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Gender equality, reconciliation of personal and working life and shared responsibility

Report[1]
Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination
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Summary

Despite progress on the path to gender equality, a traditional division of roles between women and men is still widespread. Men enjoy a privileged position on the labour market, while women find themselves with a large share of the household responsibilities.

Reconciliation of personal life represents a challenge both for women and men. A legislative framework and appropriate policies are needed to achieve equality between spouses but also to facilitate women's access to the world of work. In addition, this would contribute to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Beyond the action of public authorities, a profound change of mentality is needed. Indeed, the organisation of work should allow all those who so wish to engage in paid activity and be able to reconcile their work with their personal lives. Moreover, the principle of shared responsibility, which means that women and men go beyond the traditional division of roles and share responsibilities in the home, should be the benchmark for the development and implementation of effective reconciliation policies.

1. Reference to committee: Doc. 12541, Reference 3760 of 15 April 2011.

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A. Draft resolution[2]

1. Although progress has been made along the path towards gender equality, a traditional division of roles between women and men remains widespread in Europe. Men enjoy a privileged position on the labour market, whereas women still do the lion's share in terms of household responsibilities and care of dependants (children and elderly persons).

2. At the same time, the financial and economic crisis has had repercussions for the balance in the numbers of women and men in the world of work. In many economies, those sectors which employ a larger proportion of men have been more severely affected by the consequences of the crisis (examples are construction, infrastructure, transport and industry more generally, whereas the services sector has done better in maintaining employment levels and profitability).

3. Reconciling private and working life today is a challenge for both women and men. However, some inequalities persist to women's disadvantage in the world of work, in terms of remuneration, discriminatory recruitment and career progression.

4. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that systematic and consistent reconciliation measures should be adopted by all member States, so that everyone who so wishes may engage in a professional activity and can harmonise this with their personal and family life. These measures should improve the reconciliation of personal and working life for both women and men and foster gender equality.

5. Another prerequisite of better reconciliation between personal and working life is an awareness of the importance of shared responsibility between women and men in families. Shared responsibility relates to every aspect of family life and includes shared parental responsibility, although it goes further than that.

6. Reconciliation policies are also necessary to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion. In practice, parents obliged to give up work because the way in which it is organised is incompatible with family commitments, or forced to reduce their work commitments and consequently their income, are at greater risk of poverty and exclusion.

7. The Assembly considers that better reconciliation of personal and working life necessitates co-operation between all stakeholders in society, States, enterprises, civil society and individuals and that the latter, women and men, share their responsibilities within their family and society.

8. The Assembly, taking into account the best practices found, thus calls on the authorities of the Council of Europe member States to:

8.1. offer adequate assistance services for dependence (children and elderly persons);

8.2. introduce a parental leave scheme enabling parents, women and men, to look after their children on an equal footing;

8.3. introduce financial support tools geared to families' needs, particularly relating to the care and education of children;

8.4. reform labour law in order to make possible and encourage more flexible forms of organisation, such as different working hours, flexitime and teleworking;

8.5. introduce into labour law the principle that these forms of work should not adversely affect career progression;

8.6. encourage voluntary application by enterprises of reconciliation measures which are more advantageous than the statutory measures;

8.7. introduce financial support (interest-free or low-interest loans) to back up reconciliation measures adopted by enterprises;

8.8. encourage research into the impact of the difficulties of reconciling personal and working life on employment levels and the competitiveness of the different economies;

8.9. encourage the collection and analysis of information about the effectiveness of the reconciliation measures adopted;

8.10. conduct awareness-raising campaigns aimed at the general public about shared responsibility between women and men within families and in the society;

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2. Draft resolution unanimously adopted by the committee on 3 December 2012.

8.11. conduct educational and awareness-raising activities in schools on the subject of shared responsibility and of respect for the rights of every member of the family, irrespective of age and gender;

8.12. establish a dialogue with social partners and civil society in order to promote the principles set out in this resolution.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Quintanilla, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. "I still strongly believe that women can *have it all* (and that men can too). I believe that we can *have it all at the same time*. But not today, not with the way [the] economy and society are currently structured." In an article which appeared in *The Atlantic* magazine in July 2012, American academic Anne-Marie Slaughter reignited a public debate on reconciling working life and family responsibilities, both in her own country and beyond.[3]

2. Notwithstanding the many advances made along the path towards gender equality, a traditional division of men's and women's roles is still widespread in Europe. Thus, while men enjoy a privileged position on the labour market, women still do the lion's share in terms of household responsibilities and care of children and the elderly.

3. As a result, reconciling private and working life is harder for women than for men. This difficulty is compounded by wage inequalities and a great deal of discrimination in recruitment and working conditions, which are disincentives to labour force participation by larger numbers of women.

4. Measures are needed to enable everyone so wishing to engage in paid activity and be able to harmonise this with private and family life. It is chiefly a matter of creating widely available and readily accessible personal support services (catering for children, particularly babies, and the elderly), encouraging the sharing of family responsibilities within couples, and transforming the organisation of work so as to introduce features of flexibility (different working hours, teleworking) without impairing career opportunities.

5. These measures have been advocated by the Council of Europe on several occasions, from Recommendation No. R (96) 5 of the Committee of Ministers to Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1769 (2006) on the need to reconcile work and family life. It is time to ascertain what initiatives have been taken at European level and what impact they have had on the economy and society.

6. However, I wish to stress that without a meaningful change of mentalities within families and society at large, public authorities' action, however important, will remain insufficient. Like in other domains, the principle of subsidiarity between public authorities and civil society is of major importance.

2. Unequal sharing of family responsibilities and its implications for employment

7. The subject of work-life balance takes up more and more room in international and national programmes, as noted by the International Labour Office, which discussed this theme at the November 2011 meeting of its Governing Body.[4] This question is taking on growing interest because of a set of factors, including the rise of atypical employment, ageing of the population and changing family structures.

8. As the researcher Roland Pfefferkorn points out, conjugal relations have changed remarkably over recent decades with the development of extramarital cohabitation, divorce and single life. But once women have entered into conjugal and/or family relationships, they usually find themselves in a domestic context where little has changed in comparison with the situation many years ago.[5]

9. The "Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family life and work" confirmed in 2010 that the participation rate of women and men in household and family work differed greatly. On average, 80% of women are involved in this type of work on a daily basis, as against only 45% of men. The disparity varies from country to country, from the minimum 17% rate of male participation in domestic chores in Turkey, to 70% in Sweden.[6]

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3. *Why women still can't have it all*, Anne-Marie Slaughter, *The Atlantic*, July/August 2012, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/07/why-women-still-cant-have-it-all/309020/.
4. *Work-life balance, ILO, Agenda of the 312th session of the Governing Body*, www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_164195.pdf.
5. Roland Pfefferkorn, *Le partage inégal des "tâches ménagères", Les Cahiers de Framespa*, 7/2011; see extract: framespa.revues.org/646?lang=en.
6. *Second European Quality of Life Survey: Family life and work*, Eurofound 2010, www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1002.htm.

10. This research also shows that the bulk of the population is aware of this disparity, given that women's and men's replies to the correlated questions on work sharing in the family are quite consistent with each other.

11. According to a survey conducted in the United Kingdom by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), an independent research institute, eight out of ten women do more domestic work than their partners. Only 13% of the women interviewed in connection with this research said that their husband works harder than they do at home.[7]

12. In France, a study conducted by the Institut national d'études démographiques in November 2009 found that "Women perform 80% of household duties. Eight out of ten 'always' or usually do the ironing, seven out of ten prepare the meals, half do the vacuuming and food shopping, four out of ten do the washing up and the accounts". The study also shows that when one or more children come along, the division alters, with this inequality steadily increasing.[8]

13. Research carried out at the University of Valladolid from 2008 to 2010 highlights the influence of cultural and traditional factors on the design and application of reconciliation measures. It was found that the countries of Mediterranean Europe take a conflicting attitude to the roles of women and men. While the principle of equality within the family is widely accepted, the idea that women should give priority to family responsibilities is nevertheless widespread.[9]

14. The annual report for 2011 of the Banca d'Italia, Italy's central bank, which contains a chapter on women's role in the economy, describes a situation of inequality between men and women, especially where women's rate of participation on the labour market is concerned. According to the study, the main reason for this situation is a lack of services and infrastructure enabling working and family life to be reconciled, especially for women with very young children.[10]

15. In Italy, 46.5% of women in the 15 to 64 age group are in employment, namely 21 points below the male rate. The differential in 1993 was 31 points. The study highlights a constant reduction in this differential, even during the current economic crisis, for the negative impact of the crisis is greater on men's employment rate.

16. "Within families, including those where both spouses work, household duties and the care of persons are dealt with by women disproportionately", the text adds, before concluding that "Differences in attitude between women and men may give rise to involuntary discrimination". Inequalities which still exist in the organisation of work within the family are invariably reflected on the labour market, including women's place on that market.

17. In order to cope with their many commitments, large numbers of women accept temporary or part-time jobs or take a career break. According to the 2011 report of the European Commission on "Progress on Equality between Women and Men", almost one third of women with family responsibilities either have part-time jobs or are not working.[11]

18. On the one hand, work-life policies are devised as tools for enhancing gender equality. On the other hand, women who have had to leave work incur a risk of poverty and social exclusion stemming from loss of income and the difficulty of resuming employment. Work-life policies are therefore useful not only for achieving gender equality, but also, as emphasised by the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE), for preventing and combating poverty and social exclusion.[12]

19. Can women reconcile their working life with their personal and family life? It would seem to be impossible if we take as our example Anne-Marie Slaughter, an academic who held a post of high responsibility at the top of her country's administration, and who wrote the article quoted at the beginning of

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7. *Forty years of feminism – but women still do most of the housework*, *The Guardian*, 10 March 2012, www.guardian.co.uk/society/2012/mar/10/housework-gender-equality-women.
8. *L'arrivée d'un enfant modifie-t-elle la répartition des tâches domestiques au sein du couple?,* Arnaud Régnier-Loilier, Ined, November 2009, www.servicesalapersonne.gouv.fr/Public/P/ANSP/Actus/2009/Dec/200911_INED.pdf.
9. *Relaciones de género, maternidad, corresponsabilidad familiar y políticas de protección familiar en España y en el contexto europeo*, Universidad de Valladolid, February 2010, www.seg-social.es/prdi00/groups/public/documents/binario/131348.pdf.
10. *Relazione annuale 2011*, Banca d'Italia, 31 May 2012, www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/relann/rel11/rel11it.
11. *Progress on Equality between Women and Men in 2011*, European Union, http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/files/progress_on_equality_between_women_and_men_in_2011.pdf.
12. www.coface-eu.org/en/upload/15_Capacity_Building/Factsheet%20WG1%20Reconciliation%20fr.pdf.

this report. After spending 18 months working in Hillary Clinton's State Department, she decided to leave her post in Washington and return to teaching at Princeton University, so that she could look after her family better, especially her teenage children.

20. Yet the answer to this question given by Ms Slaughter in her article is not entirely negative. Firstly because she did not simply give up work: she chose to return to an occupation giving her a greater ability to manage her own time. Secondly, because her thesis is that women cannot reconcile their family life with just any job, and that, as things stand, such reconciliation would be possible in absolute terms if the way in which work is organised were changed.

21. The debate which followed the publication of this article showed that work-life balance is a more topical subject than ever, and still perceived as a problem needing to be resolved. However, a number of women of the younger generation seem less inclined to sacrifice family responsibilities for professional development.

22. Some people, even in Europe, have interpreted this as a cultural decline and a sign of a revival of old ideas about women being "naturally" destined to run the household. French feminist philosopher Elisabeth Badinter, in her book "Le Conflit, la femme et la mère", condemned a "tyranny of motherhood".[13] In her opinion, contemporary society puts pressure on women to devote more time to their families. One example cited was that of the promotion of breastfeeding by many over-enthusiastic paediatricians.

3. The reconciliation of personal and working life, a question which also concerns men

23. The balance in the numbers of working men and women has changed in recent decades. In 2009, Canada became the first country where women were in the majority on the labour market.[14] The same thing happened the following year in the United States, where, at the same time, three university degrees in every five were being awarded to women.

24. In Europe, women have filled six of the eight million new jobs created since the year 2000.[15] The economic crisis which has affected some of the industrialised countries in recent years has contributed to these developments, for it has had a more severe effect on those sectors of the economy where the majority of workers are men, such as industry.

25. To conclude from this that modern post-industrial society is more geared to women and that "the end of men" has arrived[16] would certainly be an exaggeration. But the situation of the two sexes in the world of work is becoming increasingly similar.

26. The reconciliation of personal and family life with work commitments is not therefore a matter for women only. The traditional division of roles between women and men also affects the latter: in practice, a man trying to carry out his full share of family responsibilities might well be regarded as insufficiently motivated and involved in his professional work.

27. The debate started by Anne-Marie Slaughter was revived a few months later when she wrote another article, this time on work-life balance as an issue for men as well.[17] Numerous accounts by men from different social and occupational backgrounds demonstrated their desire to reconcile the private and family sphere with that of work, and their difficulties in doing so.

4. Reconciliation and shared responsibility

28. Reconciliation is thus an issue for both women and men – albeit one more widespread and more urgent among women. I therefore feel that no purpose is served by emphasising the potential or existing conflict between the sexes in matters of work organisation. It is preferable to seek out possible ways of combining and harmonising the needs and aspirations of both. This is why one concept particularly close to my heart is that of shared responsibility, the sharing of responsibilities within the family.

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13. Elisabeth Badinter, *Le Conflit, la femme et la mère*, Flammarion, 2010.
14. *Women outnumber men in Canadian workforce*, *The Canadian Press*, 5 September 2009, www.ctvnews.ca/women-outnumber-men-in-canadian-workforce-1.431861.
15. *We did it!*, *The Economist*, 30 December 2009, www.economist.com/node/15174489.
16. Hanna Rosin, The End of Men, *The Atlantic*, July/August 2010, www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/07/the-end-of-men/308135/.
17. Anne-Maria Slaughter, Work-Life Balance as a Men's Issue, Too, *The Atlantic*, 31 October 2012, www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2012/10/work-life-balance-as-a-mens-issue-too/264273/.

29. The outstanding example of shared responsibility is that of parents for their children: here we refer to shared parental responsibility, with the tasks related to the care and upbringing of children being shared. However, it goes further than this. All family responsibilities, whether they are household tasks or providing assistance to dependent persons, the keeping of accounts or dealing with the authorities, should be shared fairly, where possible equally, within the couple".

30. "Responsibility" is central to this concept, for it is not a matter of merely sharing activities. It is increasingly common for one spouse to "help" the other, but this does not call into question the roles within the couple. Shared responsibility, on the contrary, implies that family duties are not all dealt with by one spouse, but are shared by both.

31. This equal sharing firstly guarantees effective fulfilment of equality between the spouses. Secondly, and just as importantly, it places women and men on an equal footing where work is concerned. Equal commitment within the family makes possible equal opportunities in terms of access to, the permanence of and progress in the world of paid work.

32. Shared responsibility is linked to essentially cultural factors which the law could not impose on individuals. It is nevertheless both possible and necessary to promote this concept through education and awareness campaigns.

33. In Spain, campaigns of this kind have been conducted by, among others, the authorities of the Autonomous Community of Andalusia, where a publication entitled *Guìa para chicas* (Guide for girls) has been circulated to lower and upper secondary schools. This text gave a clear and simple explanation of how every member of the family can demand respect and call for all to make their contribution to family management.

5. Council of Europe and European Union legal instruments

34. As early as 1996, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation that represents an important landmark in the reconciliation of working and private life. Recommendation No. R (96) 5, as well as presenting the situation prevailing at the time of its adoption, indicates a number of measures needed to aid reconciliation of work and family life.

35. This text recalls that it is women who most often continue to bear the principal burden of family responsibilities, and that insufficient sharing of these responsibilities encourages discrimination against women on the labour market. It further underlines that women and men are increasingly stating their determination to share their family responsibilities more equally, and that numerous obstacles, notably social and cultural, stand in the way of this.

36. As to the recommended measures "to enable women and men, without discrimination, to better reconcile their working and family lives", the recommendation mentions people's right to hold or obtain a job "without being subject to discrimination and, to the extent possible, without any conflict between their employment and family responsibilities". The appendix to the recommendation introduces, *inter alia*, the principle that "it is important that workers be able to meet their increasing responsibilities to other dependent family members, and in particular to their relatives who are elderly or who have a disability".

37. The revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163 (1996)), in Article 27, addresses the "right of workers with family responsibilities to equal opportunities and equal treatment". This article notably stipulates that the States undertake to apply appropriate measures "to enable workers with family responsibilities to enter and remain in employment, as well as to re-enter employment after an absence due to those responsibilities; to take account of their needs in terms of conditions of employment and social security; [and] to develop or promote services, public or private, in particular child daycare services and other childcare arrangements".

38. The Parliamentary Assembly looked into the question of reconciliation policies in 2006 when it adopted Recommendation 1769 (2006) on the need to reconcile work and family life. This text firstly recommends that member States fully implement Committee of Ministers Recommendation No. R (96) 5.

39. The specific measures recommended comprise genuine wage parity for women and men, the introduction of flexible working conditions, adequate remuneration/compensation during maternity leave, the introduction of paid paternity leave, together with paid parental leave available to the father and mother, and guaranteed places in day nurseries for children whose parents so desire.

40. The Lisbon Strategy, the main plank of the European Union's economic and development policy adopted in 2000, set the objective of achieving a female employment rate of 60% by 2010, with care facilities for at least 33% of children under 3 years of age and 90% of children between age 3 and compulsory school age, in order to promote greater reconciliation of family and working life as well as greater gender equality.

41. In 2009, only nine member countries had achieved the objective of 33% of children under 3 in official care facilities, and seven had reached the 90% target for children over 3. As for the female employment rate, 11 of the 27 European Union countries were at 60% in 2010. The rate rose from an average of 57.3% in Europe in 2000 to 62.1% in 2010 (compared to 75.1% for men).

42. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, on which the Treaty of Lisbon confers legally binding force, prohibits all gender-based discrimination and establishes the right to equality between women and men in all spheres.

43. The application of this equality principle is supported by the Commission's Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015. This identifies specific measures to reconcile working and family life, such as the improvement of care facilities for children below compulsory school age, as key actions for gender equality.[18]

44. The Commission has also laid down the Europe 2020 strategy, whose aims include an employment rate of 75% for women and men between 20 and 64 years of age (only Sweden has to date achieved this objective).[19]

45. For its part, the Council of the European Union, in March 2011, adopted a New European Pact for gender equality which places work-life policies in the foreground.[20] This pact emphasises the importance of promoting better balance between family life and work for women and men alike.

46. Directive 2010/18/EU takes the same line by extending compulsory parental leave from three to four months (a minimum of one month not being transferable from one parent to the other, in order to encourage fathers to take care of their children). It also provides for protection against unfavourable treatment of employees taking their parental leave.

6. Overview of work-life policies in European countries

6.1. Parental leave

47. Parental leave is an essential means of reconciling working and family life, and the trend is towards its extension. Mr Andrea Rigoni (Italy, ALDE) is currently preparing a report on "Parental leave as a way to foster gender equality". I would refer you to this report for a more detailed analysis.

48. In Europe, there is a trend towards the extension of parental leave. In the Netherlands, it increased from 13 to 26 weeks in 2009, and in Estonia, where the parental leave system has been exceptionally generous since 2004, there are 575 days of paid leave (of which the first 140 can only be claimed by mothers).

49. However, the great majority of beneficiaries are women, thereby interrupting their careers and perpetuating occupational segregation, while the leave taken by men is usually much shorter. In 2002, Sweden established a system providing for 13 months of parental leave, with two months reserved for fathers. Although this constitutes a definite advance, on average fathers only take 22% of the total days of parental leave. Finland has also established a "Daddy Month", to which 12 working days were added in 2010.

50. In Luxembourg, the great majority of the six months of full-time parental leave is taken by women. Indeed, in 2009, 2.15% of the parents who had received parental leave were men.

51. In 2007, Germany provided new allowances for parents taking parental leave *(Elterngeld)* and, despite budgetary restrictions in 2011, this system has resulted in more fathers taking their parental leave.

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18. *Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015*, Commission of the European Union, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52010DC0491:EN:NOT.
19. Commission of the European Union, *EUROPE 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth,* http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF.
20. Council of the European Union, *European Pact for gender equality for the period 2011-2020*, www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/119628.pdf.

52. The development of paternity leave is an important step towards greater equality in the taking on by parents of responsibilities for their children. In Spain, the law on gender equality introduced paternity leave of 13 days in 2007, in addition to the two days previously granted to fathers. The Spanish Government has undertaken to extend this leave to four weeks in 2013. In Poland, it was increased from one to two weeks in 2012. Turkey has also begun to introduce paternity leave, albeit of only three days and confined to the public sector, as has Greece, which offers fathers two days of paternity leave.

53. But there are still a number of countries not providing any paternity leave at all, and others like Estonia where the allowances prescribed for paternity leave have been suspended until the end of 2012 because of the economic crisis.

54. In Denmark, the great majority of fathers use their paternity leave, but this leave only constitutes 8% of the aggregate maternity, paternity and parental leave taken by both parents. Moreover, since January 2009, payment of compensation for paternity leave has also been suspended because of the economic crisis.

6.2. Care services

55. Although systems are changing, a traditional view of the role of men and women prevails in many countries.

56. One of the European Commission's recommendations was therefore to promote reconciliation of working and family life by providing affordable child care services. In Denmark, in fact, 79% of the mothers taking parental leave return to work as before, and the high quality of child care services is an important factor.

57. In 2009 in Cyprus, only 22% of children under 3 years of age were enrolled in an official day care programme. Although that is below the European average, in this country the family is the nucleus of society and culture, so many grandparents look after their grandchildren. In Greece, only 11% of children under 3 years of age are registered with care services, well below the European average of 27% in 2009.

58. Childcare services are highly developed in countries such as Sweden, which has set a statutory limit for nursery charges (in proportion to parents' income and number of children), and where public provision for childcare is guaranteed to all parents and free for up to 15 hours per week for children aged 3 to 6. Consequently, 63% of children under 3 and 94% of children aged 3 to 6 are enrolled in official childcare services.

59. In Finland, every child under 7 is unconditionally entitled to be registered with a care facility, and pre-primary education is free of charge. In addition, parents who do not use municipal childcare services are entitled to extra paid leave after the end of parental leave, enabling them to care for their children under 3 without giving up work.

60. Italy also has a free, albeit non-compulsory, childcare system in the public sector, in which, as in Denmark and Germany, 90% of children aged 3 to 6 are enrolled.

61. In the Russian Federation, childcare facilities are being restructured. The country has a large network of pre-school institutions. However, these are still insufficient, particularly in rural areas, due to increasing demand.[21]

62. Ukraine has a similar situation, with only 56% of children attending childcare facilities. The Ministry of Education, which supplied this data, indicates that the number of pre-school institutions (about 15 500 in 2010) is increasing by 200 to 300 units yearly.[22]

63. Since 2010, a year of nursery care has been provided free of charge in Ireland, and for low-income families the improved Community Childcare Subvention Programme introduced in 2010 enables parents benefiting from this programme to pay only about 33% of school attendance costs.

64. In France, childcare services are of high quality and have long, flexible opening hours. However, it is hard to find places in nurseries, so the government undertook to create 200 000 additional places for children under 3 by 2012.

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21. Early childhood care and education in the Russian Federation, Unesco 2007, http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001491/149142e.pdf.

22. www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/education-ministry-some-44-percent-of-children-una-78029.html.

65. Likewise, the Austrian Government invested € 45 billion between 2008 and 2010 in the extension of nurseries, and since 2011 has aimed to create 5,000 additional places each year.

66. In Luxembourg, the greater ease of combining work and family life is due to the establishment of *Maisons Relais* in much greater numbers (110 in 2009), and also thanks to their flexibility.

67. The trend is thus towards improvement and extension of childcare services to save mothers especially from interrupting or curbing their careers. A law of 2006 requires all local authorities in the United Kingdom to provide sufficient childcare to meet the needs of employed parents. The government has set up Sure Start Children's Centres to provide help and advice to parents and carers.

7. Legislative models

68. Many countries have introduced legislation to enhance gender equality at the workplace as well as laws permitting better reconciliation of work and family life through more flexible working conditions.

69. In Spain, the law reforming workers' status, approved in 1999, is specifically called the "Law on reconciling family and working life". It introduces or reforms measures such as maternity and paternity leave, breastfeeding leave and reduced working hours for family reasons.

70. In the Netherlands, a project was introduced in 2006 whereby employees may save 10% of their annual income, up to a maximum saving of 210%, to finance a future period of unpaid leave. This affords some flexibility, but only 4% of employees avail themselves of it because the project is complicated to implement. The government also introduced an "income-dependent combination tax credit" in 2009 for the lower-earning partner in order to encourage him or her to work additional hours.

71. In Belgium, parents of children under 12 years of age cannot be asked to perform overtime or to work at night or weekends unless they give their consent. In the same spirit, Austria in 2010 established childcare allowances tied to parents' income in order to give them more opportunities to stay away from the labour market for a certain period in order to care for their child.

72. In an effort to achieve more balanced representation of the sexes in decision-making posts, France enacted a law in January 2011 concerning balanced representation of women and men on administrative and supervisory boards, and concerning occupational equality, progressively introducing quotas in a move towards feminisation of the management bodies of major enterprises.

8. Good practices

73. The Council of Europe member States have also developed differing practices regarding reconciliation of working and family life.

74. In Belgium in 2009, the government adopted a "family plan for the self-employed", aimed at narrowing the gap between the welfare benefits available to self-employed workers and those for employees.[23] The plan's provisions include the improvement of maternity leave and introduction of parental leave also open to fathers, equal family benefits for children of employees and self-employed persons, suitable nurseries and childminders and the possibility of obtaining a loan without security on favourable terms.

75. In Switzerland, the Canton of Bern has adopted a plan emphasising the ongoing development of childcare places. Childminding facilities and "day parents" are subsidised by the Canton, enabling families to pay reduced rates. Since 1 August 2010, municipalities have been required to establish an all-day school module.[24]

76. The gender equality bonus in Sweden, introduced in 2008, is intended to make it easier for mothers to return to work after childbirth and to encourage fathers to take more parental leave so that they can take a more balanced share of the responsibilities relating to children.

23. *Plan famille pour les indépendants*, 2009, www.planfamillepourlesindependants.be/.
24. www.fambe.sites.be.ch/fambe_sites/fr/index/navi/index/kinder_und_beruf/foerderung_im_kanton_bern.html.

77. Sweden also created in 2003 the Golden Dummy Prize for enterprises that make allowances for family life, which is attracting a growing number of candidates (80 in 2010). This type of enterprise is also encouraged in Flemish-speaking Belgium where the *Gezinsbond* (league of families) was launched in 2009 to create a forum for promoting a business culture that allows for family life and to enable enterprises to advertise.

78. Many practices for improving childcare services have also been developed. In Estonia, the Estonian development partnership "Children taken care of, mothers at work" has created new care services since 2005. The Caisse nationale des allocations familiales in France created the Monenfant.fr website in 2009, which provides advice, guidance and solutions to parents to help them to find services to care for their child.

9. Corporate initiatives

79. Reconciliation of working and private life does not depend solely on legislative measures or on structures and services provided by the State. In a number of cases, public and private companies together with public authorities have also adopted measures to help their employees manage their working time and personal commitments better.

80. A survey published in 2011 by a research centre, the Italian Centre for Social Responsibility (ICSR),[25] shows that the good practices adopted by these economic players include:

– working time and workplace flexibility (flexitime, part-time, flexible leave programmes);

– maternity and paternity support policies (leave for family reasons, reintegration into work after extended leave, creation of nurseries or agreements with external facilities);

– training of staff and internal communication.

81. The study also shows that most large and medium-sized enterprises perceive their employees' well-being as a strategic asset, making it possible to improve productivity and the quality of the goods and services offered. Over half (55%) of the organisations participating in the survey assert that good practices regarding reconciliation of private and working life have improved the in-house atmosphere. This has been reflected in relations between staff members and between staff and managers, with greater employee satisfaction and motivation.

82. This research also highlights the fact that the current economic crisis is likely to encourage enterprises to alter their internal organisation by introducing measures to reconcile private and working life. There are two reasons why this unlooked-for effect could arise from the situation of low growth and scant financial resources in most countries. Firstly, human capital is becoming the most important resource for the success of a business. Consequently, enterprises decide to make an effort to increase the level of employees' satisfaction in order to motivate them and secure their loyalty. Secondly, in a difficult climate marked by tougher competition, some enterprises would be prepared to try out major changes in their internal organisation as part of their drive for productivity.

83. The French experiment with the Observatoire de la parentalité en entreprise confirms that the industrial world is paying closer attention to this subject. This centre for monitoring parenthood, set up in 2008 on the basis of a "Parents at work charter", is supported by 388 signatory enterprises and associations which have undertaken *inter alia* to:

– facilitate the reconciliation of working and private life for employees with children;

– adjust working conditions for pregnant women;

– guard against and eliminate discriminatory practices towards employees with children.

84. In the course of its work of gathering, analysing and disseminating information on the work-life balance of persons with parental responsibilities, the Observatoire has published numerous documents. These include a teleworking guide and a guide to nurseries and enterprises, designed as "aids to thought and action". Indeed, they provide useful information for enterprises wishing to introduce new forms of organisation that meet the needs of employees with children.

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25. People first!, Italian Centre for Social Responsibility – ICSR, www.i-csr.org/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=90%3Apople-firstle-dimensioni-del-bilanciamento-tra-vita-personale-e-professionalele-nuove-prassi-italiane&catid=1%3Aricerche&Itemid=88&lang=en.

10. Conclusions

85. The traditional division of roles between women and men is a major obstacle on the path to equality. While inequalities in the labour market are gradually decreasing, women still have to shoulder most family responsibilities. As a result, the difficulty of balancing family and working life means that women cannot fully enjoy equal opportunities.

86. At the same time, the predominant mindset in the current world of work, still to some extent reflecting sexist stereotypes, and work organisation which has not changed sufficiently, are also preventing men from fulfilling all their responsibilities within the family.

87. Programmes for balancing family and working life are therefore of major importance in policies on gender equality and quality of life.

88. It is essential that our societies make it easier to reconcile these two areas of life. The measures required to achieve this include new forms of work organisation (flexibility in terms of working hours and places of work), access to personal care services (particularly for children and the elderly) and financial support for families. Such measures require the co-ordination of all stakeholders in the world of work, both public and private.

89. The current economic climate, which is characterised by weak growth and a shortage of financial resources, should not delay the adoption of work-life balance policies. On the contrary, there is an increasingly urgent need for such policies. The current crisis, which has affected economic sectors which employ larger numbers of men, has had the effect of reducing the inequality in the employment rates of the two sexes. However, the “levelling down” of inequalities should not be accepted. Enabling both women and men better to balance their working life with family responsibilities would help to limit the negative effects of the crisis. Increased participation by both sexes in the world of work would represent a factor for growth in the economy as a whole and for more balanced development.

90. Work-life balance policies are necessary to prevent and combat poverty and social exclusion. Parents, in most cases mothers, who are obliged to give up their jobs because of working hours incompatible with their family commitments, are more vulnerable to poverty and exclusion.

91. The possibility of balancing family and work must therefore be one of the main objectives of all gender equality policies. The aim is to combat inequalities between women and men, establish conditions that allow parents to find fulfilment both at home and at work, increase economic growth and improve social cohesion in society as a whole.