Employment, Gender Equality and Family Policies: A Comparative Analysis of Post-Yugoslav Countries and the European Union

The gender perspective of economic activity implies the observation and explanation of differences between women and men. According to feminist literature, gender economic differences are a result of cultural norms that shape the asymmetrical division of gender roles in the private sphere. On the one hand, part-time employment is a form that has contributed to economic activity and women's employment, but on the other hand, it is more common among women and therefore contributes to the gender pay gap. Besides, the gender-specific nature of temporary contract employment shows that employment uncertainty is more prevalent among women. We explore the employment of young and middle-aged women in some post-Yugoslav countries, using LFS indicators from the Eurostat database, in a comparative perspective. Over the last ten years, Slovenia has consistently ranked among the countries with a high rate of economic activity for women aged 25-54. In 2022, the rate is the highest in Europe, reaching 90.5%. Additionally, the employment of women aged 20-49 who had children under the age of six is one of the highest in Europe. In 2021, the rate was 82.7%, which is 12 percentage points lower than men, marking one of the lowest gender gaps in the EU. In Croatia and Serbia, the rates are lower, and gender disparities are greater compared to Slovenia. However, these disadvantages are particularly pronounced in Serbia, where economic activity is over 10 pp lower and employment is almost 20 pp lower than in Slovenia. Although part-time employment is more common in Slovenia than in the other two post-Yugoslav countries, the percentages are significantly lower than the EU(27) average. In Slovenia, part-time employment was present in 11.5% of employed women aged 20-49 who had one child under the age of six, in 19.7% who had two, and in 25.7% who had three children of this age. In Croatia and Serbia, the percentages were almost 5 to 7% for women who had one or two children and between 11 to 12% for those who had three children under the age of six. Regarding temporary contracts, the percentage of employed women aged 25-54 years is lower in Slovenia (in 2021 - 9.1%) than in EU(27) (11.6%). Temporary contract employment is more prevalent in Serbia (19.0%) compared to Croatia (13.0%). This topic is important due to the issues of gender equality and family policies aimed at optimal conditions for decisions regarding parenthood and childbirth. The high employment rate of women in Slovenia and the relatively less prevalent part-time employment suggest the need for work-family reconciliation policies that support the full-time employment of both parents. In the other two post-Yugoslav countries, there is a need to boost the economic activity and employment of young and middle-aged women, as well as decrease temporary employment. Less favourable indicators are more pronounced in Serbia than in Croatia. The achievement of gender equality implies not only equality in employment but also the absence of gender-specific forms of employment that contribute to gender economic inequality.

Keywords: gender equality, women's employment, part-time employment, temporary contract employment, work-family reconciliation