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Globalization- and Technology-Driven Labour Market Change and Fertility (LABFER)

[LABFER: Globalizacja i zmiany w rynku pracy a płodność]

LABFER is the first project which will comprehensively study fertility decisions in the changing world of work. Technological change and globalisation have led to unprecedented transformations in the way we live and work. New jobs and earnings opportunities are emerging and we are now more flexible in how, where and when we work. On the other hand, however, the demands on workers increased with the intensification of the global competition and the availability of smartphones and internet makes it more and more difficult to disconnect from work. Our jobs are also increasingly taken over by robots or moved to countries with lower labour costs.

These changes have tremendous impact on various aspects of our lives, such as our time availability, economic and mental well-being or health. They are also contributing to rising income inequalities and are likely to lie at the roots of Brexit and the trade war with China. Furthermore, they are likely influencing our family lives, including childbearing decisions, yet this influence has neither been studied nor understood.

LABFER will be thus the first project which will comprehensively describe and evaluate the consequences of these dramatic labour market transformations on fertility. We will concentrate on contemporary post-industrial societies (defined here as OECD countries), paying special attention to the most advanced European economies over the last two decades. Following questions will be addressed:

1. What is the general impact of the ongoing labour market change on total fertility?
2. What is the impact of the ongoing labour market change on fertility across various social groups (e.g high vs. low-and-medium educated, women vs. men, younger and older individuals in reproductive age)?
3. What are the mechanisms behind the fertility effects of the ongoing labour market change?
4. Which family and employment policies may alleviate the negative consequences of the ongoing labour market change on fertility?

These questions will be addressed with the use of innovative methods. First, we will link data at several layers of observation (country, region, industry, firm, couple and individual) to account for the policy, work and family context of childbearing. Second, we will use novel labour market measures which have been recently developed in labour economics, such as exposure to automation or exposure to high work demands. These measures will allow us to better capture the ongoing labour market change than the standard labour market measures used so far in social research (such as unemployment rate or temporary employment). Finally, we will use analytical methods, which have been rarely used in the field: (1) mixture cure models in order to study whether the changing work conditions affect only the timing or also the probability of births and (2) mediation models for event-history data in order to better understand the mechanisms behind the fertility effects of the ongoing labour market change.

By addressing a highly socially relevant and timely topic, LABFER will make a large impact. First, it will provide the first, comprehensive and highly policy relevant evidence on how the ongoing rapid labour market changes affect fertility. Second, it will introduce new approach to studying the effects of work conditions on fertility. Finally, it will introduce innovative methods into the field of family demography.