WORK-LIFE BALANCE AS A FACTOR OF GENDER EQUALITY

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What is Work-Life Balance?

• Commonly understood as the ability of partners to combine paid work and care duties in the domestic sphere
• It implies flexibility in work arrangements, right to reduced hours and maternity/parental leave for workers to care for their children. For mothers the implications are many more
• Sen’s (1992) definition of ‘functioning’
What is Work-Life Balance?

• ‘Life’ is more than care responsibilities
• It is a multidimensional experience encompassing work, leisure, education and domestic life, social engagement
• Well-being, happiness, self-esteem, self-respect, job satisfaction
• Flexibility: very important to enable choice but also can blur public/private boundaries
What to bear in mind when we think about WLB

• Transient state
• WLB is dynamic not static
• An intersectional approach helps us understand the interplay of power in work-life reconciliation but also capture the diversity of people’s situations
• Need to raise awareness among parents as to entitlements
Capability set for WLB
(Hobson, Fahlén and Takács 2011)
Converting entitlements into sense of entitlement

Source: Hobson, Fahlén and Takács (2011)

- Situated Agency
  - Resources and assets
- Conversion factors
  - Rights and social rights
  - Gender equality norms/discourses
- Workplace
  - Organizational culture

Sense of entitlement to make claims for WLB

Agency Freedom For WLB
Economic crisis and its effects on WLB

• Levelling down of gender gaps in unemployment, poverty and wages; but not progress for gender equality
• Women more affected – public sector
• Female employment in some Member States has fallen to 2005 levels
• Labour market behaviour of women has changed; more similar to that of men
Economic crisis and its effects on WLB

• New buffer jobs: young men, women on temporary contracts and migrant workers
• Cuts in child care and long-term care increase care burden for families – Gendered impact
• Silver lining: It can lead to radical change
Risks for Gender Equality

• Wage freezes, cuts and downsizing in public sector
• Cuts and tightening of eligibility criteria for benefits (care-related, housing etc.)
• Not all Member States are equally affected
• Gender mainstreaming not implemented in response to the crisis. Fiscal consolidation packages or recovery measures not assessed as to their gendered effects
Holistic approach to welfare policies

- Cuts in one area of welfare state provision lead to increase of expenditure in other areas.
- Housing: Homelessness increases in parallel with unemployment.
- Health: Evidence of deteriorating health and mental health (mainly for the poor but not only).
- Unemployment affects different social strata and job categories.
New Ideas on Fatherhood

• Not clear understanding from EU legislation of what constitutes a ‘good father’
• Need for institutional and legislative support for them to also be carers
• Need for cultural shift reflected in both workplace and home
ATTITUDES

POLICY

BEHAVIOUR

ATTITUDES
New trends and policy concerns

• Growing evidence that WLB increases family well-being
• Rising dissatisfaction of European citizens with those in positions of power - Protests
• Strengthening of civil society
• Return to less consumerist and more solidarity-based values
• Rising depression (30 million people in Europe)
• Increase in violence against women and migrants
• Racism on the increase
WLB and Gender Equality: Role of the EU in light of Europe 2020

- Recession undermines EU achievements in gender equality.
- Gendered effects of austerity measures have to be assessed before their implementation.
- More freedom for people to decide on the way they want to share work and care.
- Parental leave is the way forward combined with services and cash benefits.
- No cuts in existing maternity leave arrangements.
- Directives preferable to Recommendations and best practices.
- Re-establishing public gender equality institutions in the Member States in which they have been abolished.
“Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity, it is an act of justice”.

Nelson Mandela

“The community which has neither poverty nor riches will always have the noblest principles”.

Plato

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Our greatest glory is not in never falling but in rising every time we fall

Confucius
Thank you