



## **MASP final international dissemination event**

### **“Projects of life and skills development: Different approaches to valuing parenting in work and life”**

#### **Report**

*The event, organized in the framework of the Master Parenting in Work and Life (MASP) project and supported by the EU EaSI programme (2014-2020), had the objective to:*

- *present the final results of the MASP project;*
- *explore possible synergies between different European initiatives and programmes including actions on the topics of work-life balance and (women) employment;*
- *discuss perspectives for actions at European, national and local level in a period in which a number of strategies, programmes and policies around the Recovery and Resilience Fund, the European Structural and Investment Fund and the Action Plan around the Implementation of the Social Pillar are finalized.*

Participants were welcomed by **Luigi Martignetti, Secretary General of European Network of Cities and Regions for the Social Economy (REVES aisbl)** and **Roberto Munarin, Director for Employment and Vocational Training at the city of Milan.**

Luigi Martignetti pointed to the importance a correct work-life balance policy has for the achievement of the EU social goals, as described in the European Pillar of Social Rights. He underlined the fact that work-life balance should cease being mainly a “political mantra”. Declarations should translate into concrete policy actions with initiatives in different policy fields. The MASP project was an example in this sense.

Robert Munarin highlighted the MASP initiative as part of a variety of measures the City of Milan aims to realise throughout different policies fields (economy, mobility, education& training...) to improve equal opportunities and the access of women to the labour market. The urgency of the situation has become even greater and more evident with the Covid-19 crisis and its consequences. To react to the crisis, the city of Milano adopted the “Milano 2020 adaptation strategy” which contains a number of

actions towards recovery. The strategy was developed in a participatory way, involving a number of stakeholders. It also contains an important set of measures encouraging “new methodologies of work” which would allow citizens and in particular women to better balance family/private life and work. They include the creation of incentives and spaces for home working, smart working and ‘near working’, but also promoting “the 15 minutes city” in which every citizens will be able to find necessary services in his/her direct living environment. Also in the context of the aforementioned strategy, the city of Milan, in cooperation with social partners, adopted an “Employment Pact” including a plan for the reintegration into the labour market which has a specific focus in particular on women and youth. In Munarin’s view, the MASP project has been “a fantastic opportunity” to develop and experiment relevant actions and build partnerships with a number of other actors.

#### *MASP – motivation and added value for policy-makers and (social economy) enterprises*

During the first round of discussions, MASP partners representing local authorities, SMEs and social economy organisations were invited to share experiences made throughout the project period and their views on the added value of their participation in the MASP initiative.

**Giuseppina Corvino, Head of the Employment Market Unit at the City of Milan**, stressed the positive attitude of stakeholders and citizens regarding measures promoting equal opportunities and work-life balance in and around Milan. MASP has provided, in her opinion, once again evidence for the importance of *carrying out projects and experimenting new models of welfare* in smaller contexts. The experience of the city of Milan has shown that successful projects will then have a tendency to grow by themselves with a spill-over also into other geographical (and policy) areas.

**Riccardo Salomone, President of the Employment Agency of the Autonomous Province of Trento and professor at Trento University**, pointed to a strong top-down governance approach in his province in the past. To him, the MASP project provided an opportunity to build and experiment new models of welfare in cooperation with a variety of stakeholders and citizens. He also appreciated the multi-disciplinary character of MASP initiatives which did not focus on legislation and rules to enforce work-life balance only, but also on other aspects such as (organizational) culture, etc.

**Stefano Valvason, Director General of A.P.I. (Associazione Piccole e Medie Industrie)** considers the MASP initiative timely in a period in which enterprises have to develop and prove more than ever their capacity to react to changes in a flexible way. The involvement of workers in the development and implementation of new strategies and actions is in his view a crucial element of success. To him, MASP has been a stimulating experience in this sense. Developing and testing methods to value competences acquired inter alia through parenthood and which can be applied in a professional context is, in Valvason’s view, of great importance. He points to the experience of A.P.I. which, as an organization, has a majority of women among its employees, as women have proven particularly important to the organization due to their capacity to listen and be proactive in finding solutions to the needs of members.

For **Sabina Bellione, representing the social economy consortium CGM**, the topic of work-life balance is -despite the problems unveiled even more by the pandemy – still fairly neglected in Cohesion-policy-related policies and programmes at national and regional level. In her opinion, MASP has produced models and keys of interpretation for work-life balance-related policies that could be used in the new

programming period. Bellione refers to her own consortium in which many enterprises provide services helping women and men to better reconcile work and family life. However, a recurring question here is also how to guarantee work-life balance in turn to those providing this kind of services. The crisis which has been reinforced by the pandemic should be used to re-think and existing policies and models, integrating all these aspects.

#### *MASP project outputs*

**Sara Rago, Research Area Coordinator at AICCON/University of Bologna**, introduced a short presentation of different MASP outputs. AICCON, in its quality as project evaluator, noticed an improvement of prospects for a better (re-) integration into the labour market of parents and in particular mothers. This was made possible through the different training sessions organized with employees, but also with unemployed women which led to the empowerment and strengthening of 'capabilities' of this target group as well as through the strong mobilization and involvement of enterprises involved in the project. A positive outcome, in AICCON's view, and an element of success in particular when it comes to strengthening capabilities of persons, has also been the integrated and systemic approach with which new models for the promotion of work-life balance were built and the variety of actors that were involved (public authorities, SMEs, social economy, researchers, community networks...). Those outcomes are the "baseline" to build a "road to impact" moving from MASP experience in the way of growing well-being and social inclusion of people involved in the project, building a systemic cultural change (moving from WLB to *Work-Life Synergy* paradigm) and creating shared value through the improvement of enterprises' strategic orientation and positioning thanks to their WLB policies.

**Elisa Vimercati, Trainer and Head of Research in Lifeed**, presented the [Lifeed New Parents program](#) which was developed in the framework of the MASP project and tested with 311 employees from nine different companies. The programme targets employed parents with children aged between 0-3. It is based on a life-based learning and transilience approach, i.e. the firm belief in the possibility – and its added value - to bring experiences/competences from one area of life such as parenthood to another (such as work). Participants taking part in the programme:

- have access to a variety of contents (multimedia, podcasts, in-depth information, etc.) on different topics around work, parenthood, care, ... to stimulate reflections;
- are encouraged to think about and answer a number of questions about the challenges of parenthood to make them become aware of the competences and resources they are able to activate throughout this period of life;
- are invited to carry out 'real-life missions' which also enable them to discover and further develop their capacities and skills;
- have the occasion to get in touch – online and offline - with a whole community of platform users;
- have access to other spaces and tools stimulating reflection and a greater awareness of themselves.

Participants having tested the tool reported in 74% of all cases improved soft skills. Approximately 72% of them felt a better sense of possibility, whereas approximately 66% said to experience a better synergy between professional and private life.

**Dario Peroni, Employee Life Cycle Management Coordinator in Bayer S.p.A.**, presented the Hello Parents! program which was developed together with Lifeed in the framework of the MASP project. The program targets Bayer employees who become parents, aiming to support them in this very special moment in life both from a personal and professional point of view.

There are 3 main leverages of the Hello Parents! program:

- Stay connected: to keep parents on leave connected to the company, giving them the opportunity to access into the Bayer system and collect all the updates and information they would like to;
- Engage: several initiatives to keep the new parents onboard with a Hello Parents kit with Bayer products to celebrate the baby birth and then re-onboarding programs and flexibility opportunities to manage personal and professional tasks;
- Develop: an internal mentoring program to provide on a voluntary base guidance and support from one colleague who has already experienced similar challenges to another.

The Lifeed platform has been an essential part of the “Develop” area and it has been ranking as the most interesting initiative among the ones offered through the Hello Parents! Package. 30% of the Bayer employees invited to join have successfully completed the Master.

**Mara Ghidorzi, Afol Metropolitana (Employment Agency in the Milan Area)**, presented the [Digital Platform for Unemployed Women](#) developed by Afolmet following elements of the MAAM/Lifeed model.

The platform is one element of an integrated programme for unemployed women consisting of several steps:

Step 1: a skills mapping and skills training which takes into account oft skills acquired amongst others in a rather informal learning context (including parenthood) – including implementation skills, cognitive/creative skills, emotional skills and social/relational skills;

Step 2: tools and suggestions for a more functional job search, and

Step 3: legal advice regarding eventual discriminatory practices by (potential) employers for persons finding themselves already in a job or in the period of job search.

The platform was tested in self-administration with 440 unemployed women. In addition, 40 women tested the platform as part of a personalized path of flanking measures , with the support of a PES operator.

After the development of the platform, Afol Metropolitana published a specific’ toolkit for the accompaniment of unemployed women’ targeting specifically operators of Job Centres, Employment Agencies and all services dedicated to job placement.

**Patrick Eheim, Project Manager of the MASP Project**, presents the Parental Kit, developed by the city of Milan, Afol Metropolitana and Agenzia del Lavoro Trento.

The publication – available in Italian and English - is a practical tool for mothers and fathers in employment providing information on available opportunities, local services and rights.

The publication contains:

- A section on legal references regarding maternity and parental support and on the tools for reconciling work and (family) life made available by employers;
- an overview of the opportunities and local services in the City of Milan and the Autonomous Province of Trento;
- a section illustrating structure and functioning of the MASP online platform for women seeking employment.

*Exchange with other EU initiatives/projects related to work-life balance and equal opportunities*

**Erdmuthe Klaer (REVES aisbl)**, moderator of this session, drew the attention of participants on the variety of European initiatives regarding work-life balance and equal opportunities MASP partners discovered under different EU programmes and policies.

She encouraged participants to have a look at online information about the [Parents@Work project](#), realized in the framework of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship programme of the EU. The project focuses in particular on the work of labour inspectors. The project coordinator, who had planned to take part in the panel, unfortunately had to cancel her participation.

**Teresa Jurado, Professor and Researcher at the Department of Sociology II from UNED (National University of Distance Education)**, refers to a new Spanish law which entered into force in 2021 and is considered as rather progressive compared to other European countries. This legislation entitles fathers to take a fully-paid paternity leave of 16 weeks. Jurado generally welcomes the initiative, but points to two main problems: 1. Both parents have to take the 6 compulsory weeks of their leave at the same time and the time to take turns is reduced to the 10 voluntary weeks. 2. Employers now also have their say regarding the way a men and women use their 10 voluntary weeks (full vs. part-time, etc.).

The promotion of work-life balance without a gender bias (i.e. without making 'work-balance' a 'problem' of mothers only) is at the centre of the [Men in Care \(MiC\)](#) project, led by UNED. MiC aims to contribute to the promotion of a real sharing of care responsibilities between women and men so as to avoid gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work. The project brings together NGOs, trade unions, universities and employers' organisations from 7 different countries. Through the project, UNED partners would like to encourage companies, public administration and states more in general to develop socially innovative approaches in promoting work life balance through laws or changes in organizational culture. Project activities include studies, training sessions for male employees, HR departments and trade unionists as well as the establishment of specific guidelines. A specific focus is put on the stimulation of a new leadership culture encouraging men/employees to use existing opportunities.

In her recommendations to policy-makers at EU and national level Jurado highlights the need to combine appropriate measures on paternity/maternity-leave as a non-transferable right with strong social protection schemes (high wage replacement) as well as measures promoting work adaptations without wage loss and stimulating a new organizational culture within companies and organisations.

**Valentina Caimi, AEIDL**, has been working for a number of years on another, still very much unknown and/or unused way to promote equal opportunities, including work-life balance: socially responsible public procurement. She presents the [#WeBuySocialEU](#) project, commissioned by EASME and the European Commission/DG Grow as well as a recently launched project on gender-responsive public procurement, commissioned by the European Institute for Gender Equality.

Under the existing EU directive on public procurement public authorities have a number of opportunities – but are not obliged – to integrate gender-related aspects in their procurement practices. This can be done in the pre-procurement phase (e.g. through pre-market consultations, the integration of gender-related aspects in the title and description of the tender or the reservation of contracts for enterprises facilitating work integration of women in vulnerable situations, ...), or in the tender phase as such (e.g. through the inclusion of gender elements in selection criteria, award criteria or contract performance clauses). In the framework of the #WeBuySocialEU project, some good practices of gender-responsive public procurement could be identified. Among them are the examples of

- the city of Vienna (AT): a policy setting the obligation, for all service contracts of a duration of minimum 6 months and with a minimum value of 50 000 EUR, to introduce contract performance clauses promoting women in recruitment, women in qualification, work-life balance or other structural measures and,
- the city of Toledo (ES): the example of a contract for gardening services which is a reserved contract including gender considerations in contract performance clauses (e.g. a commitment to equal treatment and to present gender-disaggregated data).

Valentina Caimi recommends policy-makers at EU and national level to further raise awareness on existing opportunities to integrate gender-related aspects in public procurement and promote capacity-building measures and technical guidance on how to do it in practice. Moreover, in her view, the lack of an integrated policy approach and its impact is still too often visible when it comes to public procurement – therefore, procurement officers should cooperate much more with departments in charge of social policies and gender equality. Also, authorities at different level should start collecting sex-disaggregated data to better understand the real needs of women. Finally, considering the fact that “good will” alone proves not to be sufficient, Caimi perceives a clear need for policy guidance in all institutions, starting from the European Commission (e.g. by introducing an obligation for at least 1% of all public procurement contracts including gender elements).

**Laura Wimmer, deputy director of the Women’s Department of the City of Vienna (AT)**, was invited to shortly present [Femcities](#), a European Alliance launched by the city of Vienna, working and exchanging on different ways to improve gender equality. Femcities brings together cities from different EU Member States, but also NGOs, researchers and other interested private actors. No fees for membership are raised in order to allow every member or partner to contribute based on his/her capacities. Usually, an annual conference is organized – given the current Covid-19-related situation, Femcities are searching for an alternative in 2021.

#### *EU and national Policy perspectives*

**Pascual Martinez**, in charge of work-life balance-related topics at **COFACE – Families Europe** introduced the final panel.

He asked **Rolf Aslaskrud Kristiansen** from EUROMASC (NO) whether policy-makers and society still under-estimate skills acquired outside formal education systems in different situations of life. What

could be done to value and use them more and therewith have a greater recognition also of parents and in particular of mothers?

Rolf Aslaksrud Kristiansen thinks that skills acquired outside formal education systems are on the way to be recognized in some countries whilst being completely neglected in others. The challenge in general is still to find a way and methods to recognize these skills and make them value. Awareness-raising is a first important step in this process. In this context, Kristiansen referred to the European Qualifications Framework which actually refers to skills acquired in a formal, non-formal and informal learning context.

Soft and transversal skills are, in Kristiansen's view, very valuable for career development. Therefore, ways have to be found to transpose parenting experiences into visible and recognizable skills just as those listed and recognized in traditional CVs.

Pascual Martinez referred to Covid-19 which had an impact in particular on women employment, as the crisis hit also and in particular sectors with a predominantly female workforce which might have more difficulties to recover than other sectors. He wondered how to avoid moving even more backwards in the post-Covid phase in which one of the ways to reintegrate women into work could be, for example, to cultivate again very much the image of women as carers (in the care sector, at home, ...) and disregard their various capacities and skills even more? Rolf Kristiansen also sees predominantly women as the real victims of covid-related company closures. In his opinion there should be a greater focus on methods and better tools to identify individual skills and competences. He also pointed to initiatives such as the [STEMSOFT project](#) which seek to integrate soft and transversal skills approaches into actions promoting employability (in this case for STEM jobs).

Asked about the suitability of traditional work-life balance thinking and related measures for women/parents in any kind of situation, **Rachele Serino – sociologist and vice-president of Basic Income Network Italy** - referred to the deep changes regarding work and welfare. The work – life/enterprise-employee relationship which still serves as a basis for many policies and actions promoting work-life balance does not exist anymore for an increasing number of persons finding themselves without employment or in precarious jobs. The instability of today's labour market and new forms of work has dissolved the boundaries between work and life. Yet, not having a stable work place all too often means not having access to services. A second problem: Work-life balance is still too often considered to be a challenge women have to deal with in the first place, which increases precariousness even more.

Serino highlighted that policies – including those focusing on work-life balance - have to consider the situation of *all* citizens. Welfare systems have to include everybody and for this to happen, problems have to be tackled from a more systemic point of view. The city of Vienna and its gender equality strategy in general are, according to Serino, a positive example and point of departure. Important in this context would be the transition from a concept of "conciliation" to a concept of real "sharing". For this to happen society has to recognise and give a stronger meaning to care and caring as an important pillar of society. Welfare institutions could stimulate this. Serino pointed to ongoing experimentation, in different parts of Europe, with minimum income as one possible instrument. Also, policy-makers should pay greater attention to new forms of organising work in a community context, developed through bottom-up processes, and promote further experimentation.

**Marina Calderone, member of the European Economic and Social Committee and President of the National Council of Labour Consultants in Italy**, deplored, as previous speakers, the immediate

perception of the topic 'work-life balance' as a matter linked to women employment. She also called for a transition from a concept of 'conciliation' to "sharing". Enterprises play in her view an important role when it comes to enabling families to share (care) responsibilities. However, much still remains to be done. In addition, the pandemic demonstrated once again the weaknesses regarding availability and quality of services. In Calderone's view, enterprises should reconsider their performance and strategies to promote flexibility. They should allow for real flexibility (going beyond mere contractual flexibility which might also imply wage loss and put additional pressure on women). According to Calderone, enterprises are aware of this – they know that they have to adopt new organisational models to overcome the crisis.

**Frances Fitzgerald, Member of the European Parliament, Vice-President of the EPP group and rapporteur of the EP report on "The gender perspective in the COVID-19 crisis and post-crisis period"**, pointed to the strong socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis on women. At the same time, the proportion of women carrying out care tasks (also in the Covid context) is 80%-90%. "We clap carers, but we do not have systems in place to value care".

The Covid-19 crisis poses, in Fitzgerald's view, a real risk of regression in equality. The MEP deplores the lack of critical voices of women who are also under-represented in Covid taskforces. During the Covid-19 crisis also less academic papers were produced by women – another sign for increasing care responsibilities the latter had to take on at home.

Fitzgerald, herself mother of three boys, sees changes particularly with regard to younger men and their attitude to a sharing of care responsibilities. Yet, in this regard she also called on policy-makers and employers not to perceive working from home as a substitute to childcare. Homeworking can offer, in her view, opportunities and added value for both family/private life and the enterprise, but has to be accompanied by services and other types of support, including measures providing incentives for a real sharing of responsibilities and tasks.

Referring to the European Recovery Plan and the Recovery and Resilience Facility with their important funds Fitzgerald called on the European Commission and other EU institutions to require Member States to ensure that national recovery plans which have to be handed in by April 2021 are 'gender-proof', including measures to promote upskilling of women, to tackle the gender pay gap, etc. Fitzgerald welcomes the EU Gender Equality Strategy and the European Commission proposal on Pay Transparency. At the same time she would like to see a "European Care Strategy", including measures such as the collection of data on care in Europe, the promotion of exchange and best practice networks, etc.

Finally, Frances Fitzgerald emphasized the need for social and cultural change, including change regarding culture in enterprises and politics of the office. She would like to see more men talking about work-life balance, care and equal opportunity-related matters -including men in leadership positions – and stronger action against stereotypes.

**Jiri Svarc, Head of Unit Social Investment Strategy, European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs**, drew the attention of participants to the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. The Plan stipulates initiatives in different policy fields and sectors (employment, skills development, anti-discrimination, etc.). The employment target is one of the key EU level targets set out by the Action Plan and includes a specific reference to halving the gender employment gap by 2030. The document also outlines initiatives to better promote work-life balance and equal opportunities. Moreover, the Action Plan foresees the involvement and key role of national and regional policy-makers.



Jiri Svarc also pointed to the European Commission Recommendation on effective active support to employment following the Covid-19 crisis (EASE) which mobilises Member States to counteract gender bias, but also to consider possibilities to recognize learning and experiences acquired outside the formal education and training system.

With regard to possibilities to mainstream work-life balance and equal opportunities into different policies and initiatives linked to the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), Jiri Svarc highlighted the references in the RRF, to the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Commission is in contact with Member States in the preparation of their national recovery and resilience plans and verifying how gender equality considerations are being mainstreamed. Jiri Svarc acknowledged that it was a challenging task.

Panellists were asked to share some examples of what they would consider priority actions.

Frances Fitzgerald would like to see good practices in enterprises and government to be given greater visibility. Moreover, she highlighted the need to encourage enterprises much more to reach out to employees and listen to their needs and situation – also when it comes to discussing the choice between telework and return to the office, avoiding the latter to become discriminatory for those which still face a number of obstacles.

Marina Calderone is in favour of more experimentation of new organisational models in enterprises (including SMEs) and new models of corporate welfare. In addition, she would like to see more and stronger action for a right to disconnect – also in a telework/smart working context.

Jiri Svarc pointed to structural problems leading to horizontal and vertical segregation on the labour market. He emphasized, for example, the necessity to explore ways to bring more women in male-dominated sectors and vice versa. Also and finally, Svarc reminded participants of the Work-Life Balance Directive which is currently being transposed in the Member States – this gives civil society still time and opportunities to influence the way the directive is implemented in the respective country.

**Giuseppina Corvino, Head of the Employment Market Unit of the City of Milan** concluded the event thanking all speakers, participants and the interpreters. She hopes the pandemic to really be taken as an opportunity by all to rethink policies and models of welfare in order to create quality work and synergies between different type of players. Three basic elements should be at the heart of policies: legislation, economic support and capacity-building, including transnational exchange such as the one experienced by MASP partners.



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