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Western Europe faces a demographic crisis caused by the growth of part-time and temporary work

Western Europe faces a demographic crisis caused by the growth of part-time and temporary work, the British Sociological Association in Leeds heard today [Friday 25 April].

Professor Andranik Tangian said that if current trends continued, by 2030 a “critical” situation would develop, with growing economic inequality and fewer births.

At the root of this was the growth of the number of people in ‘atypical employment’ – defined as those with no permanent full-time contract, including part-timers, temporary workers, agency workers and the self-employed.

The proportion of atypical employment had grown from 24% in 2000 to 45% of the workforce in 2010 in the 15 EU countries, including the UK, that were studied by Professor Tangian, of the Hans Böckler Foundation, Düsseldorf, Germany.

His statistical analysis showed that any further increases in the level of atypical employment would seriously affect Western Europe. For instance, if the trend of increased atypical employment continued, as projected, to over 55% of the workforce by 2020, then:

- the average number of children born to each woman would fall from around 1.6 in 2010 to 1.4 in 2020.
- countries would double their 2010 level of immigration, as immigrants are much more likely to take atypical employment, and their availability encourages employers to create such jobs.
- the Gini measurement of inequality of income which runs from 0 (everyone earns the same) to 100 (one person has all the wealth), would rise from 32% in 2010 to 38% in 2020.

If the trend continued to 70% of the workforce in 2030, then the changes would be even stronger, Dr Tangian said.

“The socio-economical message is that the increasing share of atypical employment is damaging for the European demography.

“It is shown with statistical certainty that the higher the share of atypical employment, the higher inequality, the smaller the middle class, the lower fertility, and the higher the migration.

“Predictions are made for the situation in 2030 showing that if the growth of atypical employment continues as fast as now then the demographic situation in Europe will become critical.”

He said the causative link between atypical employment and growing inequality and falling fertility had become stronger over the years.

The 15 EU countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. These constituted all of the EU in 2003.

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