

25 March 2021

Perspectives on Work Life Balance: the MASP project. Final event

Conference report

On **25 March 2021**, the conference "***Perspectives on Work Life Balance: the MASP project - final event***" has taken place on Zoom. A meeting set up to coincide with the conclusion of the project bearing the same name, in order to present the MASP experience throughout the two years of activity, focusing on two increasingly urgent macro issues: **the balance of personal and working life** and the promotion of **female participation in the labour market**.

The event was characterised by a full programme of presentations delivered by experts who provided participants with a thorough overview of the issues underlying the project, not only at national but also at European level.

The event - broadcasted in live streaming with a link on the project's Facebook page - started at 10 a.m. on Thursday 25 March with the presence of **88 participants as spectators** (a total of 153 registered for the event) with the introduction of **Emanuela Donetti** - *Innovation Consultant* called in as moderator.

The institutional greetings kicked off the **first working session, entitled "The MASP project: context, tools, impacts"** and was opened by **Roberto Munarin** - *Director of the Labour and Training Area of the Urban Economy and Labour Department of the Municipality of Milan*, who provided a general overview of the tools and activities implemented by MASP in order to facilitate the return of women to work and the balance of work and life times: introduction of work life balance policies within the community, sharing with companies new work tools useful to recognise those soft skills matured by men and women during parenthood, facilitating the management of care loads. These issues have become even more important over the last year, when the pandemic has changed the way in which we 'take care' – it has accentuated the distance because of work-from-home solutions and with new ways of living our private and working lives, necessarily leading us to rethink and reengineer social structures and the organisation of working times and modes.

Immediately afterwards, **Cristina Tajani** - *Councillor for Employment Policies and Human Resources of the Municipality of Milan* – was given the floor and underlined how the central issues of the MASP project are nowadays a priority as well as the main subject of debates at administrative, political and corporate level. This level of interest is further amplified by this unique historical period.

She emphasised how important it is today to move from small-scale experimentation to an overall level of contribution to the definition of both public policies and business practices needed in the post-pandemic recovery phase.

The institutional greetings concluded with the intervention of **Ilona Zelvyte** - *Policy Officer, European Commission* committed to gender equality policies in the labour market and supervisor of projects supporting women's participation in the labour market and work-life balance, including the MASP project. In her speech, Ilona Zelvyte stressed that the European Union is committed to transforming the labour market to make it more accessible, fairer in terms of pay, with a better division of workloads between men and women and with flexible working hours that make it easier for women to manage their families and jobs. The European Union is currently working with all member states to ensure that the above-mentioned rights become a reality before the 2024 deadline.

After the institutional greetings, the conference began with a speech by **Flaviano Zandonai** - *Open Innovation Manager - Gruppo Cooperativa CGM*, who emphasised that the research activities carried out as part of the Masp project had brought to light transformations in the social and economic context that call for the organisation of balance policies. The pandemic has further increased the current changes, making a paradigm shift indispensable.

The project started with the idea of strengthening parental networks that provide care and education in community contexts; structuring a more accessible provision of quality services, facilitating the encounter between supply and demand and shortening distances, including economic distances; encouraging a profound organisational change in businesses, in order to stand alongside public institutions and service providers in responding to balance needs; building balance policies that cut across other areas; last but not least, envisaging new roles and places to facilitate balance. As a matter of fact, the pandemic represented an event that turned the project upside down, automatically activating bottom-up and self-organised responses, new platforms of digital welfare services, organisational changes and new social infrastructures.

Cristina Morini - *BIN Italy's Board of Directors* – focused her reflection to the results of the field research conducted by BIN Italy with a group of unemployed women in Milan and Trento and a survey submitted to a sample of 300 citizens.

The surveys aimed at identifying the central role of both sharing and balance in a society capable of expressing itself through its potential and able to make the most of the wealth of knowledge that women represent. Cristina Morini highlighted an important question for the future: *'What innovations and means should be envisaged to support a more equitable management of time in relation to care responsibilities?'*

The morning continued with the intervention of **Alda Fiordelli** - *Innovation Projects Office, AFOLMET* - who focused on the actions that AFOL Metropolitana has put in place during its participation into the MASP project. First of all, the activation of tools to facilitate the recognition of women's skills and competences, enabling them to use them to enter the labour market. In this regard, the focus of the intervention was on the platform developed for this purpose, precisely to activate a digital pathway that can be used independently by women, or as a coaching tool used by operators, in order to obtain a correct representation of their skills, with a specific focus on their strengths and weaknesses. This platform is used to date by 440 women with a daily growing trend.

The conference was also enriched by a direct testimony, that of **Laura Ravanelli** - *first person protagonist of the MASP project*. Laura Ravanelli talked about her experience with the platform and the benefits she has gained, highlighting the practicality and concreteness of the project, thanks to which she has discovered soft skills she was unaware of, starting an inner and personal journey that has allowed her to become more aware of her potential.

Stefano Valvason - *General Manager, A.P.I. (Association of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises)* – He underlined how the promotion of work and life balance policies is fundamental for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as one of the cornerstones of the work of A.P.I. Entrepreneurs are always looking for ways to innovate and increase the competitiveness of their business: promoting well-being in the workplace allows better performance and greater involvement of the people who are part of it. Specifically, A.P.I. has been involved in raising awareness among SMEs on these issues, involving them in a training and information path. Furthermore, MASP was an even more important opportunity in this historical moment in which, following the health emergency, companies must invest in their development and demonstrate more than ever their ability to react to changes in a flexible way.

The section "The MASP project: context, tools, impacts" continued with an in-depth analysis by **Stefania Terlizzi** - *General Manager of the Trento Employment Agency* - who reported on the experience undertaken in the area she is responsible for (production of short videos, webinar training courses for organisational labour consultants, trade union officials and family audit assessors, training courses for employers, meeting with employment centres, research, interventions and actions for businesses and public seminars). This is a widespread activity carried out following the logic of a system, involving not only citizens and employers, but all those players engaged every day on the macro issues underlying the MASP project - all of them aiming at encouraging the introduction of a new paradigm resulting from a cultural change.

The last speech of the first section of the conference was that of **Serena Miccolis** - *AICCON Research and Evaluation Manager* - who unveiled the first data on the project's impact assessment, with a specific focus on its transformative capacity on the entire relevant context, involving all the categories of subjects involved directly and indirectly, while emphasising the importance of the project to Objectives 5, 8 and 10 of the 2030 Agenda.

What impact has it had? Thanks to the data analysed to date, we can boast an improvement in the development of female empowerment, especially for the women involved in the most intense pathways, which combined the use of the platform and coaching by service operators; we can see greater participation in the labour market by the women involved and, in terms of well-being and social inclusion, we see a different view between the women involved in this pathway only through the use of the platform (who reported a decrease) and those who also benefited from coaching services by service operators (who instead reported an improvement): these metrics are certainly affected by the one-of-a-kind historical period we are living in.

Serena Miccolis also reported on some of the results of the 11 enterprises involved, in terms of promoting the empowerment of the target groups, the progress of an integrated systemic approach by all social players, work life balance and the creation of shared value by enterprises.

Pietro Binelli - *Euromasc Project Developer* - opened the **second session of the conference: "European Best Practices on Work-Life Balance"**, with a report on the work carried out in Norway and in the northern countries. Specifically, the results of two workshops were reported in order to highlight the best practices adopted from an economic and corporate point of view in terms of gender equality at work and with regard to work life balance as a macro theme. Pietro Binelli also reported on an interesting case history: that of a company with over 300 employees in the UK and Denmark which, in 2017, had set a series of targets aimed at improving gender equality. The target was achieved with excellent results in October 2020 with 43% of women employed in management positions and 50% on the highest level boards, a 2% increase of women in the company, and almost complete gender balance among the women interviewed. The only figure that unfortunately is still negative is equal pay, which still sees women lagging behind their male peers.

Claudia Sorger - *L&R Social Research* - presented the project *parents@work*, which started in Austria and Croatia in May 2019 and will end in September 2021. The aim of the project is to raise awareness about discrimination in the workplace by talking to employees and employers. Claudia Sorger focused on the results obtained on the Austrian territory, which highlighted the strong presence, still today, of stereotypes in the management of parental leave, a large wage gap between men and women, a focus by employers on full-time work to the detriment of part-time work, which is too often considered unsuitable for high-level jobs, prejudices towards parents in the workplace, a lack of awareness of the standardisation of parental leave and, in parallel, legislation characterised by excessively long delays in taking up and dealing with cases of gender inequality and discrimination in the workplace.

Eva Ledroit - *EU Policy & Projects Officer, Make Mothers Matter* - presented the actions that Make Mothers Matter carry out every day at European level. The focus of her presentation was on the survey administered to many mothers, who were asked to tell what they would like to achieve in the workplace. Greater recognition and active parenting policies are the most important topics, within a global context that still does not recognise the tasks carried out by women in their role as mothers and is characterised by a large pay gap.

Elisa Vimercati - *Lifed Research and Development Manager* - reported on the experience of the Global EdTech company and the Lifed digital platform, concluding the second session of the conference.

Lifed's aim is to help people become aware that their parenting journeys are a training ground for their soft skills. Through the use of digital systems and technologies, Lifed offers specific courses that make use of podcasts, videos and interactive contents with questions and missions set in real life, in order to bring people into digital coaching activities to help them refresh all their skills.

Valentina Remida - *Policy Assistant Italy, DG EMPL* - kicked off the **third and final session of the morning: "The future of work-life balance"**, summarising the challenges of the Italian context and looking at the contribution of the European Social Fund with an eye to the future.

These challenges are part of a critical situation that turns into one of the largest gender employment gaps in Europe, with strong territorial differences at national level. Valentina Remida focused her attention to financial support from the EU, highlighting the European Social Fund (ESF), the ESF+ 2021 and the PNRR.

The conference ended with the speech of **Giuseppina Corvino** - *Labour and Training Area of the Department of Urban Economy and Labour, Trade and Human Resources of the Municipality of Milan*. Emphasising that "The future has just begun", Giuseppina Corvino drew attention to the pivotal role played by the issues underlying the MASP project for Europe.

Roberto Munarin - *Director of the Labour and Training Area of the Urban Economy and Labour Department of the Municipality of Milan* - closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation, which was rich in ideas and suggestions, and wished to keep working together.

MASP is a project funded by the European Union with an international partnership with the Municipality of Milan as the lead partner and the following partners: Agenzia del Lavoro della Provincia Autonoma di Trento, AFOL Metropolitana, Associazione BIN ITALIA, API (Associazione Piccole medie Imprese), Gruppo Cooperativo CGM, EUROSMAC, Lifeed (maam Life Based Learning), REVES Network and AICCON.



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