



European Seminar «Towards a European Action Plan Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights : Work-Life Balance – Master Parenting in Work and Life»

Brussels, 21 February 2020

Event report

«Towards a European Action Plan Implementing the European Pillar of Social Rights: Work-Life Balance: Master Parenting in Work and Life» was the title of a European seminar organised by the MASP project on 21 February in Brussels.

The objective of the seminar was to:

- a) present good practices of cities, regions and (social economy) enterprises in the promotion of work-life balance – with a particular focus (but not exclusively) on groups such as unemployed and unskilled women;
- b) discuss new models of conciliation and ‘work-life synergy’ which go beyond individual action and promote cooperation between parents, local governments and administration, (social) economy enterprises, civil society and other players;
- c) reflect on concrete actions to be proposed to the new Commission and the European Parliament to bring the European Pillar of Social Rights to life.

In total, 48 persons representing local and regional authorities, enterprises, social economy, civil society organisations and EU institutions and consultative bodies attended the event (58 persons had initially registered).

The seminar was opened by host **Erika Koller**, EESC member and EESC rapporteur on Work-Life Balance. In her intervention she referred to the challenges around the adoption of the work-life balance directive. Even though the directive as such might not be « revolutionary » it can, in Koller’s view, be seen as progress, if one considers the large differences in legislation in the different Member States and the initial resistance in particular by employers. The definition of minimum standards is, according to the EESC member, already an important step into the right direction and the long-term impact of the directive will outweigh increased short-term costs. Koller welcomes the fact that also local authorities start to increasingly deal with the topic. Given not at least the increasing number of dependent (elderly) people and decreasing birth rates, investment in work-life balance is for her an investment into the future of Europe.

In a video message, **Cristina Tajani**, Cabinet Member for Labour Policies of the City of Milan, welcomed participants by presenting the vision of the city of Milan which has been the first city in Italy to propose a territorial model of smart working, agreed by a number of different stakeholders such as enterprises, universities, public actors, etc. The city also contributed to the development of a national directive setting rules and principles for the Italian administration. Moreover, the city of Milan tested the digital platform MAAM. In the framework of SmartLab Milan is bringing together 40

public and private players – among them many companies - to work on models of conciliation and welfare. In the near future the city will elaborate a time plan which should help increasing time efficiency of persons living, working and moving in Milan.

REVES Secretary-General **Luigi Martignetti** introduced the first panel discussion with MEP Milan Brglez and Erika Koller by making reference to Eurostat data which show, amongst other aspects, that 80% of women leaving the labour market do so because they need to take care of a person. According to Martignetti, cities and regions are in a position to promote work-life balance in very different ways, e.g. by introducing specific clauses in public procurement procedures, by re-organising city life, etc. Martignetti highlighted that work-life balance here should not be understood only as a matter for working persons and the importance of including also the unemployed in order to facilitate their (re-)integration into the labour market.

In the view of MEP **Milan Brglez**, the European Pillar of Social Rights with its 20, non-binding principles evoked both enthusiasm, but also scepticism. Whilst many agree on the fact that economic integration in the EU cannot be enhanced without strengthening also social elements and that the EU has to (re)gain trust by citizens, many EU Member States are not in favour of conferring more competences in the field of social policy to the EU. With regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights which also includes principles linked to gender equality and work-life balance, the challenge is to integrate the different principles in the functioning of the European Union and in particular in economic and fiscal policies. Yet, in the framework of the European semester, social criteria are most often excluded. The behaviour does, in Brglez' opinion, not follow rhetorics and this even in the case of legally binding principles enshrined in legislation and treaties (e.g. equal pay for equal work).

With a rather critical view on the recently established EP intergroup on demographic challenges and family-work balance, Brglez warned of reducing social issues to family-related topics and issues. He pointed to the need for structural change and the way the European Union is working. According to Brglez, a combination of social change with the 'Green Deal' would make it easier to « sell » the need for this structural change. He looks forward to the Gender Equality Strategy to be published by the European Commission in early March 2020. The challenge for Brglez is to prove positive micro- and macro-economic effects of such a strategy and related policies.

Finally Brglez highlighted the importance of upwards instead of downwards conversion (referring to his own country which used EU legislation to lower own standards for example in the field of asylum procedures).

Erika Koller would like to see more commitment to the promotion of work-life balance by employers. She perceives a tendency to « forget that human beings are most important for the economy » and therefore deserve investment. However, Koller also recognised that larger enterprises might sometimes be in an easier situation to solve certain issues linked to work-life balance than SMEs.

Luigi Martignetti would like to know how one could make employers and society at large understand that investment in work-life balance also has a positive economic impact.

In this respect, **Milan Brglez** counts on the alliance and initiatives of social partners. He also thinks that it might sometimes be better to 'disconnect' from EU legislation in order to avoid a race-to-the-bottom during a next crisis. However, in collective bargaining, both sides should take a responsible stance. Also, governments should step in and promote a balance between different interests. Also Erika Koller agreed on the importance of collective bargaining and sectoral agreements.

Milan Brglez also thinks that clearly measurable indicators and data could help convincing employers of the importance of work-life balance and well-being of workers as an important factor raising the employees potential and therefore his/her contribution to the activities of the enterprise.

The introductory session on EU policies in the field of work-life balance was followed by a short presentation, by **Roberto Munarin** (City of Milan) of the MASP project which aims to a) contribute to the promotion of work-life balance; b) support a more equal share of care responsibilities between women and men and c) help increasing the participation of women in the labour market. MASP aims to improve knowledge and capacities of key actors (enterprises, public authorities, employees as such ...). To this purpose it will develop two programmes: One programme addressing (staff of) public authorities, unemployed women and pregnant women, another one targeting enterprises and their employees. These activities will be based on the example of the Family Audit Certification in the province of Trento and LBV tool as well as on research activities with a specific focus on other good practices in Italy and other EU Member States and on the specific needs of unemployed women. Two study visits to Norway and the exchange with Norwegian representatives of employers, trade unions and public authorities will provide additional knowledge and inspiration.

In the framework of a third session and panel discussion, participants were given the opportunity to learn more about good practice examples in the field of work-life balance promotion. **Erdmuthe Klaer-Morselli, REVES**, shortly presented the context of this research activity. Referring to several main criteria (impact/effectiveness, innovation, sustainability, transferability and involvement of main stakeholders) partners identified ten good practices. Four of them are/were promoted by (employees of) cities and regions, three by mainly small and medium social economy enterprises, three by larger enterprises. Among them figure holistic gender equality and WLB strategies of cities, specific measures for unemployed women and related restructuring of administrative cultures and procedures, participatory design and implementation of WLB measures with employees or multi-stakeholder co-creation of public WLB strategies and initiatives, to name just a few elements. Based on the lessons learnt from the analysis of the good practices, recommendations to local and regional authorities were formulated. All material will be published on the MASP website that will soon be online.

The panel discussion brought together some good practice examples.

FAI, represented by **Arianna Pasquali and Elisa Giuseppin**, is a social cooperative delivering services mainly for elderly persons and persons with disabilities. Out of the approximately 500 employees, nearly 90% are women. Over the years, FAI has developed its WLB policy and practices such as initiatives to prevent burnout, a family desk and related advisory services for workers or post-school and educational services for the children of its employees.

Moreover, FAI is the first social economy enterprise in Friuli Region to have taken part in and received the Family Audit Certification (2019). In this context, FAI also developed guidelines on working time; carried out a mapping of flexibility measures, promoted paternity leave, improved training courses, conducted surveys among its employees, etc. The social economy enterprise is also managing the information desk 'Informadonna' for a municipality (Casarsa).

Eline Stomphorst, employee of the **city of Amsterdam**, presented **Gideon's Bende**. This initiative was set up by employees at the moment when competences regarding care in the Netherlands were transferred from the national level to cities and regions. All co-founders of Gideon's Bende are informal carers themselves and knew about the obstacles carers *were/are* facing – also due to regulations and bureaucracy. Main objectives of Gideon's Bende were thus to a) use experiences and problems shared by employees in concrete policy recommendations addressed to the city government and/or various municipal departments; b) to create a stronger awareness – in all sections of management structures – on the problems employees with informal care tasks are facing in order to develop a 'lifecycle-proof'-human resources policy and c) to encourage solidarity between employees with and without informal care tasks.

The **Institut pour l'Égalité des Femmes et des Hommes (Institute for Equality of Women and Men)**, represented at the seminar by **Sylvie Janssens**, is an Equality Body. Equality bodies exist in all EU Member States. Their task is multi-fold. On one hand they report about and disclose discrimination, thereby providing recommendations to policy-makers and other players. Moreover, equality bodies provide (juridical) support to victims. Most complaints the Institute receives from citizens are related to problems experienced at work. Twenty percent of these complaints are linked to pregnancy-related discrimination at the workplace. The case of the Institut pour l'Égalité des Femmes et des Hommes, however, also shows the important mobilising function of equality bodies and their efforts to bring together different type of public and private players to reflect on concrete strategies and means to improve gender equality and work-life balance. The Institute is also involved in campaigns and has set up a database containing good practices regarding the promotion of work-life balance.

The **Mamo Pracuj (Mummy work, if you want to) Foundation**, presented by co-founder **Agnieszka Kaczanowska**, was set up by a group of mothers in order to facilitate reintegration into the labour market of women returning from maternity, parental and childcare leave. In this context, much emphasis is put on work-life balance. To this purpose, Mamo Pracuj cooperates very much with employers who realised the added value of having women and young mothers in their teams. At the same time the Foundation provides advice and networking relationships to young mothers (but also fathers). In 2011 Mamo Pracuj set up its online portal which also includes a database of „parent-friendly” employers. Moreover, it organises webinars, online and offline courses and webinars for women seeking a job. In addition, Mamo Pracuj conceives and implements campaigns on WLB from a mother's perspective, but also campaigns for family-friendly employers.

During the discussion, **Sylvie Janssens** drew the attention of the participants on the fact that, following her experience, an increasing number of employers would like to promote work-life balance, but does not know how.

Arianna Pasquali from FAI explained that, contrary to many other cases, women employees in her social cooperative often are sole earners within their family and therefore also all the more dependent on good solutions allowing them to combine work and family life. Here, the principle of participation of all co-operators in the definition of enterprise policies and strategies is once again of great importance.

Asked about initiatives of the Gideon's Bende group of employees in the city of Amsterdam with impact on policies, **Eline Stomphorst** referred to a period of regular problems with the schedule and punctuality of school buses for children with disabilities. Gideon's Bende brought this to the attention of managers and policy-makers in the city of Amsterdam. The problem was finally taken into consideration in the framework of upcoming public procurement procedures around the school bus system.

On the question to what extent measures promoting work-life balance could be considered a PR measure by enterprises only and to what extent companies develop comprehensive strategies tackling related challenges, **Agnieszka Kaczanowska** pointed to a list of criteria Mamo pracuj uses when choosing partner enterprises. The foundation would not cooperate with enterprises instrumentalising individual WLB measures mainly for marketing purposes.

With regard to initiatives that should be taken in the future, **Arianna Pasquali** and **Elisa Giuseppin** would like to see a stronger dissemination of good practices between cities and regions at EU level.

Eline Stomphorst would like policy-makers to more often get in direct touch with « the real world »: « We often call for citizens to participate more in policy-making. However, we also need politicians to participate more in society. » She also called on governments at all levels to more facilitate social innovation. Finally, on the topic of awareness-raising, she recommended to use storytelling much more, as this seems to have a greater impact than other type of instruments.

Sylvie Janssens hopes to see more initiatives breaking down traditional role models and stereotypes – in particular actions by enterprises and others encouraging fathers to take over care responsibilities. She mentions complaints her Institute receives from fathers being discriminated against and reporting negative comments by employers and own colleagues.

Agnieszka Kaczanowska agreed with Janssens. She hopes for a future in which the fact of raising children is not considered an obstacle or weakness anymore, but is perceived as something ‘normal’, as a part of life as important as work.

The last part of the morning session was dedicated to a presentation and evaluation of the Family Audit Certification and the MAAM tool which have been a point of departure for MASP activities in terms of good practice.

Elisa Vimercati, Life Based Value (LBV), presented the CHILD tool (former MAAM programme) which is based on the life-based learning concept: Using life as a resource to develop and strengthen soft skills. Two programmes target working parents and working caregivers. They consist of inspirational content and videos, training sessions for soft skills, exercises with open-ended questions, self-assessment questionnaires and real-life mission tasks. Moreover, participants have the opportunity to become part of a community/network of users and exchange with others. The CHILD tool is available online (app) and can therefore be used in a flexible way and at many different places. Participants receive continuous feedback and can test on a daily basis what they have learnt through the programmes and in their daily life. So far, 70 companies have been testing and promoting the programmes and 8000 persons have been trained.

The Family Audit Certification, presented by **Luciano Malfer, Autonomous Province of Trento**, has been developed in partnership with different public and private players and is promoted by the Autonomous Province of Trento through its Agency for Family, Birth and Youth Policies. The certification promotes cultural and organisational change within private or public sector organisations by stimulating the adoption of human resources policies which improve the wellbeing of employees and their families while furthering also the mission of the organisation. The Family Audit has two main phases : 1) the audit process which analyses the workers’ needs and expectations, elaborating the data according to work-family balance indicators and developing a Work-Life Balance Plan ; 2) the implementation of the Work-Life Balance Plan, containing actions that the organisation

intends to take during the three-year process. So far more than 200 organisations have been involved in the Family Audit process, benefitting more than 67 000 workers.

Sara Rago , AICCON, the Italian Association for the Promotion of the Culture of Co-operation and of Nonprofit, shared some conclusions made following an evaluation of the MAAM/Child tool and the Family Audit Certification. Both programmes have been assessed based on the following criteria: culture (empowerment of workers in their work and family roles), governance (with a focus on community action and the creation of alliances), sustainability (rather difficult to assess at this stage, as both programmes are rather recent) and scaling (possibility of application in different contexts). Rago pointed to the positive impact both programmes (might) have and their potential to create shared value chains involving employees, enterprises and society at large. At the same time she also drew the attention of participants to the risks should the programmes remain initiatives carried out at individual level without the existence of a larger work-life balance eco-system supported by an alliance of different players. In such a scenario they could even contribute to raising inequalities between those profiting from such initiatives and others.

The afternoon session starts with a presentation by **Basic Income Italy** and **Mara Ghidorzi, Afolmet** (public employment agency), of MASP research conducted specifically on the *challenges faced by and needs of* unemployed mothers. Research activities were based on a survey among 300 mainly female users of services and projects offered by the employment agencies in the city of Milan/Lombardy region (Afolmet) and the Autonomous Province of Trento. Results of the survey confirmed once again the difficult choices women and in particular mothers wishing to find (back) to the labour market are faced with, next to other obstacles linked to a lack of self-esteem and anxiety. Even though existing tools and services might help unemployed mothers to escape isolation, establish new networks and find emotional support, they often do not lead to employment. They appear insufficient in a reality of rapidly changing labour markets. At the same time, the existing childcare offer with insufficient, often too expensive services does not respond to the real needs of unemployed women. A central element is time and lack of appropriate policies, culture and structures allowing (unemployed) mothers, fathers and carers more in general to manage their time the best way possible.

Based on the results of the research conducted, Afolmet is considering the development of more tailor-made services and training for unemployed mothers.

Flaviano Zandonai, CGM, introduced participants into the topic of the first panel discussion of the afternoon. Referring to what had been stated in previous sessions he underlined the need to reformulate WLB policies and to reintroduce new policies through multi-stakeholder alliances able to respond to the real needs of parents and caregivers.

Alda Fiordelli, Afolmet, explained how the re-organisation of employment services in recent years led to the establishment of larger partnerships between public and non-public bodies. This in turn allowed to identify additional resources, in terms of services, that could also be used in order to deal with a sensitive topic such as work-life-balance for unemployed. Services also include vocational training, possibilities to organize internships, etc., in coherence with the specific needs of unemployed mothers/parents.

Gloria De Masi Gervais shared the experience of **Stantec**, a large enterprise which has become a multinational. Already since a number of years the company is developing WLB-related policies and initiatives, including measures such as flexible working hours or smart working (working from home

or other locations outside the office). To this end, the specific position of a culture manager has been created. Moreover, Stantec conceived the Smafely tool – an application measuring the positive impact of smart working of its employees in terms of carbon footprint. The enterprise also cooperates with the city of Milan and other public and private players in the framework of gender equality- and WLB-related initiatives.

Muriel Meertens works for Groupe Terre (BE), a consortium of work-integration social enterprises. She underlined the importance of the democratic project of her enterprise – a social economy enterprise – which has among its objective to integrate also employees in decision-making on strategies and policies of the enterprise. Groupe Terre has been developing a number of measures supporting well-being and work-life balance of its employees. This is how Meertens was able to adapt her working life to her specific needs as a mother.

Stefano Valvason, General Manager of A.P.I., the Association of Small and Medium Industrial Enterprises of Lombardy Region, deplored the (false) image of small and medium enterprises not being able or being less able to respond to work-life balance needs of their employees. In his experience, managers of SMEs have a high interest in the well-being of their workers in order to retain work force and boost the motivation of employees to contribute to the achievements of the objective of the enterprise. Due to the rather low number of employees and a closer, more direct contact between management and employees, SMEs, however, deal with WLB topics in a rather informal way. Here, Valvason also pointed to the importance and role of work ethics and the community within smaller and medium enterprises. Many SMEs have been able to manage, for example, (parenthood-related) absence due to a strong community (bringing together employees and management) and cooperation between colleagues.

Pietro Binelli represents **Euromasc**, a Norwegian organisation working in the field of vocational education and training which is feeding the activities of the MASP project with examples of WLB policies and measures of public and private players in Norway. Binelli shortly explained the tripartite system in Norway. He stressed the importance of trust and constructive cooperation, in Norway, between trade unions, employers and the state.

Summarising the interventions of the different speakers, **Flaviano Zandonai** highlighted in particular the need to build alliances between different type of players and tackle WLB-related questions in a responsible way that avoids the creation of additional tensions between employers and employees.

The final panel discussion, moderated by **Luigi Martignetti, REVES**, focused on future actions to take at local, national and EU level to improve work-life balance for parents and carers in general.

Pascual Martinez, COFACE Families Europe, encouraged parents, carers and other stakeholders to get mobilized for the implementation period of the work-life balance directive which was voted by the European Parliament in April 2019 and entered into force on 1 August 2019. The implementation period is, in Martinez' view, an opportunity to push for policy changes in different fields: First of all, it appears fundamental to discuss and (re)define the concept of *adequate* payment of family leave/adequate income replacement. Second, investment into services to families should be boosted. However, these investments will only be successful, if services become more affordable, better accessible (problem of urban-rural divide, disability, etc.) and if a sufficient level of service quality is ensured. Martinez also proposes to integrate this type of services into the Child Guarantee such as it has been proposed. He hopes that many of these proposals will be part of the Gender Equality Strategy the European Commission should table on 4 March 2020.

Furthermore, Martinez stressed the importance of monitoring and reporting behavior of different players with regard to WBL as well as policies. Local and regional authorities should contribute to collecting relevant data. In this context, Martinez informed the participants about the strong support by Commissioner Dalli for a European Work-Life Balance Index that should be established under the supervision of the European Institute for Gender Equality. He also mentioned the fundamental role of media to raise awareness on the topic.

All these measures, however, would have, in Martinez' view, only limited impact if they are not coupled with initiatives promoting behavioral change. This also includes initiatives that encourage men – by law and through other type of practices – to take over (a larger share of) care responsibilities.

Claire Champeix presented **Eurocarers**, an association representing informal carers and their organisations. She stressed the importance, already mentioned by previous speakers, to tackle the question of work-life balance from the point of view of parents, but also of other type of informal carers in charge of persons that have become dependent due to age, disability or chronic disease. Just as parents (and mainly mothers), also other type of informal carers face risks such as financial difficulties, isolation and limited opportunities to *remain in or find their way back to* the labour market. Again, informal care responsibilities lie mainly with women.

Eurocarers would like to see a comprehensive strategy for carers being established and mainstreamed into all policies. In this context, Champeix also points to a new Demographic Change Green Paper that is currently being prepared by the European Commission.

She urged policy-makers to involve carer organisations in the design of policies.

With regard to the MASP project, Champeix invited project partners to get in touch and seek alliances also with carer organisations in the different territories.

Giuseppina Corvino, City of Milan concluded the panel discussion and the seminar by stressing the need to stimulate cultural change in general and spread examples of already running and successful practices to other cities all over Europe. However, such a wider promotion and dissemination should not follow a “one fits all” approach, but take into account the different contexts of territories. Not all solutions are equally of use for all, but have to be adapted to local specificities.

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