during vacation; free workbooks, exercise books.
- One-time subsidy is also available.

Mothers with toddlers became a special target group because they lose the working possibility temporarily, family relations are looser, higher expenditures, getting information is much more difficult for them, their technological knowledge is not up-to-date, they are not aware of the allowance system, there is not proper communication between the mother and local government. That is why they are liable to danger of poverty and state of margin in higher extent.

- The reintegration into the labour market poses several problems:
 - Can she go back to the previous workplace? (Or if she has not worked, will she have a job?)
 - Does she have the proper professional knowledge which can be sold in the labour market?

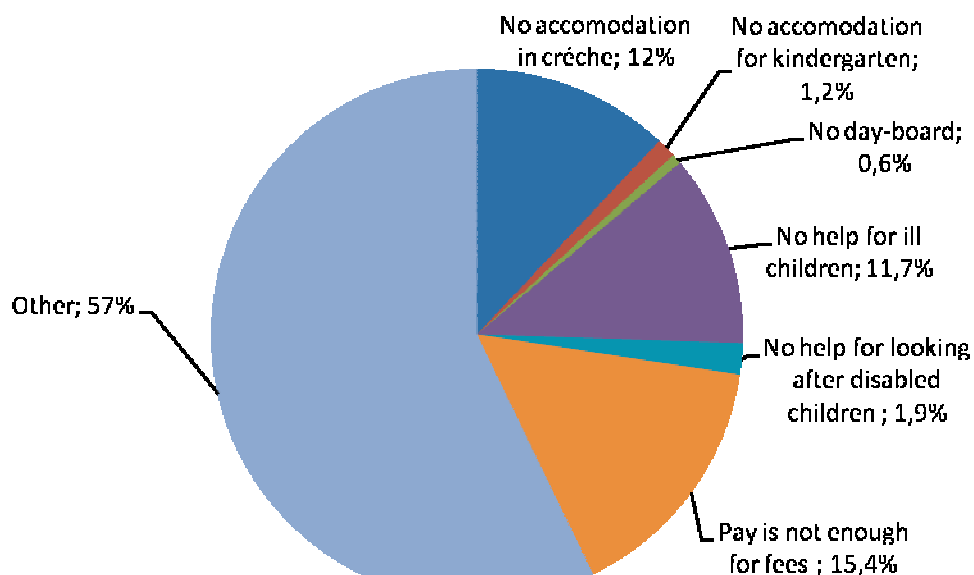
- How can she solve the taking care of children during the day?
- With which conditions can she find a job?
- Does the earnings compensate the substitution of mother?
- Is the family ready to change of lifestyle?
- How much useful time does it take to get to work? (get a job, travelling)
- The main aim of prevention is not to loose the relations, to ask for help, to get the necessary information. Essential change of aspect is in need in order that the presence of father is general.
- It is possible to work from the first age of children since 2006 beyond the maternity leave. The children can be taken to childcare institutions. Training possibilities are active labour market tools to promote employment. It means maximum of 20 hours a week, and the main problem of looking after children during this time and the intensity of these courses.
- Preference in higher education means extra points in the procedure of admission (entrance process).
- There is the Human Resource Operative Programme (HEFOP) which is the part of the National Development Plan. Among its programmes, the women, -mothers among them – are the element:
 - 1.3. Promotion of women's participation in the labour market, and reconciliation work and family obligations
 - 1.3.1. Incentive of women to return to the labour market:
 - Development of employment and inplacement
 - Services for women to become entrepreneur and operation support
- Travel allowance for mothers who get maternity benefit and work in the same time.
- There is a 'Start Plusz' Card which can be got by the government if the maternity benefit is over within a year and they are willing to work but lost their job.
- According to the Labour Law, working hours allowance and spare leave coming to the employee: maternity leave, working allowance of the father, spare leave by the number of children. If a company employ mothers, it is supported by the government.

The childcare system's main barriers are that number of new-borns is higher but there is a lower number of crèche. In 2005, the number of accommodations were 23776, the real number of entering children was 30340, this means 110,3% of utilization.

Family day care centres are good alternative solutions since 2003. This system is not in institutional frame; and it is typical in underdeveloped areas; where children are taken care of from the age of 20 weeks to 14 weeks.

In the country, regional differences also can be seen. Figure 8 shows the problems of looking after children in towns. 12 % say that the absence of rooms in crèche is a problem, whereas this ratio is 42% in villages where the number of crèche is lower.

Figure 8: Problems and proportion of looking after children, in town (2005)



Source: own compilation based on Bálint-Küllő (2008)

As for my part, the opening hours should be more flexible. It should be promoted that it is in line with labour duties; at least from 6am to 6pm, arranging it with nurses in advance.

Aspects of employers

Employers can get a new type of income subsidy since 2007 if they employ disadvantaged and disabled people. Disadvantageous people are somebody who got maternity benefit (GYES, GYET, GYED), puerperal support, nursing in the last 12 month before work. The employer has to undertake at least 4 hours of employment during at least for 9 month.

In tendencies, it can be said that the rate of traditional employment is decreasing; the self-employment is more popular in the labour market.

Atypical work contains part-time job, self-employment and fix-termed job contracts. Table 1 demonstrates the ratio of atypical work in some countries. On average, 48,5% is the rate of atypical work in the European Union. Contrarily, Hungary's rate is only the half of it (24,9%). The highest rate can be seen in the Netherlands (75,3%), in France (69,4%) and in Poland (65,3%).

The ratio of part-time job is only 4,1% in the country, which underpin the difficult situation of return to the labour market. It can be seen, that the Dutch data show 46,1% of part-time work in the country.

The rate of self-employment is the highest in Greece (40,8%), Poland (28,8%), Italy and Portugal; while the rate of fix-termed job contracts are popular in Spain (33,3), Poland (25,7%) and Portugal (19,5%).

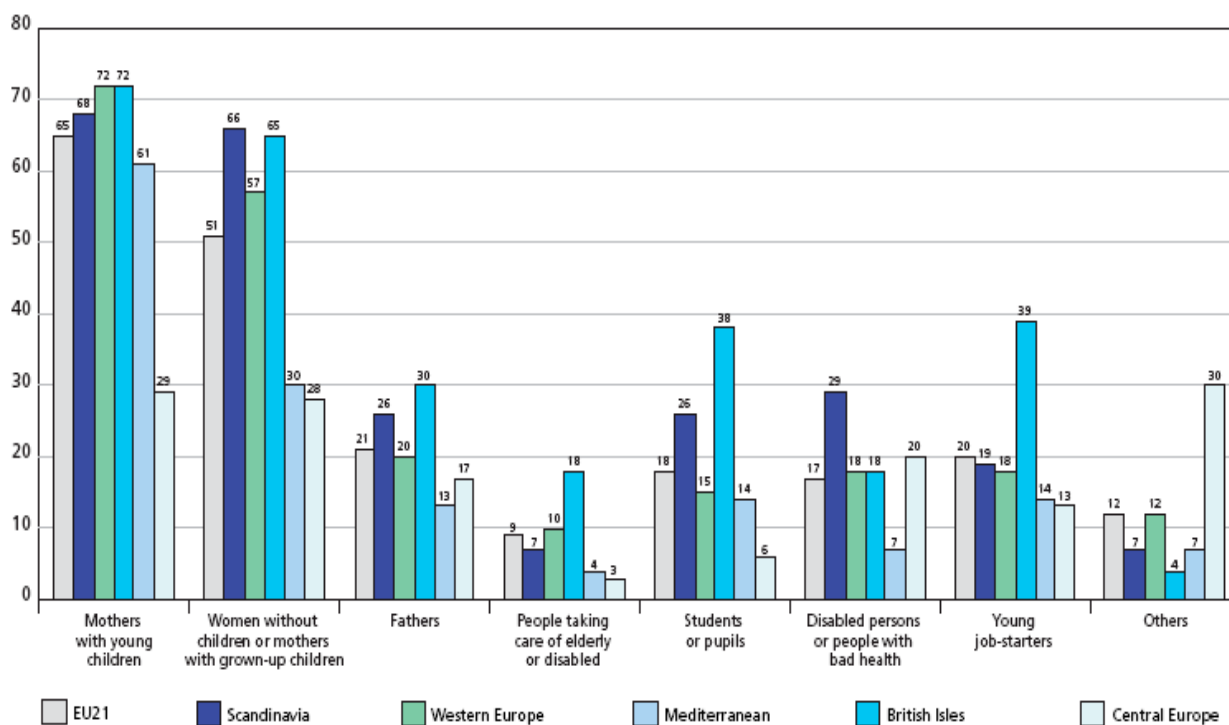
Table 1: Atypically worked employees in 2005 (%)

Countries	Rate of atypically employed (2005)	Part-time job	Self-employer	Fix-termed job contract
Austria	50,1	21,1	19,9	9,1
Denmark	38,2	22,1	6,3	9,8
United Kingdom	43,8	25,4	12,7	5,7
France	69,4	17,2	8,9	13,3
Greece	57,6	5,0	40,8	11,8
Netherlands	75,3	46,1	13,7	15,5
Germany	49,4	24,0	11,2	14,2
Italy	49,6	12,8	24,5	12,3
Portugal	54,8	11,2	24,1	19,5
Spain	60,1	12,4	14,4	33,3
Sweden	45,5	24,7	4,8	16,0
<i>EU</i>	<i>48,5</i>	<i>28,4</i>	<i>15,6</i>	<i>14,5</i>
Slovakia	20,5	2,5	13,0	5,0
<i>Hungary</i>	<i>24,9</i>	<i>4,1</i>	<i>13,8</i>	<i>7,0</i>
Poland	65,3	10,8	28,8	25,7
Czech Republic	31,5	4,9	18,0	8,6

Source: Employment in Europe, 2005

The following figure shows the categories of part-time workers by country groups in 2004-2005.

Figure 9: Categories of part-time workers, by country groups (%)



Source: ESWT, 2004-2005

In each country group, mothers with young children are the typical part-time workers; and the least popular employment form in people taking care of elderly or disabled. The data in the previous table is underpinned by low number of part-time workers in Central Europe.

WLB (work-life balance) – policies are the systems of practices, programmes and attitudes in the corporate culture, which permit for employees of contribution to corporate results in highest extent; and to live a full life beyond work. There are several arrangements in WLB-policies to harmonize the work and private life (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Types of work-family arrangements provided by firms

<p>In connection with flexible working hours:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flexible time for start and finish - Flexible working hours - Working hours bank - Shorter working weeks - Shorter working hours - Overwork reduction - Part-time work - Working year in alignment with school year - Self-roster of working hours 	<p>In connection with working arrangement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teleworking/working at home - Job-sharing - Char/seasonal job - Telework - Shift changes in case of working in shifts
<p>Leaves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prolongation of maternity leave - Paternity leave (for fathers as well) - Maternity leave (for fathers as well) - Expansion of leave without pay - Family leave - Career break scheme - Research break scheme 	<p>Allowances, services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Services for pregnant women - Childminding - Allowances of other dependents - Education - Forum, counselling - Shopping within doors, other services - 'private' personal assistant - Voluntarity, TCR - Supportive programmes - Medical attendance - 'Confidential room' - Zion, promote of practice a religion

Source: Családbarát munkahely, Tanulmánykötet

Since 31 Dec 2005, the plan for equal opportunities over 50 employees is compulsory to work out. It is valid for disadvantageous groups such as women, employees over 40, gipsies, disabled, parents with 2 or more children who are under 10, or single-parents with children under 10.

Conclusions

The main aim of the paper was to point out that the women face several difficulties in the labour market because of having children. The state of Hungarian childcare systems, maternity benefits, and unawareness of information aggravate their bad situation beyond stereotypes and discrimination in work. Their knowledge after maternity leave is less, not up-to-

date, and it is very risky to get unemployed and reach the state of margin.

Nevertheless, I suppose that it is a precious labour stock for companies. In long term, it is reasonable and economic to invest into their human capital and retain the core staff after maternity leave. It is possible with WLB-policies, spread of flexible working arrangements and working hours, reconsideration of leave and allowance system.

In long time, it will be fruitful for employers, employees with children and the whole society because of growing number of willingness to have a child.

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