

Work-life balance vouchers: new opportunities for social work to match private sector's needs

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In the last decade there has been a growing interest for reconciliation of work and family life issues, leading to the development of policies and instruments both as state and company measures. After a brief discussion of the rationale for public policies to support work-life balance issues, we introduce the possible role of vouchers in financing demand for such services and analyze some cases by presenting available comparative data on the work-life balance vouchers, adopted in some Italian Regions. The benchmarking example is constituted by the CESU (Cheque Emploi Service Universel), which in France set a new paradigm for social policy: the public financing play a role in guiding the private sector in becoming a main contributor of the welfare system: tax allowances and public funds are available for the private actors if they spend on specific merit goods/services. Two implications of the above paradigm ask for a deeper understanding: on the one side the case of the diminished public funding and, consequently, public welfare and the opportunity for social services and social work to benefit from the contribute of the private sector; on the other side the opportunity for the private sector to be socially responsible through the spending policies supporting the work-life balance of the employees. In this perspective the link between social work and the private sector enhances the socially responsible behavior of the SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises, the typical dimension of the European firms). The paper addresses the topic "Social work and political action". The issues of work-life balance is high in the agenda of the policy makers, but there is a strong need to investigate more deeply what are the consequences at the level of the welfare system, both public and private, when it is challenged by an intervention at the economic and fiscal perspective.