

Challenges of Reconciling Private and Professional Life in the Conditions of Technological Progress and an Open Labor Market¹

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Abstract

The goal of research in this paper is to harmonize the private and professional lives of employed workers. We work very fast and such a pace of life damages our health and suppresses the primordial values that generations in history have barely fought for. The established eight-hour working day has become just a dream. Today, workers work more, although positive legal regulations have no legal basis for it. The well-known three eights (eight hours of work, eight hours of rest and eight hours of sleep) are not respected. Inspections are not doing their job and workers are not protected. The question arises, how to solve this? Technological development and an open labor market help us. A worker must be flexible, must invest in knowledge and skills in order to achieve decent work, and to balance private and business obligations. In the paper, research was conducted using the online survey method, which proved that workers expect the state to provide equal opportunities for work and life for all workers. The EU provides equal opportunities for economic growth and development to its members, which are the basis for a better and more organized life for workers.

Keywords: private life, business life, working hours, economic growth, open labor market.

JEL Classification: K31

1. Introduction

Today, people are constantly trying to find a balance between family and work obligations. Various studies show that people who are aware of the need for a balance between work and private life are more satisfied and enjoy better physical and mental health.³

In these difficult and uncertain times, many young people do not have the necessary security of life that older generations had because they either do not have a secure job or they burn out at work and work much more than the agreed working hours. It is very difficult for young people to plan something more serious, and if they decide to take a more serious step in life, they are faced with the problem of balancing private and professional life. This leads to dissatisfaction, stress, illness, which ultimately ends either with the breakup of the family or living on the margins of normal life. The original

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³ Maree Roche, Jarrod M Haar, Fred Luthans, "The Role of Mindfulness and Psychological Capital on the Well-Being of Leaders." *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 2014 Oct; 19(4):476-89. DOI: 10.1037/a0037183. Epub 2014 Jun 16. PMID: 24933594.

values in the field of work that generations have fought for for centuries remain a dead letter on paper without application in real life. For example, the century-old struggle for the eight-hour workday is now being avoided by employers at all costs, so that the popular three eights (eight hours of sleep, eight hours of work and eight hours of rest) almost do not exist. And we know that every person, in addition to their obligations at work, also has private obligations that they do not have time to fulfill, which leads to problems that generate stress and ultimately illness, family breakdown, poverty, the decline of young people, instability in life and the loss of the will element. This is a serious issue and a way must be found to solve it.

Technological development and an open labor market are helping in this situation, although many families have been displaced, leaving their homes to other regions in search of a job that is suitable for a person in every respect. Regarding this problem, an online survey was conducted, from which it can be concluded that young people are turning to a new approach. The paper used the methods of analysis and synthesis, the comparative method, and came to the conclusion that the economy must be revived so that young people have a place to work, introduce labor standards that must be adhered to without deviation, use new technologies due to the speed of information flow, and introduce lifelong education wherever possible, protect disabled people, people of advanced age, and people of lower social status. Young, able-bodied residents should be stimulated through decent work, through rewards, and through care for their families. Particular attention should be paid to people with disabilities, the elderly, the powerless, and children. The goal is to relieve the worker to the extent that he/she can be effective at work if his/her child or parents are taken care of during his/her working hours. The intention of private employers is to build nurseries and kindergartens for children and homes for the elderly and disabled so that workers can work peacefully and do not have to take sick leave.

2. How to act when a person is stressed for a long time?

It was said in the introduction that a balance between private and professional life is needed because the demands of modern society and the work environment can lead to stress, exhaustion and mental health problems. Therefore, it is necessary for a person to register how much stress has accumulated in the long term and to have the knowledge that if it lasts for a long time, it can produce harmful consequences for health and to know how to fight to overcome stress. It is important to develop personal strategies for dealing with stress. We must emphasize that this is completely individual for everyone. Everyone has their own methods of successfully dealing with stress (e.g. breathing rhythm, visualization of a certain situation etc.).

“More than 40% of employees neglect other aspects of their lives because of work, which can increase their vulnerability to mental health problems. When working long hours, more than a quarter of employees feel depressed (27%), a third feel anxious (34%), and more than half feel irritable (58%). If we do not establish a balance, this can lead to burnout, anxiety, and other mental problems. In the context of increasingly demanding work obligations, it is important to take time for yourself, family, and activities that relax us. This is how mental stability and long-term productivity are

preserved 'Burnout' is the disease of today - how to help yourself?"⁴

Indeed, what can be said in this situation other than to keep these two spheres strictly separate.

Author of books on effective organization and teamwork, David Burkus, - has taken the position: "Is the key just to balance them or to keep them strictly separate? In theory, it sounds great. In practice, it rarely works."⁵ The myth of balance does not work because the reality of modern life is that these boundaries are very permeable, not strictly separate. Strict separation brings more stress to some. Therefore, it is not amiss to view them as flexible guidelines that better suit the rhythm of some people and thus accept them for your own benefit.

3. Two roles (work and family) in a person's life - can they be reconciled?

Work and family role are two primary roles in the lives of most people in modern developed societies.⁶ The work role involves the obligations and duties of a person in paid employment, while the family role refers to activities outside work related to private life. Work-life balance is defined as satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with minimal role conflict.⁷

The EU Commission consulted the social partners in two phases on the challenges related to work-life balance. The EU is striving to strengthen its social dimension and provide citizens with more effective rights. The European Pillar of Social Rights envisages a social Europe for all European citizens. Priorities include: equal access to the labour market, fair working conditions and a balance between work and private life.⁸

In addition, the EU promotes equal opportunities in private life and work for both sexes. Efforts are being made to harmonize the entire legislation among the member states through the harmonization of private and professional life, through flexibility for employers and employees, which implies that the economy should be strengthened so that it is the basis for the set guidelines and goals. Special attention should be paid to the disabled, the elderly and powerless

⁴ Mirna Koričan Lajtman. 2024. "Kako postići balans između poslovnog i privatnog života? Psihologinja donosi zanimljiv odgovor" ["How to Achieve Balance between Work and Private Life? A Psychologist Offers an Interesting Answer"]. *Magazin HRT*, October 1, 2024. <https://magazin.hrt.hr/zdravlje/kako-napravit-balans-između-poslovnog-i-privatnog-zivota-psihologinja-donosi-zanimljiv-odgovor-11785579>.

⁵ David Burkus, *Under New Management: How Leading Organizations Are Upending Business as Usual*, Harper Business, 2016, p. 75.

⁶ S Zedeck, K L Mosier, „Work in the Family and Employing Organization”, *American Psychologist* 45 (2), 1990: 240-251. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.45.2.240>.

⁷ Jane Sturges, David Guest. 2004. "Working to Live or Living to Work? Work/Life Balance Early in the Career." *Human Resource Management Journal* 14 (4), November 2004: 5-20.

⁸ Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU, *OJ L 188*, 12.7.2019, pp. 79–93.

4. What can companies do to improve individual employees' professional and private life balance?

Companies can do the following:

- work on raising awareness on employee rights related to the possibilities of reconciling the needs of private and professional life;
- strive to create an organizational culture and implement values that enable employees to enjoy their existing rights without sanctions (formal or social);
- establish good practices and enable all employees to enjoy their rights;
- educate management with the aim of raising their awareness of the need to support the aforementioned policies;
- encourage positive changes through concrete examples.⁹

5. Certificate for Family-oriented companies - example of Slovenia

The certificate for Family-oriented companies is based on the socially responsible principle of cooperation between management and employees with an emphasis on achieving a balance between professional and private life. The process of obtaining the certificate is a long-term consultation process, which provides positive effects that go beyond just harmonizing the business and private lives of employees and is reflected on companies in the form of positive economic effects, primarily through increased market competitiveness. The aforementioned process is also reflected on the entire society, ensuring long-term positive effects.

The certificate for Family-oriented companies is the only certificate of its kind in Slovenia and represents a socially responsible principle of cooperation with employees.

Through the certification process, the company/organization sets and implements specific goals and measures. Based on the internal evaluation of the company, with the help of a professional advisor, it prepares an action plan for the implementation of measures with the aim of better managing the work process and improving the quality of the working environment in terms of harmonizing private and professional life.¹⁰

6. Measures taken at the European Union level

The EU Commission's proposal for a directive on professional and private life balance for parents and care givers sets new or higher minimum standards to create greater convergence between EU Member States, while preserving and extending existing rights, as follows:

- paternity leave - a new EU-wide right;

⁹ DOP i ljudski resursi- ravnoteža privatnog i poslovnog života, Institut za društveno odgovorno ponašanje [CSR and Human Resources – Work–Life Balance, Institute for Socially Responsible Behavior], <https://idop.hr/dop-i-ljudski-resursi-ravnoteza-privatnog-i-poslovnog-zivota/>, accessed on 10 November 2025.

¹⁰ Nataša Jeličić, *Balans između privatnog i poslovnog života: Mit ili stvarnost?* [Balance between Private and Work Life – Myth or Reality?]. 2024, <https://lidermedia.hr/unplugged/balans-između-privatnog-i-poslovnog-zivota-mit-ili-stvarnost-160309/>, accessed on 10 November 2025.

- parental leave - its payment is proposed;
- care givers' leave - a new EU-wide right;
- flexible working arrangements - with the aim of involving care givers and updating the level of protection.

In order to complement the legislative proposal, the Commission's initiative contains a set of non-legislative measures to support Member States in achieving the common objectives. These include:

- ensuring protection against discrimination and dismissal for care givers and parents, including pregnant women and workers returning from leave;
- encouraging gender-balanced use of family-related leave and flexible working arrangements;
- making better use of European funds to improve long-term care and childcare services;
- removing economic disincentives for second earners, particularly women, that deter them from accessing the labour market or working full-time.

Article 33 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides: *Family and professional life*. „The family shall enjoy legal, economic and social protection. In order to reconcile family and professional life, everyone has the right to protection against dismissal for reasons connected with motherhood and to paid maternity leave and parental leave following the birth or adoption of a child.”¹¹

Work-life balance is a value that has found its place in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, the EU Treaty, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and numerous sources of secondary EU law – e.g. Directives.¹²

7. Conclusion

Although there is legal legislation in the Republic of Croatia that relates to the balance of private and professional life, it is not being applied consistently.

As in other EU member states, it can be seen that we are faced with unequal application of the law. In recent years, there has been frequent migration of our able-bodied people who were looking for a safer and more profitable working environment and emigrated from the Republic of Croatia. The motive was to preserve their health and preserve their family.

From a short and simple survey, it can be seen that they decided to go to countries where they would not have to work above the contracted norm, where they would have enough time to rest and devote themselves to their family, where they would not experience stress and a high work pace, which is evident from the survey results. The current situation in the EU was analyzed and the practice of other EU members that have come significantly closer to the balance of private and professional life will be used, and in the Republic of Croatia, there is still work to be done on the consistent application of the law, the economy must be strengthened, the use of modern technologies must be intensified and healthy food produced, and empty administration simplified.

¹¹ European Union. 2000. *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, Article 33. Official Journal of the European Communities, C 364/1, 18 December 2000.

¹² Nataša Jeličić, *op. cit.*, 2024.

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