



Peer Review on Good Practices in the Area of Reconciliation of Work, Family and Private Life

Experience Exchange in the Frame of EIGE's Work on Good Practices on Gender Mainstreaming

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REPORT



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1. Introduction

Equality between women and men is a fundamental value of the European Union and a condition for economic growth, competitiveness and sustainable development. Achieving equal economic independence, equal pay for equal work and equality in decision-making are three of the five priorities of the European Strategy for Equality between Women and Men (2010-2015)¹. Fostering reconciliation of work, private and family life is central to all of these goals – just as it is for achieving the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth².

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has implemented a study to collect and assess good practices in the area of reconciliation of work, family and private life in EU Member States.

Reconciliation cuts across a number of policy areas. Both EU and national legislation on gender equality and non-discrimination, including rights to equal pay, equal treatment, parental leave and non-discrimination of part-time workers, along with working time legislation, all intersect with reconciliation policies.

¹ European Commission (2010), Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015. Available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0491:FIN:en:PDF>

² European Commission (2010) A European Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%200007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>



The principle of gender equality must be understood as countering the disadvantages faced by women with regard to access to, and participation in, the labour market and the disadvantages faced by men with regard to participating in family life. In particular with regard to the latter, men have to be involved and targeted in order to make the social changes needed to achieve gender equality.

More specifically, interventions promoting reconciliation cover:

- Legislation, policies, strategies and action plans on **care services**. This addresses both childcare services (as defined under the Barcelona targets as accessible, affordable and of good quality) as well as care services for disabled or older family members.
- Legislation, policies and strategies on **parental leave**, including those that promote men's involvement in parental leave schemes. In some countries there are also leave schemes that provide entitlements to carer's leave, for example, for the care of older or disabled family members. These include other financial allowances or compensation for working parents, e.g. for childcare or leave.
- Legislation, policies, strategies and action plans on **flexible working arrangements** that enable parents to balance work, family and private life. These may include policy guidelines, collective agreements and/or legal rights for parents to negotiate flexible working time schedules e.g. shorter working hours or days, flexible starting and finishing times, tele-working, term-time working, or other innovative solutions.

This peer review has had the aim to gather experts and stakeholders to learn about EIGE's work with good practices and to assess the potential in terms of transferability.

It has, moreover, provided an overview on trends and approaches at EU level, in several Member States, thus enhancing the knowledge about some of the main initiatives and challenges in the EU.



The contribution from EUROFOUND

EUROFOUND presented the main findings from a recent study in the area of care.

In particular:

- The work and care reconciliation issue for Europe
- Actors and care regimes in Europe
- Policy instruments in support of working carers
- How well do countries perform in their support of working carers?

Reconciliation has to be understood as a systemic issue and different features contribute to the complexity of the problem.

Multiple actors share responsibilities and initiatives. Different regulatory patterns constitute the policy framework, with a huge need for coordination and at the same time a high risk of ineffectiveness and duplication of measures.

A huge burden is placed on households that too often have to manage directly their care needs, with direct multiple negative effects on jobs, employment, income and participation in active life.

This burden is today still principally assumed by women.

Conclusions from the study address the policy perspective.

- The investment in resources for reconciliation and care needs to be supported by a needs' analysis and clear understanding of the effectiveness of existing infrastructures;
- A multi-actor approach is strategic as the impact of care needs is wide and it affects all stakeholders of society, households and the labour market.

EIGE's presentation: the concept of positive flexibility

EIGE's introduced its main findings from the work on reconciliation, focusing in particular on the concept of positive flexibility. This concept originally expressed a positive notion, has been twisted towards a different meaning where to be flexible means accepting all working conditions, all organisational features, all needs, driven by the absolute priority of being in work – **and then accept any condition – or by the absolute priority to provide care – and then organise personal and professional life on the basis of the care needs.**



The analysis of good practices and of the wide range of effective examples on reconciliation, in the EU, mapped within the study, has highlighted some relevant features that shift back the concept of flexibility to its original positive understanding.

The approach is based on the fact that needs are at the centre of the design and implementation of any policy or practice, aiming to reconcile the divergent needs of the different stakeholders (people/employees, employers, public institutions).

The analysis of needs leads to the definition of “flexible” approaches that focus on how to achieve the best mix between the request of time of the individual/household and the request of skills/results of the business.

The public, being State, Region or a local administration, has a key role as it has the power and duty to develop the regulatory framework and the assignment of resources.

The insertion of the need analysis into this policy cycle supports directly the effectiveness of the policies and the positive impact on people, business and a community’s life.

The concept of profit is also reshaped within the positive flexibility approach.

From a perspective that “MORE” is the aim – more income, more money, more profit for the business – there is a move towards a perspective of “BETTER” – better working conditions, better professional performances, better impact of policies and practices in people’s life.

The constructive interaction among all actors of the process leads to the improvement of the whole policy cycle of reconciliation measures. It supports the sustainability and the coherence of the political planning as a result of a wide contribution of all stakeholders.

The results of the policy review, developed within EIGE’s study, show how critical the adoption of this approach is.

Positive flexibility is a strategy for gender equality and economic growth.

The research has shown some trends that clearly highlight how gender inequalities still represent an obstacle for full empowerment and emancipation of women.

JOBS

In order to manage care needs, women accept precarious jobs, poor jobs and often drift away from employment. This occurs often when public services are reduced and dismantled

PART-TIME

Women rather than men tend to opt for part-time work (32% of women against 9% of men).



The reason to accept part-time is mainly because of care and reconciliation needs, while for men the reason for part-time work is mostly for not being able to find a full-time job.

The social and economic crisis has without any doubt had a negative impact on women, with specific concerns focused on the quality of jobs, income and pay/pension gap and an increase of the inactivity rate.

For companies, this has often meant a loss of talent and experience followed by a reduction in competitiveness.

2. EIGE's Findings on Good Practices

The collection and identification of good practices on reconciliation of work, private and family life has focused on three specific areas, awareness-raising, benchmarking and self-regulation.

The study has developed a qualitative framework of criteria for the assessment of approaches that have proven to be effective solutions to overcome specific gender inequalities.

Three examples, from the 13 good practices were presented.

- AWARENESS-RAISING – NISTA, MALTA
 - ✓ *Using the media to encourage women to work*
- BENCHMARKING – Family audit certification in Trento, ITALY
 - ✓ *Productivity and wellbeing through family audit*
- SELF-REGULATION - Paternal leave company workshops, AUSTRIA
 - ✓ *Encouraging SMEs to give fathers time off for their kids*

Brief reflections from discussion.

AWARENESS-RAISING – NISTA, MALTA

The initiative has been designed and implemented in the Member State with the lowest female employment rate and the highest female inactivity rate, with the clear aim to increase and improve women's participation in the labour market and concurrently men's participation in care activities.

A gender mainstreaming perspective was adopted to support a cultural transformation within companies and organisations.



The campaign has been well supported by research throughout the whole project cycle.

The Media were highly involved in the campaign to spread awareness and understanding about the need of a change in behaviour of women and men, employees and employers, fathers and mothers.

Some developments not just results of this initiative but surely positive influenced by the overall strategy include:

- Increased female employment rate, from 39.8 in 2009 up to 46.8 in 2012(Eurostat Employment Rate by Sex 2013);
- Better awareness on reconciliation policies and higher enrolment in childcare facilities;
- More and improved incentives for working mothers;
- Free childcare scheme since April 2014;

According to Eurostat 2013, Malta had the highest increase in job opportunities in the EU.

BENCHMARKING – FAMILY AUDIT CERTIFICATION IN TRENTO, ITALY

The certification is embedded in a wider strategy that promotes the “family mainstreaming” together with the concept of “life projects” in the community of the Province of Trento.

The overall policy recognises the local ecosystem and focuses on well-being and family policies, addressing all relevant actors – households, enterprises, public institutions, social partners and local communities.

- The certification promotes the family friendly brand and it represents a feature for competitiveness and attractiveness of companies;
- When benefits are placed in, and shared with the whole community, the local social capital is enhanced;
- Companies have been made aware that economic benefit goes through the recognition of needs of people, employees and staff within the design and implementation of working agreements and family practices;
- Better working environments – less sick leave days, less extra time working hours, increased sick leave days for mothers, additional childcare days for fathers – have supported improved economic performance and increased ownership of XXXX and satisfaction from staff and
- The public institutions have a central role in guiding the joint process of policy making as they identify priorities, assign resources, set services and monitor the social effectiveness and relevance of the family friendly strategy;



- The experience started at local level has received a national recognition and the model will be transferred and adopted throughout the whole country serving as benchmark for family mainstreaming strategies.

SELF-REGULATION - PATERNAL LEAVE COMPANY WORKSHOPS, AUSTRIA

The initiative has been implemented by one of the largest women's NGO in Austria.

The overall gender mainstreaming strategy has aimed to support social dialogue and self-regulation to increase both women's employment and men's involvement in care/unpaid family activities.

Management levels have been involved in specific training, to embed gender knowledge and awareness of gender sensitive approaches within private companies' organisations.

The actions implemented have contributed to transform the internal culture and organisation, thereby raising awareness among fathers about taking parental leave.

- Poor knowledge of existing legislation and provisions can affect negatively the effectiveness of reconciliation policies. Awareness-raising initiatives have to address this issue in order to boost the best use of available tools;
- Family friendly practices represent a feature for competitiveness as they can attract and retain talents and skilled workers;
- Parenting represents a tool to support and promote women's careers;
- The establishment of reconciliation practices in companies supports the reduction of other gender gaps such as the one related to pay and pensions;
- Companies adopting gender sensitive approaches are likely to become more active stakeholders in the life of their community;
- Social partners and policy makers show political and financial engagement by supporting development of self-regulation approaches and practices.



CRITERIA FOR IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF GOOD PRACTICES ON RECONCILIATION

General criteria

The general criteria are applicable to all examples and are particularly important as they apply to the final assessment process for the selection of practices and initiatives of the 12 examples of good practice. The following criteria have been adopted by EIGE to assess tools, methods or practices with potential to affect gender equality positively:

- ✓ It has been working well i.e. the practice is finished or at least it shows substantial achievement;
 - *This demonstrates that there is a good and solid design and methodology, it has been implemented efficiently and shows positive outcomes.*
- ✓ The practice/initiative is transferable and can be replicated elsewhere.
 - *The issue(s) and actions carried out are relevant and applicable to other countries or to different regions or sectors within the same country.*
- ✓ It provides a learning point on how to think and act appropriately;
 - *This shows that the example has significant potential to be a learning tool that can be used to build capacity amongst stakeholders.*
- ✓ It is embedded within a wider gender mainstreaming strategy;
 - *This demonstrates the commitment to apply the practice to a wider gender mainstreaming strategy and is part of a structured approach rather than a one-off initiative.*

- ✓ It is an effective achievement in terms of the advancement of gender equality and/or reduction of gender inequalities.
 - *This highlights the importance of the practice being grounded in the broad objective of achieving gender equality and which addresses some of the structural factors that lead to gender inequalities.*

Common criteria

These criteria represent the key elements of the next level to assess the content, design, implementation and outcomes of the practices. They provide more detailed criteria and allow for more in-depth assessment of the practices on the reconciliation of work, family and private life to be made. These cover the assessment practices as well as methods and linkages to gender equality outcomes. Such criteria are therefore common to all the three themes (self-regulation, awareness-raising, benchmarking) covered by this study.

- ✓ There is substantive information on the practice available and there is evidence of its success.
 - *This should be evidenced by context analysis, research and data analysis setting out the problem to be addressed and the monitoring and evaluation of the practice/initiative; evidence of leadership is also shown.*
- ✓ Innovative elements in the design and/or implementation of the measure are present.
 - *There is evidence that the practice is innovative it tests new thinking and approaches to the address the problem identified and it is grounded in substantive planning that establishes clear goals, actions and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.*
- ✓ The practice/initiative is grounded in a well thought out communications strategy.
 - *This shows evidence of the efforts to disseminate information and results about the initiative/practice.*
- ✓ The objectives and purpose of the practice/measure are clear and there is link of these objectives to gender equality/gender mainstreaming.
 - *There is evidence that the initiative on reconciliation of work, private and family life is intrinsically connected to gender equality and gender mainstreaming objectives, targets and outcomes.*
- ✓ The practice/measure is well-designed, based on a clear and coherent methodology, with concrete and it provides clear action for implementation.
 - *Clear evidence of a coherent and strategic approach to planning, methodological design and project management is provided.*
- ✓ There is evidence of positive effects on work-life balance and gender equality.
 - *Evidence is provided of monitoring and evaluation of outcomes in relation to reconciliation of work, private and family life and that this had a direct impact on gender equality outcomes.*

- ✓ All relevant stakeholders were involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the practice.
 - *Where relevant this should include employers, employees, trade unions, NGOs (such as women's organisations and family organisations), and government departments/agencies.*
- ✓ The practice/measure promotes (directly or indirectly) men's involvement and participation in reconciliation of work, family and private life.
 - *There is evidence that a focus has been given to men's involvement and participation and that gender equality outcomes are documented.*
- ✓ As an additional beneficial criterion: The practice/measure can be implemented in an economic crisis/austerity setting where financial means are scarce.
 - *The initiative takes account of the impact of the economic crisis on gender equality, and demonstrates gender-sensitive and cost-effective responses.*

<i>Specific qualitative criteria for the identification of good practices</i>
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A. Gender sensitive self-regulation in public and private organisations

- A1. The initiative is set in the context of a broader goal to promote gender equality and in the case of companies, in that of the 'business case' for equality.

Gender equality is integral to the initiative and there is evidence that it is integrated into corporate/business strategies and/or diversity programmes.

- A2. The initiative/measure was developed on the basis of prior assessment, research or analysis (employee survey, gender analysis/gender impact assessment or existing studies that have identified specific challenges or problems etc.).

A clear evidence base and gender analysis is made setting out the problem/challenge to be tackled at workplace, company or other level (also drawing on national/international evidence).

- A3. The elaboration of the measure was carried out in consultation with employees / relevant stakeholders, for example, through an employee survey, employee discussion groups.

Effective systems for employee/stakeholder consultation and participation are put in place.

- A4. There are binding provisions for the parties/organisation(s) participating in the measure/agreement.
- A5. There is a permanent structure (body/committee) in place that ensures and monitors implementation, including reporting on the outcomes of the initiative.
- A6. Sufficient technical and human resources are allocated/available to support the implementation and are effectively deployed.

A7. The managing authority/company management is committed to actively implement the measure and has developed coherent objectives and actions for implementation.

Senior level commitment and leadership is given to setting objectives and implementing the initiative.

A8. There is some evidence that the target groups / employees (significant number of employees) benefit from the introduction of the measure.

If this has not been possible because it has been too early to capture the evidence, there are some clear indicators of what the anticipated benefits will be.

A9. There is evidence of continuity and sustainability.

There are measures put in place to ensure that the self-regulation initiative has a plan and resources for continuity and sustainability.

B. Specific criteria: Awareness-raising initiatives aiming at promoting the development of work life balance practices

- B1. The initiative/campaign is well focused, has clear goals and is well planned.
- B2. The campaign has clear messages that grasp the attention of multiple audiences.
The initiative/campaign clearly conveys key messages to multiple audiences.
- B3. The campaign/initiative is built on a good understanding of the prevailing culture and views and of gender equality principles.
- B4. The awareness-raising campaign/initiative has a clearly defined target group/audience.
- B5. The campaign/initiative employs a range of effective approaches and techniques to ensure that the messages are received and understood by a diverse audience.
- B6. The implementation and communication strategy is tailored to the main objectives.
The awareness-raising campaign/initiative has a clear communication strategy and meets the objectives that have been set out.
- B7. The campaign/initiative uses a combination of tools and methods that support and reinforce each other (educational, training, social media, information, etc.).
There is a coordinated and complementary use of different communications tools and methods.
- B8. The scope and design of the initiative/campaign ensures the desired ideas and messages to be moved forward.
- B9. The campaign/initiative helps overcome traditional stereotypes on gender roles, and has a clearly defined objective to change gender relations and promote gender equality.
- B10. There is evidence that the campaign/initiative is positively influencing the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs of the target groups.
Although it may be difficult to capture the impact on attitudes and behaviour of information campaigns, a solid attempt has been made to measure and evaluate the impact of the awareness-raising campaign/initiative on attitudes and beliefs.

C. Specific criteria: Benchmarking

C1. The benchmarking exercise is grounded in gender equality principles.

The goal is to promote and implement gender equality through benchmarking.

C2. There is a clear plan and timetable set for the benchmarking exercise.

C3. The partners for carrying out the benchmarking exercise are well identified and involved.

All relevant stakeholders are involved and participate in the process, including relevant accreditation bodies, employee representatives, NGOs, equality bodies, etc.

C4. Qualified independent experts and evaluators are involved.

Recognised independent experts with knowledge and understanding of gender equality carry out the benchmarking.

C5. The tools for data collection are well-developed and introduced.

A systematic approach is taken to the collection of evidence to support the benchmarking exercise.

C6. A self-assessment report/document is prepared by participating organisation(s);

C7. An action plan for improvement was prepared (for instance, 'work-life balance plan' as part of a wider gender equality action plan etc.) and there is evidence of implementation.

The outcomes of the benchmarking exercise lead to an improvement plan and relevant implementation of areas for development.

C8. There is clear evidence that the lessons learnt from the benchmarking exercise were taken on board and facilitated improvements in policy and practice on reconciliation;

C9. The organisation and the involved key partners and stakeholders are committed to the process and to gender equality.

C10. The good practices identified via benchmarking are well-advertised and popularised based on a clear communications strategy.

Good practice outcomes are communicated effectively and clearly to a variety of audiences and stakeholders.

3. Panel discussion

A panel discussion brought together different stakeholders to reflect on some main issues related to reconciliation.

COFACE, EQUINET, ETUC shared their different perspective driving the general discussion that was moderated by EIGE. Reflections from the discussion include.

- Some traditional issues such as discrimination, diversity, working culture, pay gap and stereotypes still detect gender inequalities. Different innovative approaches need to be adopted;
- Families, in all EU Member States are too often having to manage care issues alone and this invariably has both a qualitative and quantitative negative impact on women;
- Political decisions related to cuts in financial resources have principally penalised women and moved gender equality away from the list of priorities of the political agenda;
- Several positive approaches and effective solutions have been implemented in the EU and the exchange of good practices can support capacity building in the policy making environment;
- A legal framework is strategic to safeguard rights and to allow self-regulation, based on peculiarities of the different communities and organisations;
- A whole rethinking of work-life balance approaches is requested and a more consistent gender equality perspective needs to be considered, as some of the traditional tools (extensive leave, negative flexibility) can have a negative effect on active labour market participation and access to a sustainable income;
- The development of policies and practices needs to involve a wider range of stakeholders and take into consideration an overall framework of needs, to seek convergence and coherence and avoid ineffective and irrelevant measures;
- Flexibility must seek full time employment in particular for women, and reduce the use of part-time that too often leads to a critical reduction of income;
- Policies and practices need to be result-based, targeting specific objectives, addressing specific needs while monitoring the effective reduction of gender inequalities.

4. Main conclusions

The event's extensive discussion, sharing of experiences, understanding and approaches enabled participants to gather knowledge and attitudes, needs and solutions.

The result of the exchange represents both a political recommendation as well as a methodological approach for policy makers and stakeholders.

The outcome is listed in the following statements which suggest how to promote and support gender mainstreaming strategies and reconciliation policies and practices:

- *To **target clearly gender equality objectives** when designing and implementing initiatives, policies and approaches;*
- *To **provide financial and political resources to support infrastructures and a legal framework**, to make the strategies sustainable, effective and relevant in terms of gender equality;*
- *To **adopt a multiple stakeholder approach** at all policy cycle, with specific concern on the involvement of those expressing the most relevant needs in terms of gender equality and also of the no-traditional stakeholders of the gender equality community, to widen understanding, concern and activation and to build effective solutions;*
- *To **use Media as a multiplier** of social and political awareness-raising and to support the cultural transformative dimension of gender mainstreaming;*
- *To **consider a lifecycle approach** in the development of reconciliation policies and practices, as current and forthcoming social and working pattern change rapidly and people's expectations tend to vary and require new solutions and options;*
- *To address gender equality issues for **education and lifelong learning** policies;*
- *To **improve the skill matching**, to drive talents and competences towards job needs and to support the process also by adopting gender sensitive attractive practices of work life balance;*
- *To **apply social dialogue** as a tool to reframe the gender equality language in negotiations of policies and of self-regulation;*
- *To **liaise reconciliation policies** to other forms of gender discrimination (pay gap) and segregation (career, recruitment, decision making);*
- *To **investigate on benchmarking**, to establish a framework of tools and experiences for learning and development of standards;*
- *To **investigate new and emerging needs** determined by changes and challenges in society and labour markets;*
- *To **develop monitoring tools and evaluation strategies** to assess impact and consistence of the policies implemented as well as to show evidence of the effectiveness of the investment on gender equality practices;*
- *To apply **Gender Budgeting, Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment** as tools of policy design and monitoring and evaluation strategy;*

- To **consider different time patterns and needs** among all different actors with a life cycle approach, not just linked to care but extended to work, learning, training and individual time;
- At an institutional level, **to establish a solid legislative framework** that can ensure the full access to rights and opportunities and at the same time **ensures the options of self-regulation**;
- At public level as well as at organisational level, to **understand what social well-being consists of** and to **centre the enhancement of social capital on individual and households**;
- To **avoid replicating and reinforcing stereotypes** in communications and in designing media campaigns;
- To **consider changing and new patterns in work, family and time needs** and to **introduce innovation** in policy life cycle;
- For Unions to **assess and improve the role of women**, as actors of change;
- To **support a wider knowledge of already existing rights and opportunities**, among employees and employers;
- In public and private organisations, **to introduce “time offices” and local diagnostics**, gathering all relevant actors of the community;
- To make sure that, when developing policies and practices, tools and strategies to support reconciliation, **gender equality expertise is embedded at all level and at all stages of implementation**;





For all presentation and additional information about EIGE's study on reconciliation and EIGE's work on Good Practices, please contact Maurizio Mosca at Maurizio.Mosca@eige.europa.eu