

## ETG 4 LIVING DOCUMENT

### WORK-LIFE-BALANCE IN COMPANIES AND ORGANISATIONS

#### DRAFT 4

## 1. THE CHALLENGE

Flexibility of work organisation has increased significantly in recent years. However, it is often the needs of enterprises with respect to the production process and the competitiveness of the markets that drive this flexibility. Consequently, it does not necessarily contribute to a better reconciliation of work and family life. There is by far not enough understanding of employers that flexible, family-friendly work organisation can enhance the overall performance of a company.

The dilemma of reconciliation is mainly perceived as a “women’s problem” and this is being reflected by female employment patterns. 37 % of women with care responsibilities for children are working part-time<sup>1</sup>, compared to 17% of women with no such responsibilities and 6.5% of men<sup>2</sup>. Whilst this choice is predominantly a voluntary decision, a growing number of women have no other option. Particularly those with no or low qualifications can often only find part-time employment in female dominated occupations such as retail or personal services where employers are increasingly organising jobs on a part-time basis in many countries. But, whether by choice or not, even if those reduced working hours help to cope with a job and various care and family tasks, there is a price to pay. Part-timers have fewer opportunities for training and career progression, lower salary levels and reduced access to supplementary payments and social protection benefits<sup>3</sup>.

Striking a balance between work and family responsibilities is an enormous challenge for people regularly working long full-time hours, overtime or atypical hours. Those patterns have been increasing during the last decade<sup>4</sup>. In all EU (15) Member States, except for Portugal, for more than 30% of all employees working on Saturdays is the norm and not an occasional exception; figures for women are only slightly lower than those for men. Whilst with 33% night work remains a male domain, evening work has also become a normal pattern for 20% of female workers in the EU. It is important to note that, to make a living, people working highly flexible and atypical hours tend to hold more than one of those often precarious jobs.

## 2. EQUAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO IMPROVING THE WORK-LIFE-BALANCE OF WOMEN AND MEN IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS

A substantial cluster of EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) and Transnational Partnerships (TPs) has developed good practices that made a visible difference for women and also for men who want both: gainful employment and career and a more satisfying family and personal life. The most significant changes for both employees and employers were enabled through the introduction of comprehensive work-life-balance policies in companies and organisations.

Before embarking on testing a multitude of programmes in public and private organisations the DPs had to [bring the relevant key players on board](#), which required to prepare business cases to

<sup>1</sup> Employment in Europe 2003: Part-time arrangements vary greatly between Member States. On average, part-time work ranges from below 20 hours per week in most Member States (EU15) to over 22 in the Nordic countries, Luxemburg and the UK. Amongst part-timers women work on average longer hours than men, except in Southern Member States and Poland. In the new Member States the employment shares of part-time workers are only 10% compared to 17% in the EU 15 and part-timers tend to work rather long than short hours.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., % of total male employment.

<sup>3</sup> European Working Conditions Observatory: [First Topic Report on new European working conditions](#).

<sup>4</sup> Rachel Silvera: *Articuler vie familiale et vie professionnelle en Europe*, 2002

convince employers, social partners, local and regional authorities or employment offices of the validity of their approach.

The work-life-balance schemes as such were often linking two or more avenues to helping employees reconcile work and private life, including:

- [Increasing flexibility of working time](#) ;
- [Tackling disadvantages of flexibility](#);
- [Meeting care and other family needs](#); and
- [Turning work-life-balance strategies into a sustainable process of cultural change](#).

Some DPs have embedded their new models of family-friendly work organisation in companies and organisations into [territorial approaches](#) aimed at improving the work-life-balance of the population in a local or regional area.

## 2.1. PREPARING THE GROUND

During the early stages of their activities, DPs were busy laying a solid foundation for their multi-faceted activities. Targeting and convincing employers was on the top of the agenda, as was the widening of their own knowledge base concerning the issue of work-life-balance.

### 2.1.1. Developing business cases for work-life-balance

Almost all DPs assessed existing research and/or carried out new studies on flexible, family-friendly work organisation. Exploring the approaches of pioneers in this field helped to breed new ideas and to assemble a number of business cases that were later used to convince employers.

The Irish DP Work-Life-Balance Network (WLBN) is working to improve the reconciliation of work and family life for both women and men. Cooperating with six large companies, both public and private, and public authorities it is geared to integrate a gender dimension in their personnel policies and to bring about organisational change in terms of diversity. At the base of the DP's reflection and research activities were the great work-life challenges that organisations and employees are facing today. For the companies these are the changing working environment through globalisation, increasing competition and technological changes, and managing this process of change. For employees the challenges are related to heavy workloads, organisational cultures that do not support the reconciliation of career and private life, non-supportive management behaviour, gaps between policies and practice and loss of benefits. At the individual and family level the biggest challenge are care responsibilities for children and other dependents, which a growing number of people, the so-called sandwich generation, are carrying out simultaneously. The interface of gainful work and family duties is marked by role over load and stress.

*In order to establish the business case for work-life-balance, WLBN carried out an extensive literature review of what is happening in the US, Canada and the UK, and also in Ireland. In addition, it established statistics in support of the issue and how it impacts on the bottom line, i.e. the profit margin of a company. In reality, it is this argument, which provides the case whether or not an employer will consider supporting a work-life-balance programme and the same holds true for unions. If the workforces' needs are considered in the strategic thinking and planning of the organisation – the outcome according to research shows that productivity is higher; absenteeism is lower; etc. and hence the "real" savings to the company are manifested in retaining a higher skilled, productive staff. WLBN has collated the data<sup>5</sup> below and presents this information as part of its argument. Some examples:*

*An Irish study<sup>6</sup> shows that 86% of employees at senior management level work longer than the standard hours on a regular basis and 70% do not have access to paid overtime or time in lieu. The introduction of flexible work arrangements yielded a number of benefits, including:*

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5 All business cases can be found in the DPs Work Life Balance Diagnostic Pack, 2004

6 'Off the Treadmill', National Framework Committee, (Eileen Drew 2002)

- *Employee satisfaction: + 85%*
- *Attracting/retaining employees: +74%*
- *Productivity: + 58%*
- *Reduced labour turnover: – 55%*
- *Reduced absenteeism: – 50%*
- *Improved business results: +48%*

*A report from the UK Department of Trade and Industry indicates that stress related absences cost the UK industry £7.1million per week. The report is also emphasising that if, thanks to more flexible working arrangements, just 10% of non-working mothers returned to work after maternity leave, employers would save £39million per year. Examples of good practices demonstrate that, for instance, Xerox UK saved £1million over the last 5 years due to its pioneering work-life-balance programme. British Telecom reports savings of hundreds of thousands in recruitment, retention and development costs and more than £200million in accommodation<sup>7</sup>. The same research points out that people would prefer flexibility in their work practices as opposed to a £1000 salary increase.*

*The statistics collected and presented by the DP formed another element of the arguments to convince employers of the crucial relevance of the female potential in Ireland.*

- *Female employment participation has increased by 15% since 1994;*
- *Female labour market participation is at the EU average of 56%; Female participation in the 25-29 age group is 80%;*
- *Ireland's target is 60% by 2010 under the Lisbon process;*
- *Labour force grew from 1 million to 1.6 million in the last ten years;*
- *Female participation grew by 140% between 1971 and 2001 while male participation grew only by 40% over the same period;*
- *ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) estimates economic growth of 4-5% per year until the end of the decade;*
- *FAS (The National Authority for Vocational Training and Education) estimate the growth will be in skilled areas;*
- *50% of women progressing to 3<sup>rd</sup> level education while only 40% of men do;*
- *Fertility rates are dropping which has economic and social consequences.*

#### [IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

When trying to bring companies on board, German DPs could benefit from a recent study<sup>8</sup> commissioned by the National Ministry for Family, Youth, Senior Citizens and Women.

*A major European business consultancy, undertook a cost-benefit analysis of flexible work organisation and other support measures for parents in a representative sample of enterprises. Results show that, on average, a basic "family package" (counselling for parents, individualised flexi-time, telework and childcare) helped each company to save costs of up to several 100.000 € . Model calculations based on the loss incurred through staff turn-over and absenteeism on the one hand, and on the cost of the "family package" on the other, demonstrate that on average a return on investment of at least 25% can be generated. Also, using outstanding examples from other companies and the results of gender equality audits and labels help helped to gain the commitment of employers.*

#### [DE-EA-35821 - GenderNet](#)

In its preliminary research<sup>9</sup> the French DP Rennes égalité des chances has assembled a number of arguments to convince employers that, given the emerging skills gap, recruiting women is increasingly becoming a must.

<sup>7</sup> This refers to access issues for people with disabilities where in the UK an employer is obliged to accommodate a person with a disability to the maximum of £200 per person. It also refers to making provisions for absent employees who had they been given the opportunity to work flexibly or accommodated in terms of their work life balance needs may not have been absent.

<sup>8</sup> Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend/Prognos: Betriebswirtschaftliche Effekte familienfreundlicher Maßnahmen – Kosten-Nutzen-Analyse, 2003

*The report is pointing out that women represent a larger potential of untapped human resources than men and that they are also better prepared for tasks in the service sector, where job creation predominantly occurs. Another important point is related to the waste of public and company resources that have been invested in women's education and training and don't produce a reasonable return, because many women drop out of the labour market due to the lack of family-friendly work arrangements. The fact that, in general, women are today better educated than men adds weight to the argument.*

*Research indicates that a successful work-life-balance of employees has an influence on productivity. Absenteeism, turn-over and difficulties to recruit and retain qualified staff are often the result of the reconciliation dilemma. A recent study<sup>10</sup> emphasises that "work satisfaction is strictly proportional to income and level of education". This means that the least qualified part of the workforce is increasing its job mobility and that companies need strategies to attract and retain workers.*

[FR BRE 200110587 - Rennes égalité des temps](#)

### **2.1.2. Bringing employers and unions on board**

Equipped with business arguments and good practice cases the DPs started out to contact companies to win them over as pro-active partners of their activities. Led by a local government, the Spanish DP @CCEDE is cooperating with an Employer Organisation and a Trade Union. Despite of the active role of those partners in identifying and approaching the companies, it was not always easy to build up a sustainable relationship with the management of the targeted companies.

*As a first step the DP developed guidelines for interviews with employers and produced information sheets that are presenting the issue in an attractive way. Companies were contacted via telephone and then in-depth interviews were led with HR managers. The aim of this exercise was to get an overview of the work-life- balance measures already in place and to launch a dialogue on developing and implementing the most appropriate flexible work arrangements in each company. Hurdles to setting up this type of personnel policy were discussed and the needs of each enterprise were assessed. At the end of this explorative process, 709 companies agreed to analyse the situation of their women employees concerning recruitment, promotion and wage differences.*

*As a result, the HR managers started to develop a vision of reconciliation policies they could implement in their companies. The relation established through the DP's approach, facilitated direct feedback from HR managers during the implementation of those measures. Moreover, the approach produced a "Domino" effect: it raised the awareness of other companies operating in the same area.*

[ES-ES535 @CCEDE](#)

The Irish WLBN DP developed strategies to secure the backing of the top level decision-makers in its six partner organisations. Active support from the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC) proved to be a real asset.

*Executive Breakfast Briefings for senior management proved very successful in bedding down management support for work-life-balance in general and the project in particular. The events were hosted by IBEC, which increased their attractiveness and credibility. High profile speakers provided the opportunity to learn more about the importance of work-life-balance programmes to business and also at a personal level. Those lectures were also exploring the impact on companies that neglect to address the reconciliation of working and private life.*

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<sup>9</sup> Michelle Kergoat: Evaluation ex-ante: Constat de départ et exposé de la problématique : de l'égalité professionnelle des femmes et des hommes à l'égalité dans les usages du temps, rapport provisoire d'évaluation, 2002, Rennes

<sup>10</sup> Dares, 2004 : La place du travail dans l'identité des personnes en emploi, Premières Synthèses Informations, janvier 2004, n° 01.1

*The events were organised as closed sessions, specifically for senior managers in Dublin Bus, An Post, eircom (Irish Telecom), Dublin City Council, the Office of the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commissioners and Iarnród Éireann (Irish Railways). The “peer pressure” element arising resulted in a 89% participation rate.*

*It is important to note that the commitment of senior management kept growing over time, due to the project’s internal awareness raising activities. This included, for instance, on-going briefings held with senior management in the six participating organisations. Moreover, WLBN was engaged in a PR campaign prior to work life balance Day on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2004 which attracted a lot of media attention and had repercussions on top players.*

#### [IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

The case of the French DP Cityctac shows that winning the commitment of the top is not always a guarantee for on-going support by the key people in an organisation. The DP aimed to develop family-friendly working arrangements that enable better reconciliation of work and private life, particularly for women and men working in mass distribution. Led by Algora, a provider of open and distance learning, Cityctac cooperated with a business creation support centre (Boutique de Gestion) and Monoprix, a major super market chain, which is part of the Galeries Lafayette Group.

*The get the ball rolling Cityctac went straight to the top. The Board of Directors at Galeries Lafayette was very interested in the project and –orally – gave the green light to experiment work-life-balance programmes in three supermarkets located in Nîmes, Boulogne and Lille. The regional sales directors and human resources managers in the individual stores were less convinced. But thanks to on-going awareness raising pilot schemes were eventually designed and agreed with the human resources managers in the three locations.*

*Due to Monoprix’s internal mobility policy, managers of local stores are often being moved, which turned out to be a problem for the DP. During the two years of its operation the project had to cooperate with three different directors of human resources. Whilst the first was quite enthusiastic about the pilots and saw them clearly as a contribution to the company’s goal of sustainable development, his successors were rather sceptical. For the DP this meant a difficult process to (re)convincing key players and (re)negotiating the activities. By contrast, the pilots were welcomed and supported by the shop stewards and work councils.*

#### [FR-NAT-2001-10674 Cityctac-tactic](#)

The situation was much easier for the Equilibre DP, which is also working in France. This DP was initiated and led by a large private enterprise, the ACCOR Group.

*When a company itself creates a European project, there must be good reasons for taking this challenge. In the case of ACCOR it was the aim to reduce staff turn-over in the IBIS hotels which are part of the group and to attract qualified women and men to various positions in that hotel chain. This commitment turned out to be a major driving force to keep the dynamic all along the project. DP leadership by the company itself also helped to involve middle management, which is the most important hierarchy level when it comes to triggering change in this economical sector.*

*The strategy of the DP was to first experiment work-life-balance schemes in pilot sites throughout France. It assumed that it would have been a mistake to try to communicate largely BEFORE having results to show. Therefore, at this stage, only the management and staff from the pilot sites were directly involved in the project.*

*Eventually, it became clear, that, in this specific context, focusing on work-life balance and not on gender equality as the main objective was an important strategic choice. Firstly, hotel and catering is not a sector where women suffer gender specific discrimination: both female and male employees have to cope with atypical working hours. Secondly, addressing the issue of gender disparities (caused by the uneven distribution of family tasks) through improving the work-life-balance was a way of making*



*men feel involved as well as women. In this sector, both would not think that this only is a woman' issue !*

*In the end the work-life-balance project proved to be a good incentive to explicitly address gender equality at a later stage. Another hotel brand of the ACCOR group, Formule 1 / Etap Hotels, just started a project on career development for women!*

[FR-NAT-2001-10609 Equilibre](#)

In most cases DPs succeeded to convince shop stewards and work councils, and also regional or even national trade unions to become partners or to support their aims and activities. The WLBN DP in Ireland, for instance, took account of the fact that there is a substantial gap in knowledge regarding what is meant by work-life-balance and therefore developed a short awareness raising and training programme for shop stewards, in partnership with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU).

*This session, which outlines equality, diversity and work- life-balance has been integrated onto every shop stewards training course. The 3-day course focuses on:*

- *Role of Trade Unions in the workplace;*
- *Changing Concepts in industrial relations;*
- *Partnership at the level of the Enterprise;*
- *Employment Law;*
- *Negotiation skills for shop stewards;*
- *Communications training;*
- *Equality, diversity and work-live-balance training;*
- *Globalisation and trade unions.*

*So far three courses have been delivered on behalf of ICTU. In addition, the Technical Electrical and Engineering Union (TEEU), the largest craft, manufacturing and engineering union in Ireland has approached WLBN to deliver the course on their shop stewards training, which has happened several times. The coverage and scope of this training means that a number of participants in a variety of companies and sectors will have been exposed to equality, diversity and work- life-balance training. It is important to note that this session on w-l-b has now been established as a core part of the curriculum for shop stewards training.*

[IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

### **2.1.3. Identifying the needs of employees and employers**

To design work-life-balance programmes that are benefiting both employees and employers most DPs were undertaking company and/or sector specific surveys. Mostly, this included an analysis of existing reconciliation policies and a needs assessment for both workers and companies.

The survey of the Equilibre DP in France focussed on the hotel and catering sector where flexibility of working hours is a must. Yet, even if the employees of the sector are aware of this necessity and have accepted that their jobs are outside of the "9 to 5-bracket", ACCOR, the lead partner of the DP, is keen to gain a better understanding of the needs of its employees and to track good ideas for reconciliation policies..

*The survey was focusing on a large target group: employees of the hotel and catering sector, but also those who are not yet active in this sector, namely trainees and jobseekers. The study was conducted by a neutral and well-known research institute, that led in-depth interviews with 210 people in five pilot regions in France. Those regions were chosen for their special training and employment context regarding hotel and catering. For instance, one of the selected regions has low unemployment and it is difficult to recruit staff; another industrial region was targeted to address low mobility rates, a third is a tourist region with high numbers of seasonal jobs etc.*

*Published at the end of 2003, the results showed that the hotel and catering sector is being appreciated for the quality of human relations, the dynamism and diversity of work, and its possibilities of team work and work autonomy. Respondents classified the*

ACCOR Group and Courtepaille (a restaurant chain and another DP partner) as employers with good training and career opportunities.

On the other hand, compared to other economic sectors, wages are only low to medium level, which requires employees to look for affordable housing. This in turn often results in the fact, that people live in city districts that are far away from their places of work and need much time to commute. A job in this sector means also that an employee never has the same rhythm than « the others », i.e. the partner, the kids or friends and family. The choice to have children is a real problem, if women (and men) want to become managers. However, the interviewees think that the existing situation can be improved, in particular through:

- Management: good relationships and ability to train employees on the job;
- Time management: improving working time arrangements;
- Life time capital: an idea that would allow working time flexibility on a long term basis;
- Income situation: incentives and better wages;
- Training for low qualified employees;
- Better career development for women;
- Accreditation of prior learning;
- Better solutions to childcare, transportation and housing;

The DP considers the process of the survey itself as a very important first step to make a large number of people aware of the work-life- balance problems and to kick-off reflection about what can be done.

#### [FR-NAT-2001-10609 Equilibre](#)

The French Cityctac DP is addressing four key themes that are directly or indirectly interlinked: gender equality, the use of time, new information and communication technologies (ICT) and training. The approach is based on the results of recent research<sup>11</sup> indicating that women and men are experiencing time in a different way. Whereas for men time is a “monolithic” stream, it rather appears as multi-faceted and “kaleidoscopic” for women, who have to manage different roles at the same time. The time constraints of those different roles are often a serious obstacle to women’s career development and to access vocational training. For the DP, this is clearly the main reason of inequality between women and men.

Cityctac is a multi-regional project and its activities are taking place in seven cities: Paris, Boulogne, Nancy, Le Havre, Nîmes, Besançon, and Rennes. In all those locations the DP is running micro-projects of a different nature and targeting different groups of women and men. In some cases the focus is on digital literacy and ICT training, in others on female business creators, women home helpers or employees of one of the country’s largest super market chain. The dilemma of reconciling work and private life of women politicians is another component. During the early stages of project, samples representing all those groups received a questionnaire, developed by the DP. They could complete it as a paper exercise or fill in an electronic version of the survey on the Internet. In total, 365 people participated, of which 81% were women.

*Amongst the broad variety of results<sup>12</sup> reflecting the four key themes of the DP and its different areas of activity, some are particularly relevant to work-life-balance. In general, both women and men feel to be always lacking time (70% of respondents). But more women (63%) than men (51%) are feeling under time pressure, especially on week ends and off-days. Unsurprisingly, more women than men are working part time (24% as compared to 7%). The part-timers in the sample are mainly supermarket cashiers and home helpers, and mostly their working time arrangements are imposed by the employers. Only 2.8% of the women and 1.5% of the men have explicitly opted for part-time work to raise their children.*

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11 Dominique Meda : Le temps des femmes, 2002, Cristina Lunghi – Eyrolles : « Et si les femmes réinventaient le travail », 2001

12 Cityctac Tactic: Synthèse de l’enquête Cityctac- Tactic : Articulation des temps de vie professionnelle et familiale, Janvier 2004

*Despite of the 35-hours-working week in France many workers and employees are working more the 42 hours. Over 90% of the supermarket employees work atypical hours and 82% report that this often includes the weekend. Also, the repetitiveness and intensive pressure at work is felt to be increasing the hardships of the working day. Most women in the sample are daily spending more than one hour to commute from home to work. For the supermarket employees in the Paris agglomeration this amounts to a significantly longer time.*

*The survey reveals that schedules of training programmes are usually imposed by the training providers and/or the companies and that flexible and e-learning arrangements are particularly appreciated by women.*

*A special section of the questionnaire was dedicated to new services that could alleviate the daily battle against time. Participants were offered a choice of 13 different possibilities, including:*

- *Detailed information on transportation and traffic;*
- *Home delivery of goods instead of investing time in shopping;*
- *Sales and service points in the workplace, providing newspapers, groceries, and also hairdressing or handling medical prescriptions on request;*
- *Emergency childcare;*
- *Ironing, mending etc. service in the workplace;*
- *Transport by request, particularly for those working atypical hours (at night, very early mornings, weekend);*
- *After-school care and related activities for children;*
- *Car sharing;*
- *Company based childcare;*
- *Car wash and maintenance in the work place;*
- *Extension of service hours in childcare centres.*

*For the supermarket employees reliable information on traffic and transportation in real time is on top of the list (32%), closely followed by the various services provided either at home or in the workplace that would help to save substantial amounts of time. Everything around cars appears of much less importance, which shows that the majority of that group must rely on public transport.*

[FR-NAT-2001-10674 Cityctac-tactic](#)

In its preliminary research the @CCEDE DP, operating the Red Local Consortium, a local network for reconciliation in the Madrid region, combined a literature review on flexible work arrangements in companies, involving the local, regional, national and European level, with a study analysing the situation of workers and the reconciliation policies of local enterprises.

*Focusing on local companies, and using of sample of 218 workers (118 men and 100 women), the DP carried out quantitative and qualitative research to identify the needs of women and men within Red Local's area of operation. The study also surveyed the existing services supporting reconciliation and their capacity to satisfy the needs of male and female workers. The results reveal that the main problem is not the lack of services, but the "reconciliation costs", which must be met by the workers themselves in order to care for children or other dependents. There are clearly not enough affordable services, and, in general, the cost of care services is high compared to the income of working mothers.*

*Another part of the research screened the existing provision of work-life-balance arrangements in the local companies. It was found that only 84 workers living within the Red Local area knew that such schemes can exist. Except for some good practices related to flexibility that were found in private sector SMEs located in Corredor del Henares, the outcomes showed a lack of company policies providing flexible family-friendly working time arrangements. The DP argues that this result is indicating that family obligations can become a factor of exclusion, i.e. personnel policies tend to discriminate against people with care responsibility when it comes to recruitment, training and promotion.*



Finally, the study presents a plan to implement innovative actions for reconciliation and flexible working conditions in the territory. It concludes that two major steps must be taken if gender equality is to seriously meant to become a reality:

- Increasing the time which women and men can devote to domestic tasks and care for dependent persons, leisure time and participation in cultural, social and political life.
- Transferring a larger proportion of childcare and care of elderly and sick people to the public sphere. In this way, part of the unpaid “reproduction” work would become productive, paid work, which, in turn, would create qualified jobs and professional careers for many women.

[ES-ES535 @CCEDE](#)

Whilst analysing the needs of employees and employers, the French DP based in Rennes has also been looking into the situation of care and family services:

*The DP surveyed the existing care services provision in and around the City of Rennes and at the same time explored possibilities of creating new and extending existing services.*

*In addition, two studies identified the needs of two groups of people with particular difficulties to reconcile gainful employment and private life: managers (34 women and 7 men) and the cleaning staff of Rennes’ municipal buildings (30 women and 7 men). The outcomes show that for both groups the difficulties to strike a work-life-balance are depending on household and living arrangements. The largest difficulties were encountered by lone mothers and women with small children. In couples, the male breadwinner model is being visibly dismantled, even if the unpaid work at home is not shared on an equal basis between women and men. Women are considering to reduce their working hours with the arrival of a child, but they never intend to give up gainful employment.*

*Women managers described long working hours and high stress levels as one of the big obstacles to a satisfying work-life-balance. For the cleaning staff physical exhaustion and broken work days were the biggest problem.*

*All women and men covered by the survey expressed their desire to spend more time with their children. Mothers feel exposed to a permanent pressure of competing demands on their time. Whilst priority is given to the job, the children and partner, domestic work is perceived as a cumbersome minor priority. Time spent with the extended family and friends, being involved in associations or cultural life is marginal, and there is almost nothing left in terms of personal time. Despite of the feeling to be permanently lacking time, the female interviewees perceived their own time management as quite performing. They value their different activities, tend to play down the difficulties and have learned to postpone what cannot be done at the moment. Women with children have developed an even more rigorous management of their different live times, which is immediately threatened if unexpected challenges or emergencies occur.*

*The third research project of this DP is assessing the constraints and needs of 40 enterprises in terms of new flexible work organisation. Preliminary results indicate that:*

- The companies are not aware of the question of articulating life times: the managers are not informed about the issue because the employees don’t complain and there are no formal demands.
- French companies believe that they are already making a big effort when complying with the law stipulating the 35-hours-week.
- Companies don’t consider reconciliation of life times as a responsibility of economic players.

[FR BRE 200110587 - Rennes égalité des temps](#)

In Italy, Auchan, a company with atypical working hours, which is a partner in the territorial network created by a DP named Con-tempo carried out a study with the aim to better understand the reconciliation needs of its employees. A working group, assembling representatives of management and trade unions and also external experts, collected and analysed personnel data, carried out a questionnaire exercise, and led individual interviews and focus groups.

*Unsurprisingly, the results showed that many workers have problems to balance work and family life. In particular, interviewees emphasised the need for actions that take account of peoples' full life cycle, i.e. addressing the issue of childcare is not enough, the problems of people with care responsibilities for ageing parents and relatives require much more attention. To accommodate all work-life-balance needs the working group proposed to consider the establishment of "competence point" inside the company as a promising concept to enable more gender and diversity oriented management practices. The idea met with the interest of the employer and the working group set out to define the tasks and to explore the financial viability of the intended new infrastructure. Auchan's San Rocco al Porto point of sales was chosen as a test site, and the management of that store as well as the trade union representatives, external consultants, and the Equality Officer of the Lodi Province negotiated a practical solution that would accommodate the needs of both the employer and the employees. At the same time, seminars were organised to discuss the idea with relevant key actors and to gain their support. Specific training courses were designed and implemented to prepare the future staff of the "competence point" for their work.*

[IT-G-LOM-0016 Con-tempo](#)

The survey of the WLBN partnership explicitly referred to the definition of work-life-balance arrangements as outlined in a recent Irish study<sup>13</sup>, which described relevant policies as formal and informal arrangements that support and assist employees in managing the dual responsibility of work and non-work life. The DP emphasises that those arrangements must also include the needs of individuals who do not have any specific family or caring responsibilities, but who also seek a better balance between their work and private life. Employers who implement such arrangements recognise that there should be a healthy balance between an individual's work and their life outside of work, and further that satisfaction outside work may enhance employees' contributions to work.<sup>14</sup> Such policies are consistent with contemporary employment legislation specifically in the areas of equality and health and safety, and reflect the emerging work practices in Europe, which support men, as well as women, working in environments that enable having more time for themselves, their own activities and (where relevant) their children and families.

The WLBN survey also defined objectives for the implementation of a strategy and action plan within four of its six partner organisations that carried out workplace audits in the framework of EQUAL.

*The process involved a number of stages and was geared to create and enhance ownership of the relevant players in each participating organisation. The working structure of the DP, which consists of a Management Steering Group and so-called WLB Groups, representing management and unions in each organisation proved to be an asset to the DP's participative approach. For instance, tendering and selecting independent equality auditors, researchers and/or HR consultants was played back and forth between the two levels and resulted in establishing a team of experts that suited the needs of everybody involved. In cooperation with the WLB Groups, the team designed a specific survey for each company or administration. In addition, a communication strategy was developed to ensure full participation at both DP and company level.*

*After piloting and amending every survey, the next step involved qualitative and quantitative data collection. It is important to note that the methodology in each case was different. The*

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<sup>13</sup> Drew, Humphreys and Candy: Off the Treadmill. Achieving Work/Life Balance. National Framework Committee for Family Friendly Policies. 2003

<sup>14</sup> Kodz, Harper and Dench, 2002, quoted in Off the Treadmill, Achieving Work/Life Balance. National Framework Committee for family Friendly Policies. 2004.

following two examples show the different approaches and methodologies that have been used to carry out the work-life-balance audits in the organisations.

### **Iarnrod Eireann**

The aim of the survey is to:

- Find out the level of awareness of WLB issues within Irish Rail;
- Find out if there is a gap between the relevant policies and procedures and what is actually happening in practice within the company;
- Find out what problems staff are experiencing in relation to WLB;
- Identify possible solutions to these problems.

This information can then be used to gauge how integrated WLB is into the overall arrangements in Irish Rail. The survey was designed and administered by a joint union/management group with the help of an independent researcher. Sixteen interviewers / survey administrators were recruited and trained internally to build capacity enabling the organisation to repeat this exercise in the future.

Preliminary results show that there is a lack of awareness with regard to the understanding of work-life-balance, with only 46% of respondents indicating that they knew where to access the relevant information. Iarnrod Eireann intends to pilot an e-working programme, since a number of employees had said that they would like the opportunity to work more flexibly and avoid travel time and traffic congestion.

### **eircom**

A detailed electronic questionnaire was issued to a stratified random sample of employees within eircom. The sample of 2,000 employees reflected the make-up of the organisation's human resources. People were invited by e-mail to complete the questionnaire anonymously and return it through an independent IT company to the consultants. The exercise, which was designed for completion in circa 20 minutes, was used to gather data on the experiences, attitudes and perceptions of staff. A total of 1,297 completed questionnaires were returned representing a response rate of two thirds (65%) of the survey population. Besides personal details, the following topics were covered:

- Work details (type and place of employment);
- Working environment and conditions (satisfaction in relation to work environment and conditions);
- Work-life-balance experiences and perceptions;
- Training and career development experiences;
- Equality and managing diversity (including the nine equality grounds<sup>15</sup>).

In addition to the questionnaire, focus group discussions were conducted with ten groups as a means of gathering additional qualitative data on the experiences within eircom. The focus groups sought information on the attitudes, perceptions, experiences and feelings of staff in relation to the management of work-life-balance. The groups were representative of key occupations, social and business groupings, grades, and geographical locations of the company. Each group was conducted with the same format and discussions focused on:

- Positive experiences of WLB;
- Difficulties in managing WLB;
- WLB arrangements sought by staff.

The emerging results demonstrate that where WLB operates it is due to the capacity of the local manager to support their staff. However, the focus groups also indicated the lack of available and clear information and direction on WLB to staff and managers.

The groups reveal eircom as a place where competing cultures co-exist. These mirror the company's development process from a public to a private enterprise. There is a mix of public and private sector ethics and behaviours; of hierarchy and technological freedom; and also a culture of privatisation and shareholders. Yet, as part of its history as public sector organisation, eircom provides a large variety of reconciliation policies ranging from part-time,

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<sup>15</sup> The nine grounds as defined in the Employment Equality Act, 1998 are gender, marital status, family status, age, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability and membership of the Travelling community.

*reduced and flexible working hours for parents through maternity and parental leave and other leave schemes to telework. Managers reported that there are too many cultures within eircom and that they are unaware of the company policies and procedures with regard to work-life-balance, although they do admit knowing they are available on the intranet. But there are also centres of excellence where local managers see the value of integrating WLB in their areas of responsibility. What emerged from the focus groups is that WLB has to be seen in the context of an organisation that has gone through many iterations of change in the past twenty years and that WLB presents eircom with an opportunity to design work around targets that benefit both organisation and staff.*

[IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

## **2.2. TESTING WORK-LIFE-BALANCE POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

Building on the results of their surveys and research projects, the DPs proceeded to implementing a large variety of work-life-balance programmes, mostly as pilot schemes in both public and private sector organisations. In some cases they were involving a whole territory, thus reaching far beyond individual companies or institutions.

### **2.2.1. Increasing the flexibility of working time**

In general, DPs were testing a variety of models in parallel to find out which of them were most suitable for different categories of staff, but also for the different and changing of needs of companies and organisations. Examples include formula involving full-time hours over four days, periodic home working and telework, combinations of long and short days and working longer hours over a defined period to accrue non-working blocks of time. Those banked hours could then be used during schools holidays or family emergencies. Results were very satisfying, especially for female employees. Mothers appreciated the general reduction of stress and also the opportunity to better articulate working time and childcare provision and to spend more quality time with their children and partners. Employers came to recognise that both job performance and productivity increased and that they were able to attract groups of people as employees that before had been unable to take up gainful employment.

#### **2.2.1.1. Specific programmes for people with care responsibilities**

EQUAL DPs were very aware that the implications of increasing flexibility could result in a two-track system at the workplace, with men working full-time on the fast track and building a career and women working part-time or flexi-time on the slow track with no or only few career perspectives. To avoid that pattern DPs tried to ensure that people are not penalised by taking on flexible working. From the beginning, they emphasised that even if the new working time arrangements were particularly attractive to women with care responsibilities for children and other dependants, they should not be labelled as “women-only programmes”, but address both women and men.

The French DP that worked with food industry employers in Brittany and addressed the problems of employers and job seekers with care responsibilities, was therefore targeting young parents and not just mothers. The companies are facing difficulties to attract and retain a qualified workforce, whilst women (and men) with small children cannot take up the vacancies, even if offered on a part-time basis. This is due to shift work which involves atypical hours that are incompatible with the service hours of childcare institutions.

*The DP was adapting a solution that had been developed by a company in Brittany. The idea is to fully use the potential of human resources existing in the company, before hiring temporary workers. The model is based on the fact that whilst some production units are running full blast early in the morning and requiring large work teams, they may function with a much smaller team during the later part of the day. Therefore the company created a transfer system which allows to place people during slack periods in one department in another that needs more staff. Obviously, this requires that the heads of units to identify people that have the necessary skills to work in another unit and to handle this kind of rotation in a flexible manner.*

*For the employer the advantage lies clearly in the quick response to changing production needs and emergencies, which can hardly be satisfied by temporary workers*



who would have to become familiar with the requirements of the job in an extremely short time.

The DP is piloting the model with a company whose production is organised in two shifts of eight hours. The participants of the “young parents scheme” would work in two different teams every day, and thus be increasing the workforce in certain units during peak hours. The jobs can be performed during the day, instead of involving schedules very early in the morning or in the evening, when childcare centres are not open. Clearly, a win-win situation for both employers and employees!

However, the DP is aware that this model may have some pitfalls. Project managers are currently discussing with the employer how to prevent that the new group of workers are perceived as “good for everything and for nothing” in the organisation. Job content and conditions are being negotiated and the production managers are being prepared for the flexibility approach. Also, since it is not expected that company will give up its two-shift-system, it is paramount to define the access criteria to the new jobs. Many questions are still open: What are the priorities, how many hours will those jobs involve, how can the necessity of additional staff in certain production units be identified and evaluated?

To facilitate the adoption of the model, the DP is organising peer support from the pioneering enterprise. Details about the functioning of the model, its strong and weak points and the benefits gained in terms of more flexible work organisation will be discussed in a working group.

#### *F- 2001-BRE-10871- Développement des conditions favorables à l'activité des femmes en Finistère*

As a part of the WLBN project, eircom, the Irish telecommunication corporation, implemented a pilot “term-time” initiative. Term-time working means that the employee works during school terms but not during the school holidays. It appeals, in particular, to parents of school going children.

*eircom recognises the difficulties that employees encounter in trying to balance work and home commitments. The corporation seeks to anticipate these needs and match them to customer and business requirements. The initiative came about as a result of the involvement of the Business Area Managers in the eircom Work-Life -Balance Project Group. Each business area was asked to consider initiatives that would suit their needs and also those of their employees. Term-time was being piloted on this basis. The stipulation was that it should not interfere with service delivery or business targets.*

*12 women and one man participated in the scheme that began in June and ended in September 2004. After completion the pilot was evaluated through a questionnaire exercise involving the participants and the area managers to whose teams they belong.*

*The results of the survey clearly demonstrate that those employees who took part in the pilot programme, viewed term time working very positively.*

- *Over 90% reported that this working time arrangement made no difference to their reporting relationship to their manager.*
- *The whole sample agreed that an advantage of term time is that it gives employees the opportunity to balance work and other commitments. 99 % of respondents stated that another asset is the way in which it facilitates the needs of employees with care responsibilities.*

*Many of the perceived disadvantages are not accepted by employees.*

- *92 % of respondents disagree that a disadvantage of term time working is co-worker resentment. Those 92 % describe the attitude of their co-workers to their term working as very positive or fairly positive.*
- *Only 7% of the employees find that a negative point of term time is the loss of key skills, while 69 % disagree with this view and 23 % of the sample neither agree nor disagree.*



*In addition, the questionnaire was completed by eleven managers: five from the Retail division, five from Wholesale Networks and one from Central Services. They were asked their opinion concerning the impact of team members' term time working on a number of issues, including the delivery of objectives, scheduling work arrangements and maintaining good customer relationships. In general, managers did not view the impact of their team members' term time working in the same positive light as the employees. They tended to argue that they observed no difference, on a range of issues rather than viewing it positively.*

- *45 percent feel that term time impacts negatively on the delivery of objectives. For instance, difficulties in the demands of the service are perceived as a weak point.*
- *A large proportion (72%) believes that a disadvantage of the scheme is the loss of key skills.*

*However,*

- *The most positive issue, according to the managers surveyed, is the impact of team members' term time working on their reporting relationship to their manager. 45% view this in a positive way. Just over a third (36%) do not see any difference and one respondent views it negatively.*
- *63 % of the sample agreed that an advantage of term time working, is the way in which it allows employees to balance work and other commitments.*
- *More than half see the retention of valued employees as an advantage of term time working.*
- *55 percent observed no co-worker resentment,. In fact, almost two thirds reported that the workload of term time workers was shared amongst colleagues. Over 80 % did not encounter difficulties to reallocate work.*
- *Over 70 % see the reduction of payroll costs as an advantage of term time working for the company.*

*Even if a number of managers argued that in the future more consultation was required, as the combination of summer leave and term time impacted on the ability of the team to deal with the day to day business, 82 % stated they would continue to facilitate term time working.*

[IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

#### **2.2.1.2. Transferring flexi-time models to other target groups**

Often, designing programmes for parents was a first step in the development of more general work-life-balance policies in companies and organisations. Good practices were transferred to other categories of staff such as older workers and people with disabilities who may be unable or not wish to work full-time.

*An Irish DP succeeded to adapt flexi-time models the needs of older workers and people with mental health problems. Personalised flexible working hours, for instance, helped women and men suffering from depression. The solutions are based on the fact that between the recurrent spells of the illness, people have periods when they are well enough to work. Experience showed that they can be empowered to lead a more balanced life from this experience of work. Concerning the older workers the [DP](#) managed to convince employers that this group of employees should be given the choice of phasing out of gainful employment through flexible work arrangements. Good practice includes gradual retirement packages offering the option to work part-time for two years prior to retirement (2, 3 or 4 days a week). Along with this, the employee's pension contributions are paid in full. Thus upon retirement, the employees receive their full pension benefits, which is particular important for women. The approach helped enterprises to meet the emerging skills gaps due to demographic change and to transfer the knowledge and skills of older workers to the next generation.*

[The National Flexi-Work Partnership, IE 19](#)

### 2.2.1.3. *Telework as a solution to reconciling work and private life*

Some DPs have been experimenting with telework not only in a perspective of improving the work-life-balance of employees, but also as a response to business needs, in particular to increase productivity and competitiveness.

Under the title of “New employment perspectives for a higher quality working life” a Greek DP set out to test telework as a new and profitable model of work organisation for the call centre sector. The model was also designed to enable better reconciliation of personal and working life, and to create new job opportunities for people with disabilities. The concept is based on recent developments in telecommunications and the evolution of software programmes that provide the possibility of forwarding and rerouting phone calls. Thus call centre agents can respond from any geographical location, which means that there is, technically speaking, a huge potential for telework.

The DP’s pilot programme was aimed to apply different teleworking models in the call center sector and to analyse all the technical, organisational and socio-economic factors in order to develop successful and viable models of telework in this specific segment of the labour market.

*For Greek employers in the call centre market, one of the big challenges is to find and retain skilled personnel that will respond to the customers’ requests, questions and/or complaints in a professional way. In Greece, there is no vocational training for this occupation. With low pay and high stress levels working conditions leave much to be desired. Turnover in the sector is high and it is difficult to find staff, particularly part-timers and people working on fix-term contracts. Usually, the personnel is young, not very experienced and often holding university degrees. Working in the call centre is their first job, they don’t see real career prospects in this sector and leave when there is a better opportunity.*

*In its set-up the DP’s pilot programme mirrors the work organisation in the call centre. Agents are grouped in teams that are assigned to various projects. When introducing telework the project teams were re-organised to consist of employees that work either in the call centre itself, from home or from a specific teleworking environment, a so-called telecentre. There were two major reasons to establish the telecentre: the data security<sup>16</sup> required by banks that are an important group of customers and the relevance of the telecentre for improving the work-life-balance of people who wanted to telework, but could not do so at home. The telecentre is located in the centre of Athens. Unlike the call centre itself, this location is close to where most employees live and thus cuts down the time spent on commuting from an hour to around 15 minutes.*

*The implementation of the new model involved several stages. As a first step employees were informed about the aims and means of the EQUAL teleworking pilot programme. If interested, they were invited to fill in a form that asked for the number of days they wished to telework, their preference of working in a telecentre or from home, and also about the existence of adequate space in their homes. In the beginning, the interest in the experiment was disappointingly low. Particularly young people were afraid to be losing out on “social life” with colleagues, if working from home, or to be heaped with more family tasks when doing so. Some employees lacked the appropriate space, others were opposed to changing their place of work because they believed telework involves a higher risk of unemployment and has a lower status in the company hierarchy. The DP had to make an extra effort to explain the benefits of teleworking in a much more personal way and with more detail.*

*Eventually 18 women and 17 men from four different project teams of the call centre were recruited. Selection criteria included the availability of the space in their homes,*

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<sup>16</sup> In specific bank related projects, the responsible agent has to have access to bank-data and consequently to sensitive personal data. Home-based telework lacks the capability of optical control of the teleworkers; i.e. it is not possible to guarantee the prevention of the “natural” (optical) theft of data, as the system can only guarantee the prevention of the “electronic” theft. Given the required “high security level” of banking institutions, those customers did not give permission for the use of their data outside the physical environments of the company. This resulted in the fact that only a limited number of the call centre’s projects would have been eligible for telework.

*their social and family situation, i.e. for some people telework contributes significantly to balancing work and family duties, whilst for others the family environment was prohibitive to telework. What counted most for the company was a smart allocation of personnel and the business relevance of the projects involved. 24 of the new teleworkers (9 women and 15 men) opted to work from home and 11 preferred the telecenter (9 women and 2 men). It is important to note that people with disabilities (suffering from Thallasaemia and/or visual impairments) are also participating. The teleworkers had to sign a new work contract or a "private contract on a short-term change of working terms". Home-based teleworkers signed a private agreement with the company, which makes them responsible for the security of the teleworking equipment and its maintenance in good condition.*

*As a next step, the teleworkers participated in a special training program, which was mostly implemented with an asynchronous e-learning method, so that employees could learn at home and in their own time and pace. The program included:*

- *Effective ways of work organisation in the personal and family environment of the teleworker (including ergonomics);*
- *Time management;*
- *Stress management;*
- *Solutions to balancing telework, family responsibilities and personal life.*

*At the end of the training, demonstrations of the equipment, connection procedures with the systems of the call centre and the use of the specific software applications took place. To expose the teleworkers to their new situation in a safe environment, they all had to participate in a test run in a "teleworking simulation space" at the call centre. Here, they were on their own, exactly as they would be when working at home.*

*The most important feature of the pilot was the so-called mixed teleworking model. This means that nobody was confined to working only from home or from the telecentre. Instead, people rotated between working one to three days either from home or from the telecentre and two to four days in the call centre. To deal with any kind of problem, a support team was created that consisted of the relevant managers and supervisors, technical support staff, plus a HR manager and a lawyer with expertise in telework. Besides providing technical support via telephone guidance, remote and, if necessary, on-site trouble shooting, monitoring and evaluating the telework experience in terms of productivity, quality of service and degree of collaboration was paramount.*

*The emerging results of the pilot scheme indicate that the mixed teleworking model enables the company to adapt more easily to upcoming changes and to master unexpected situations. More specifically, telework proved to be extremely helpful to deal with sudden peaks and unexpected problematic situations, such as traffic jams or difficult weather conditions. Moreover, it is an excellent strategy to manage changing work loads during the year (e.g. only few projects in one month and a big number of projects in the next) and to allow for the involvement of part-time workers.*

*The DP is convinced that the telework experiment has improved the image of the company. The company gained in reputation for its ability to apply this innovative method of work organisation and also as an employer concerned about the work-life-balance of its employees. In terms of costs and benefits, it is still too early to make a final assessment. But it appears that despite the considerable investment in equipment and set-up, overhead costs are decreasing. Unsurprisingly, there was a slight drop of productivity in the initial phase, followed by an increase due to the fact that teleworkers usually cover all the productive hours of the day (9:00 – 14:00 and 17:00 – 20:00), which is impossible in a traditional working environment.*

*The teleworkers found that they had more time to spend with their family and to satisfy personal needs. They also appreciated to avoid long journeys to and from the worksite (in some cases commuting takes three hours per day). Moreover, telework is seen as ideal by people who want to work part time. Some fears expressed prior to the exercise turned out to be unrealistic. Thanks to the mixed teleworking model the employees did*

*not lose contact with the company, nor did the team spirit suffer. There are no negative implications to workers' rights, work satisfaction and promotion perspectives. Some participants also claim that working conditions have significantly improved. They felt that working at home eased their concentration as did the absence of supervisors and "physical" control.*

*After the end of the pilot phase the call centre will continue to use telework in different modes and with different categories of staff:*

- *Regular teleworkers will be using the model developed thanks to EQUAL;*
- *Occasional Teleworkers will have the teleworking equipment installed in their homes and are going to telework whenever required, by either personal needs or company needs (call peaks or space problems).*
- *Ad hoc Teleworkers kick in if a special need emerges such as an important new project or a project with specific skills requirements. Teleworking equipment will be installed in the homes of call centre agents or of new employees.*

#### *GR-200836 - Initiative for working life quality*

In the framework of the Irish WLBN DP, two partners, eircom and Iarnród Éireann, are also testing teleworking models. The pilot initiatives involve management, unions and employees who jointly, and on a co-operative basis, are examining the issues that exist in identifying and overcoming any barriers to this form of work-life-balance arrangement. The project timeframe to complete such actions is February 2005, followed by feedback, evaluation and review.

The experiments are expected to increase awareness of both employers and employees in terms of advantages and disadvantages of an e-working scheme, but also, more generally, of the strategic importance of implementing work-life-balance initiatives to gain competitive advantages.

The pilots are respecting a Code of Practice for e-working that is based on the Code of Practice on e-working in Ireland. In addition, an E-Working Agreement between the employer and the employee was signed. Similar to the Greek model, the WLBN pilot schemes have a help facility in each participating organisation, where practical assistance and technical advice is available. A website is hosted by eircom to give information and assistance to both the e-workers and their managers.

*Expectations of participants and their managers are measured at the outset and again nearing completion of the pilots. Training seminars are obligatory for all participants with a particular emphasis on the challenges facing the managers of e-workers and their teams. The training is covering the following aspects:*

#### **The e-office:**

- *Office space design, ergonomics and environmental factors;*
- *Health and Safety and compliance with legal requirements;*
- *Ensuring separation from family functions;*
- *Office security, file protection and personal security;*
- *Addressing childcare issues and deciding on childcare options.*

#### **Psycho-social issues:**

- *Developing a new, more proactive working style;*
- *Avoiding isolation;*
- *Establishing boundaries between work and home;*
- *Developing starting up and winding down rituals;*
- *Establishing a support network;*
- *Avoiding overwork;*
- *Social network associations;*
- *Dealing with distractions and interruptions;*
- *Maintaining self motivation and focusing on short and longer term goals.*

#### **Manager / employee issues:**

- *Establishing the e-team;*
- *Ensuring good channels of communications between the e-team;*



- *Developing a behavioural contract and an e-working agreement;*
- *Dealing with co-workers concerns.*

**Communications:**

- *Writing skills;*
- *E-mail and voicemail etiquette ;*
- *Call forwarding and messaging.*

**Communication Technology:**

- *Ensuring IT equipment is sufficient;*
- *Basic knowledge of technical support;*
- *Maintenance of equipment, software and virus updates.*

*Further training is being provided, which is designed specifically for the managers of e-workers. This training is concentrating on how to manage e-workers by support, etiquettes, customer service, and managing teams comprised of e-workers and non-e-workers.*

*For the implementation of the EQUAL e-working initiative the DP has developed in-depth guidelines that cover a wide range of aspects. This includes health and safety, legal issues, technical and psychological support, communication, but also the formulation of clear objectives that support management by outputs and strategies for both managers and employees to maintain high levels of motivation and performance. The following list of questions provided to potential e-workers are an example for the amount of detail that is considered necessary to make e-working a success:*

**Employees and managers must ask themselves:**

- *How do they view the flexibility of e-working? They will be required to be available to work at certain times and to attend meetings in the office. It will be critical to the success of e-working that they be available as agreed.*
- *How do they like to work? Mainly through interaction with others to get solutions, or through individual research?*
- *How do they prefer to approach improving their skills? Through self managed training or learning from other members of the team?*
- *Will there be a need for more self sufficiency on IT issues? How will they manage without ready access to colleagues for solutions to minor problems?*
- *Once they are e-working the main means of communication at work will be e-mail and phone; will they need to adapt their communication style?*
- *How organised are they? Can they always find that document?*
- *Do they have suitable, secure office space in the home that is of a standard acceptable to their organisation?*
- *If they are not the homeowner, will they need to check if it is okay to e-work from that location?*
- *Will they have to consider doing a refresher course in time management before they start e-working?*
- *E-workers tend to work longer hours – will they have the self-discipline to address this?*
- *E-working will increase the need to trust your own judgement – do both employee and manager have confidence in their decision making skills?*
- *Resentment from colleagues can be an issue: have they discussed with their manager how they are both going to deal with it?*
- *They must consider if e-working is likely to impact negatively on their career path. Does this matter to them now? What about in the future?*
- *They may have to deal with interruptions, e.g. neighbours or younger children. Have they ensured the correct message is given?*
- *E-working can give rise to unexpected reactions; have they discussed the expectations of their family, friends, or housemates?*
- *What do they plan to do with their extra time?*
- *The employee must also give thought to their ability to deal with the isolation of e-working, and the resulting change in their social environment. Talking to a colleague*



*or friend who is already e-working will provide a valuable insight into the potential benefits and drawbacks.*

*The results of an earlier pilot scheme, in which eircom was involved, were very encouraging. The responses of managers indicated that the productivity of the workers was not impacted negatively. The e-workers found that they had more time for themselves, less stress, more work-life-balance and better ability to cope. E-workers saved up to 9 hours per week in commuting time and 12.5 percent stated that they used the extra time to contribute to their local community. Office space can be reduced and this results in a saving in overheads. The corporation expects that the new initiative may further increase those benefits.*

[IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

### **2.2.2. Tackling the disadvantages of flexibility**

Highly flexible working time arrangements are not always a blessing for employees. Not only are atypical working hours often hampering the reconciliation of work and family life of workers, they also tend often to have a negative impact for employers such as increased absenteeism and turnover. A number of DPs are successfully addressing that problem.

#### **2.2.2.1. Reorganising atypical working hours**

Two French projects are linking new working time models to a process of (re)assessing and reorganising work environments and job contents.

*One of those DPs succeeded to dismantle the “broken shifts ” that were the usual pattern for cleaning all municipal buildings of the city of [Rennes](#). Before, to make enough income, the predominantly female staff had had to work two shifts, one in the early morning and another at night. Thanks to EQUAL, they now have full-time jobs and can either opt for a schedule from 7.30 to 15.30 or from 10.45 to 18.45. It took, however, some efforts to overcome the reticence of the other employees who had not been used to actually see the cleaning during office hours.*

*Team work is a key element of this new model. Whilst in the past one person has been assigned a certain number of square metres, two women are now sharing the work in a larger space. The size of the space is calculated in such a way that one can replace the other in case of absence.*

*Moreover, the DP managed for the women to swap workplaces so that they live closer to work and need less time to commute. As a result of the whole arrangement absenteeism has dropped by 30%.*

*The cleaners are also being offered individualised plans for training and career development. The training is geared to achieve a recognised higher level vocational certificate.*

[FR BRE 200110587 - Rennes égalité des temps](#)

In the second case, training was the precondition for the intended changes. The Equilibre DP developed two different approaches that are taking account of the specific constraints of hotels and restaurants.

*Thanks to training, the Ibis hotel chain could reduce the alarming turnover and absenteeism of its female staff. For example, a new solution was found for receptionists who, in the past, had been covering two rush periods – one in the morning when guest were checking out and another in the evening when new arrivals were piling up. Despite of the free hours in between, spending time with children or partners was almost impossible, since when these returned home, mothers had to leave for their second shift. A multi-skills programme was the turning point towards more family-friendly work patterns. Employees were trained to qualify for more than one job. As a result, a person can now, on the same day, work first as a receptionist and then as a waiter. This allows*

*HR managers to propose full days instead of “broken” schedules. In addition, the approach helps employees to develop a career and get an increase in pay.*

*The model did not work for Courtepaille restaurants, since they don't have the same variety of jobs as Ibis. Instead a training scheme was developed for employees who want to have a career and become assistant manager or manager. Training is always organised during working hours, fully paid by the employer, and most of the time carried out in the work place. These conditions make it accessible to all.*

*The DP also addressed the problem of “imposed” part-time, i.e. the fact that in some sectors most jobs are being offered as part-time, which, for some people, does not generate enough income. Part-time is also the predominant form of employment in the Courtepaille restaurant network. At one of its pilot sites in the south of Paris, Equilibre tried to test “part-time matching”. The idea is that the local employment agency, which is a partner of the DP, would propose a second part-time job to people who work part-time in restaurants, but need a full-time income. The agency would ensure to find jobs in the same area of the city, but in another sector of activity.*

*DP partners were surprised because, in the first restaurant that had been chosen, nobody was interested in the scheme. The restaurant was actually located near to a university and many part-time workers were students who had no interest in working full time. A second place was then selected, where several employees were keen to work full-time. Results of the pilot schemes should be available by the end of 2005.*

[FR-NAT-2001-10609 - Equilibre](#)

#### **2.2.2.2. Improving qualification levels and time management skills**

The Cityctac tactic DP used several approaches to tackle the disadvantages of atypical work arrangements at Monoprix, whose stores are historically located in city centers. The company employs 18 000 staff in 299 stores that are based in 85 % of all towns with more than 50 000 inhabitants. Generally, most employees live far away from the stores and work five or even six days a week. A large percentage are holding part-time jobs, and 75 percent of the workforce are female. Turnover is high, and Monoprix is recruiting 14 000 new workers every year.

The DP is building on the sustainable development policies that are linking economic, social and environmental objectives and forming important part of Monoprix's corporate identity. Cityctac decided to develop a “small steps policy” that is based on local pilot projects. Their results are then to be disseminated and multiplied within the organisation with the aim of becoming general policy.

*One of the local pilot projects is being implemented at a Monoprix store in Lille. The goal is to help employees gain free time for themselves, improve living conditions and access to training, in particular for women with no or low formal qualifications. The DP offered basic ICT training and Internet skills to the employees, intended to help them meet the most essential skills requirements, but also to save precious time through using the Internet to track traffic or transport information or services that can help to better reconcile work and family life. But the women found it difficult to afford the time for training. The DP's innovative scheme changed the situation: Employees could barter each hour they spent on training for an hour of housework, supplied by a local social economy enterprise and paid for by the company. In addition, the DP negotiated needs-tailored services with local providers of childcare and found more suitable solutions to transport, particularly late in the evening and on weekends.*

*In Nîmes Cityctac's pilot scheme concentrated on enabling current Monoprix employees to play a more pro-active role in reorganising their working and private life. As in Lille, this involved Internet training, time management skills and cooperation with local childcare providers to provide more flexible and needs-tailored arrangements and support for housework. For instance, when the employees turn up for training they can bring bags with clothes and linen that need to be ironed. A service enterprise picks them up, handles*

*the ironing and brings the apparel back to Monoprix. This service is free of charge for the trainees, the cost being met by the company.*

*A third pilot carried out in Boulogne Billancourt was based on the findings of the DP's preliminary analysis, which revealed that many women have no clear understanding of the work-life-balance concept. Therefore the labour market integration scheme aimed at improving the employability of jobless women included strategies and tools enabling them to optimise the organisation of their daily lives. In addition, participants were supported to prepare for a job interview with the director of the local Monoprix store. As a result 13 out of 15 participants in the scheme were recruited by Monoprix.*

*For the employer, the DP's activities are clearly yielding benefits that tend to reduce turnover. Cityctac is disseminating the labour market integration scheme to the 130 Monoprix stores in Paris and the surrounding Isle-de-France, which may lead to making participation in that training a criterion for recruitment. The DP is also convinced that work-life-balance will increasingly become an important issue of the social dialogue, namely in relation to raising qualification levels of employees and to improving their quality of life. The development of close cooperation with local providers of care services and labour market training is contributing to achieve that goal.*

[FR-NAT-2001-10674 CITYCTAC-TACTIC](#)

### **2.2.2.3. Finding better solutions to commuting**

Preliminary surveys of most work-life-balance DPs indicated that commuting time from home to work to kindergarten or school and to shopping and other service areas is one of the most time consuming and unproductive items on peoples' daily agenda. This is particularly true for women who – to a lesser extent than men – own a car or have the family car at their disposal. The problem is even more pressing if people work atypical hours and have to commute at times that are less serviced by the public transport systems. The Equilibre DP in France is addressing this issue.

*In the hotel and catering sector, employees work on highly flexible schedules, due to the nature of their activity. They finish late and start early, and public transportation does often not accommodate those schedules. Since most of the employees don't live close to their worksites, they have to use their own car, which is a large expense, given their moderate income. Collective taxi and/or public bus services were successfully tested to improve commuting in the area of Sophia Antipolis, a technology hub at the French Riviera, and in Nantes in the west of France. Those services are now considered as a good solution, which is jointly financed by the state or local governments, the company and the employees themselves.*

*Commuting may be also a problem for people with seasonal contracts, trainees, or employees being in the test period of a new job, who don't have a permanent residence in the vicinity of their workplace. The DP organised temporary lodging for trainees in Nantes and for employees performing seasonal jobs in the region of Nice.*

*The relevant employers organisation in Nice had earlier identified a need for temporary lodging and consequently become active in a semi-public project, aimed at restructuring a building to provide flats for employees of the hotel and catering sector. But once the apartments were ready, almost no employer rented apartments for their staff. EQUAL provided an opportunity to test this solution and to re-stimulate the initiative of the employers organisation.*

[FR-NAT-2001-10609 - Equilibre](#)

## 2.3. MEETING CARE AND OTHER FAMILY NEEDS

### 2.3.1. Needs-tailored care services

Lack of affordable and flexible care for children and other dependants is a major barrier to balancing work and family life in many Member States, and thus, a number of the EQUAL work-life-balance DPs made the provision of flexible, affordable childcare an integral part of their activities<sup>17</sup>. Whilst some of the projects solicited financial support of employers to establish or improve the care provision of their employees, others developed strategies for job creation in the care sector. Training for and creation of new care and other family support services has generated a double effect: jobs for unemployed women with no/low formal qualifications and labour market access for other women – unemployed or inactive – who before could not seek gainful employment due to the lack of childcare and elderly care

*The Spanish @CCEDE DP supported women to set up small private companies offering childcare and elderly care. The idea is to extend the range of childcare services to those times of the day, which are not covered by the existing public or private provision. At the same time, the new services are expected to help women with unmet care needs enter the labour market.*

*As a first step the DP carried out a market study. Based on the results a “resource map” for the care of children and other dependants was drawn up. The map revealed a number of un-met needs and also market niches not being covered so far. The DP targeted those niches and created jobs in small businesses that provide new and more flexible childcare. A training programme for unemployed women offered both knowledge and skills for childcare and for business management. The future women entrepreneurs were then supported to thoroughly analyse all the strong and weak points of their business ideas and to explore possible opportunities and threats. To facilitate access to finance, the DP carried out market research for each individual entrepreneur to help her defend her business plan vis-à-vis the banks or funding agencies. A number of problems had to be overcome when it came to adapting the initial business ideas of the women to the hard realities. It was not easy to find locations that were suitable for childcare at an affordable rent and start-up loans were difficult, if not impossible to get.*

*Subsidies provided by EQUAL facilitated the start-up of the new enterprises, mostly dedicated to caring for children and other dependants. The DP organised coaching services and further assistance to the new ventures and supported the women to continue tracking and exploiting additional market niches, which helped to consolidate the businesses and to create more jobs.*

*Two sub-projects are contributing to further improve child care and elderly care in territory. One succeeded to extend the opening hours of existing child care services. This is being achieved by combining public services with those of a private child care institution. As a result, school children can now be offered care before and after school hours. The second sub-project involves the creation of micro businesses that are specializing in homecare for children and other dependants.*

[ES-ES535 @CCEDE](#)

Emergency services supporting parents when their job suddenly requires them to work overtime or when children are sick and mothers or fathers cannot stay with them at home are a rare commodity. Led by the municipality of Rennes, a French DP has created this kind of life line, which is particularly relevant for lone parents.

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<sup>17</sup> See also: Living Document 2003: Reconciliation of working and family life.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/index.cfm?file=detart.cfm&art\\_id=11981&nav\\_id\\_menu=10678&lang\\_id=5&news\\_flash=N&news=N](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index.cfm?file=detart.cfm&art_id=11981&nav_id_menu=10678&lang_id=5&news_flash=N&news=N)

*The DP was financially supporting Parendom, an NGO that provides home-based care for children as a complimentary service for parents who are working atypical hours. Parendom is also offering an emergency service. Fees are based on the family income and range from 1,5 to 9 euros.*

*In addition, thanks to EQUAL, the Calais Crèche, a childcare facility serving the employees in an industrial zone, was created in March 2004. Subsidised by different companies and several municipalities, this centre is open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. and children can spend a daily maximum of ten hours in its care. Crèche and parents sign an agreement on the time intended for the child to stay in the institution. Fees are income-dependent and based on between 50 and 100 percent of the total service hours. Two places are always reserved for emergency cases.*

[FR BRE 200110587 - Rennes égalité des temps](#)

### **2.3.2. Family help desks**

Another successful approach to meeting reconciliation needs and at the same to helping companies attract and retain qualified staff is the introduction of “help desks for family matters” or “reconciliation mediators” based in companies or local authorities. DPs trained women, both employed and unemployed, to provide counselling and practical advice to employees. This may include support to locate the most suitable childcare or elderly care service and to find quick solutions to almost any kind of emergency. Developing personalised working time arrangements to be negotiated with the HR department and career planning for parents and people with care responsibilities are also part of the offer.

The Italian Con-tempo DP, which is working with several municipalities, is also cooperating with companies. Supported by the project, one of them established a family friendly service as part of its commitment to a greater social responsibility towards its territory of operation.

*Based in San Rocco al Porto, Auchan is a company that has introduced flexible opening hours to satisfy the needs of its customers. At the same time it is seeking to improve the work-life-balance of its employees. The majority of Auchan’s staff are women and most of them are facing difficulties to reconcile work, raising children, but also caring for elderly and sick dependants.*

*A “competence point” created thanks to EQUAL is helping employees to manage work and private life and also offering active support for reintegration after maternity and parental leave.*

*Located on the premises of the Auchan’s HR department, the “competence point” was launched in November 2003. It is open twice a week, but the two counsellors are also available in case of emergency.*

*The service includes information on relevant legislation and existing territorial services; a search catalogue to find publications and addresses of all the bodies dealing with reconciliation; counselling and support to help employees clarify their personal needs and to find solutions that are compatible with those of the company. Sometimes the staff can also facilitate exchange and mutual support between people with similar problems. Last, but not least, the help desk collects and up-dates data on employees’ needs and keeps management and union representatives posted on emerging work-life-balance requirements. Listening carefully to everybody involved is seen as an important quality and ensures that new ideas, suggestions and proposals are valued and eventually used for further improvements.*

[IT-G-LOM-0016 Con-tempo](#)

One of the DP members of the French Equilibre project, Bien Etre A la Carte, has created a special kind of help desk. Bien Etre A la Carte is a tailor-made service programme designed and paid for by the ACCOR group to accommodate the needs of its employees, and sold as a commercial service to other companies.



*The aim is to help people find quick solutions to practical problems, in order to be more productive at work. In a company where hundreds of employees work at the same place, it can be a concierge service, which finds and contracts providers of cleaning and ironing services, car wash or even leisure time activities. In another location it may be more suitable to install a hotline, providing legal information and help to find appropriate childcare or domestic services, even for renovating an apartment. Everything is imaginable that can help people in their day-to-day life.*

*Although Bien Etre A la Carte is a commercial company that existed before the launch of EQUAL , a number of employees targeted by the Equilibre project are benefiting from its services. The experience and rationale of this service provider is an important asset for the DP. It seeks, as a basic rule, to make tailor-made solutions available and to adapt them to the specific needs of employers and employees in different locations. Also, good communication and mutual understanding are regarded as a must: it is not enough that the management decides to improve the work-life balance of employees. These should be aware of what work-life-balance means for them. And last, but not least, involving a commercial service can enhance local solutions, since an external initiative is often a guarantee of sustainability.*

[FR-NAT-2001-10609 - Equilibre](#)

In general, company help desks were particularly successful when working closely with territorial initiatives for work-life-balance or with Time Agencies<sup>18</sup>. This cooperation is widening choices and availability of support measures and resulted in lasting coalitions of local or regional employers, municipalities and relevant service providers in the territories.

### **2.3.3. Optimising parental leave**

The “help desks” described above have in many cases become permanent facilities and are also ensuring that people on parental leave can stay in touch with their company. They facilitate participation in training and in regular or occasional part-time work. During and especially towards the end of parental leave, the help desk staff is supporting returners to prepare for any changes in the workplace that may have occurred during their absence. Often a return requires that parents are granted more flexible work arrangements, which in turn helps companies to retain them in their workforce and to save considerable costs.

In the framework of the Con-tempo DP, the help desk focused particularly on the period after the return.

*Coming back to work after a period of maternity or parental leave is a very difficult moment for many women. After an intensive period of time spent with the baby, the mothers have to reorganise their life and to cope with the demands of the world of work. Offering an exchange of ideas and experiences with peers helps to feel less lonely and allows to (re)establish a positive relationship with work and colleagues. The DP organised training sessions and discussions to address those issues and also to provide information on workers rights, equal opportunities legislation and specific regulations supporting reconciliation. Most women workers welcomed and appreciated the services, and the DP expects that the help desk can make a valuable contribution to the company's efforts of support for people with care responsibilities at different periods in their life-cycle.*

[IT-G-LOM-0016 Con-tempo](#)

The German Gender Net DP offered similar and other services related to parental leave from outside of companies. Parental leave in Germany is extremely generous in terms of time and much less so in terms of financial support for those opting for this career break. Parents can take parental leave for up to three years, and the time can be shared between mothers and fathers. The allowance provided by the state for a duration of two years amounts to 300 euro and is

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<sup>18</sup> See Living Document 2003: Reconciliation of working and family life.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/index.cfm?file=detart.cfm&art\\_id=11981&nav\\_id\\_menu=10678&lang\\_id=5&news\\_flash=N&news=N](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index.cfm?file=detart.cfm&art_id=11981&nav_id_menu=10678&lang_id=5&news_flash=N&news=N)

means-tested<sup>19</sup>. “Parental leave takers” are entitled to combine their off-time with part-time work of a maximum of 30 hours per week, and both parents can choose to do so at the same time. In total, 85 % of those entitled to parental leave are actually making use of it and are predominantly female. After the introduction of the part-time option in January 2004 the participation of fathers increased from 1.5 to 4.9 percent. 75 percent of mothers decide to take the full duration of the leave and to abstain from any professional activity.

*This can entail a difficult situation for companies, which must replace those employees during their absence and then up-date their skills when they return after three years. To help both parents and enterprises cope with the situation, the DP offered a variety of support programmes. It encouraged those on parental leave to stay in touch with the world of work and to participate in training programmes tailored to their specific needs.*

*Counselling and advice was being offered to employers and HR managers to initiate and develop on-going contact with their employees during the leave and family-friendly working time solutions which facilitated their return.*

*The training programme for parents, developed by the DP, was aimed to maintain and strengthen their employability, but also to enable both career progress or career change upon return. Incorporating strong e-learning components, the programme was modular and trainees could influence both contents and timetables. Modules were organised in three-monthly packages, each lasting for ten weeks with four training hours every week, except during school holidays. Participants could choose to attend either in the morning or in the afternoon. This system also allowed them to take breaks because of another pregnancy or family emergencies and to continue their training itinerary at a later stage.*

*Each term a large variety of modules based on different skills levels was provided and participants were supported to put their individual training package together. A new term began after each holiday, at which point newcomers were welcomed and introductory and up-grading modules could be selected.*

*A series of shorter events and seminars was complimenting those modules. They were organised upon request of participants and included legal questions related to parental leave but also personal development workshops. For the second option there was a large “menu” to choose from, ranging from job hunting and self-presentation skills, through communication and specific telephone techniques, to interview training or time management.*

*Initially, the DP had also designed a strategy to convince fathers of either sharing parental leave with their partners or reducing their working hours and take on more family responsibilities. Both would have enabled mothers to avoid three years of total absence from the labour market. With a task-sharing partner at home, the women could have worked part-time or shortened the length of their career break.*

*Despite of outreach activities that were directly addressing husbands or partners of women who are on maternity leave and taking part in the DP’s training courses, not a single father could be recruited. The obstacles were multi-fold and include gender stereotypes such as the image of the “good mother” that requires women to take the major part of care responsibilities. The biggest blockage was, however, the difference between a man’s salary and the parental leave allocation. A survey conducted amongst the female participants of Gendernet’s training programme and their partners revealed that for those couples there was only one choice. To secure a viable family income during parental leave, they could afford to live without the lower salary of the mother, but not without the significantly higher income of the father.*

[DE-EA-35821 -Gendernet](#)

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<sup>19</sup> The income ceiling is 30.000 Euro for a couple and 23.000 for a single parent with one child. Each additional child raises the threshold by about 3000 Euro. It is possible to opt for a higher allowance of 450 Euro to be provided during the first year after the baby’s birth, instead of two years.

## 2.4. TURNING WORK-LIFE-BALANCE STRATEGIES INTO A SUSTAINABLE PROCESS OF CULTURAL CHANGE

For some of the DPs, work-life-balance programmes as described above were only the beginning of a long-term process of change. Results achieved so far are indicating that they have not only initiated such processes but also established milestones that are crucial to keeping the process going and to securing lasting impact.

*Jointly with its partners operating in key economic sectors, the Irish WLBN DP has developed a model for a “continuum of change”. The idea is that organisations move through four stages that are described as formative, broadening, deepening and mature. Whilst at the first stage a company may be complying with the relevant legislation and offering a small number of family-friendly measures mainly for women with children, the second stage is likely to extend those measures to a wider group, involving fathers or more generally people with care responsibilities. Measures are still unconnected, not systematically monitored and often reluctantly granted after demands of employees and/or work councils. During the deepening stage a more consistent bundle of policies is emerging and becoming available to all categories of staff. Policies are now seen as a response to business needs and to attract and retain staff. At this point relevant HR skills are being developed and the up-take of programmes monitored. When reaching the mature stage an enterprise is meeting its organisational goals and its employees’ work-life-needs without either suffering.*

*The Work-Life-Balance Groups established in each of the participating organisations have a crucial role in launching and fostering this “continuum of change”. Assembling representatives of management, trade unions and staff they diagnosed the current work-life-balance provision within each organisation. The next step was then to apply the work-life-balance criteria that are based on research and good practices collected earlier and to identify the stage of the continuum from which to start moving. Diagnostic checklists produced by the DP assist the organisations during this evolutionary process. All partners agree that cultural change is well underway and that –thanks to EQUAL- their organisations look considerably different than at the beginning of the endeavour.*

[IE-20 - Work Life Balance Network \(WLBN\)](#)

The French Equilibre project, which is working with two large companies in the hotel and catering sector: Ibis hotels and Courtepaille restaurants, sought to entrust employees with more responsibility in the planning of working time. Flexibility is a must in the sector, and the organisation of atypical work is a real challenge for the HR departments, which have to ensure that staff members take on an equal share of the least appreciated shifts. There is always a risk that people are discontent and feel that colleagues are better off than themselves.

*An auto-planning system was tested in a few pilot sites, where the managers are no longer involved in the planning of working time. A specifically designed software incorporates the legal framework and economic needs of the organisation, and allows employees to enter the desired free days into the system. Obviously, this system cannot be put in place in every hotel or restaurant, because a variety of individual aspects must be taken account of (for instance people with young children). But it has several advantages than can foster cultural change and reconciliation :*

- *It shows respect of peoples’ freedom of choice, since there is no obligation of explaining the reasons for the need of free time to the manager;*
- *It supports learning to negotiate with colleagues (peer to peer), instead of with a manager;*
- *It helps to discover and understand the needs of other employees, which can improve the work climate.*

*Since April 2004, auto-planning is being tested in two Ibis hotels and two Courtepaille restaurants in the south of Paris and, if the results are satisfying, it will be disseminated and generally applied.*

[FR-NAT-2001-10609 Equilibre](#)

### 3. TERRITORIAL INITIATIVES FOR WORK-LIFE-BALANCE

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Many DPs have chosen to address the dilemma of reconciling work and care responsibilities through territorial approaches that involve all relevant players: companies and social partner organisations, political decision-makers and public authorities and also the civil society. EQUAL territorial approaches focusing on work-life-balance for women and men consider local policy initiatives as a key strategy to tackle reconciliation problems.

#### 3.1. BUILDING TERRITORIAL COALITIONS FOR RECONCILIATION

Particularly in southern Member States, DPs, which have been involving the social partners in a territory or economic sector, have succeeded to introduce the concept of work-life-balance in the social dialogue. Awareness raising and training for decision-makers in trade unions and employers organisations generated “Memoranda of Understanding”, committing employers and unions to negotiate reconciliation measures for women and men and to include relevant EQUAL achievements. The following example demonstrates how the Con-tempo DP is implementing this approach in the region of Mantua.

*The DP created a working group, linking social partner organisations, public authorities and NGOs to experiment territorial actions that improve female participation in the labour market and reconciliation of work commitments and family responsibilities. An agreement of understanding was signed by the Mantua Municipality as territorial leader for the Mantua area. The Mantua sections of three major Trade Unions CGIL, CISL and UIL joined the agreement as did the Employers Organisation of the Mantua Province. The Provincial Commission for Equal Opportunities and the ANCORPARI Association which is dedicated to gender equality are sharing the commitment of all those players to mainstream the results of Con-tempo’s experimental activities in the territory.*

[IT-G-LOM-0016 -Con-tempo](#)

In Brittany, the DP, which is seeking to improve the gender equality performance of food industry enterprises, is joining forces with existing initiatives at the level of the département. These are focusing mostly on tackling the disadvantages of atypical working hours and on improving the childcare provision in a perspective of facilitating labour market access for unemployed women and men and the work-life-balance of those in employment. The DP found that in order to make progress it was paramount to address three major problems:

- The gap between the multiple and highly individualised expectations concerning flexibility in terms of working time, family duties and leisure and the existing provision of services that are rather focused on “collective” needs;
- The need to articulate the different times and roles in peoples’ lives and to link this issue to a local debate on social cohesion, structural problems of the labour market, quality of life and territorial development;
- The difficulties of an on-going mobilisation of financial resources, despite of the fact that the relevant authorities and institutions are committed to adapting their policies to the needs of the population.

In the framework of EQUAL the DP developed strategies that make local agreements and actions complimentary to those undertaken at the level of the département and vice versa. Whilst at the local level all relevant players, elected policy makers, enterprises, service providers and the users of the services interact and thus the best solutions can be found more easily, it is crucial to mobilise the decision-makers at département level at the same time. These are in a position to adopt policies and to provide the necessary funding for local initiatives. In addition, they have an important role to play when it comes to capitalising on the new practices in a perspective of dissemination and mainstreaming.

*The strategy combines a bottom-up and a top-down approach which are reinforcing each other. At the local level, this involves the DP’s cooperation with the food industry*

companies<sup>20</sup>, which have difficulties to attract and retain qualified workers, mainly because their organisation of working time in three shifts of eight hours is incompatible with peoples' family responsibilities. Thanks to EQUAL the companies are now working with territorial players, including elected political decision-makers, public authorities, NGOs and representatives of trade unions, to develop new solutions. The employers have emphasised that there is an urgent need for care services to be offered during atypical working hours and also that they would be prepared to contribute to financing those extra services.

When evaluating the negotiations, the DP realised that political decision-makers are not necessarily the best negotiators when it comes to soliciting contributions from employers. Sometimes, they did not understand the employers' expectations nor did they grasp the opportunity of an eventual commitment to co-funding a speedy implementation of the new services. Additional information and awareness raising was organised by the DP to enable policy makers to perform better during the next round of negotiations.

Those meetings revealed that the most valuable asset to facilitating a fruitful dialogue is the cooperation the DP has built with each individual enterprise, and particularly the placement of a gender equality expert within these organisations. In fact, the DP played a decisive role as mediator and succeeded to break the compartmentalised thinking in the different worlds of politics, business and social life.

These local processes were supported by a working group established at the level of the département. Its mission was to foster the exchange of local experiences, the awareness of political decision-makers and the development of a methodology to develop local agreements. The group assembled representatives of different services and authorities<sup>21</sup> and of initiatives dedicated to improving childcare and mobility of workers. The EQUAL gender equality experts were part of that group.

It has not been easy to manage this diverse mix of players. It took the DP the better part of a year to help group members find a common language and share information and knowledge about services for people working atypical hours. However, in the end successful local pilot schemes could be presented at a hearing. This enriched the methodological discussion and enhanced the motivation of the group to mainstream those achievements. A final report and brochure will be widely disseminated and a visibility event will target elected officials representing groupings of local governments and municipalities.

In addition, involving the Conseil Général from early on enhanced the sustainability of the pilot actions, since it is the competent body to integrate them into regular policies and practices.

By the end of 2004, the DP expects that three or even four permanent local agreements will be in place. They will accommodate the needs of dozens of companies and several thousands of employees in terms of family support services during atypical working hours.

*F- 2001-BRE-10871- Développement des conditions favorables à l'activité des femmes en Finistère*

### **3.2. ESTABLISHING SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURES**

EQUAL territorial approaches often involve the creation of supportive infrastructures such as local or regional gender equality centres or community centres. As in the following example, those DPs were often coordinated by municipalities. The municipalities of Pavia, Lodi, Crema,

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<sup>20</sup> See Living Document on Gender Mainstreaming, p. 21

<sup>21</sup> Including: CAF, the responsible administration for family allocation, the Conseil Général, the with its services for SMEs and labour market integration, the Directorate of Labour and its gender equality body.



Cremona and Mantua, together with the Province of Cremona, were all pro-active partners in the Con-tempo DP.

*Together with its transnational partners in Barcelona, Madrid and Paris the DP created the “European Cities’ Network for Reconciliation” whose members have committed themselves to implement several strands of action:*

- *Experimentation of local centres for equal opportunities;*
- *Research;*
- *Territorial marketing and communication of gender equality and particularly work-life-balance issues;*
- *Mainstreaming of an equal opportunities culture through strategies for attitudinal changes.*

*The idea of local resource centres is at the heart of those activities. Each centre is part of a network of similar centres covering a large geographical area. The centres employ specifically skilled personnel to promote business cases for reconciliation, awareness raising activities, work-life-balance initiatives in public and private organisations and also training for women and men operating these services. The underlying principle is gender mainstreaming.*

*All those efforts are designed to benefit women and men living the territories involved. Citizens with new ideas for change initiatives, requests for new services or innovative projects are encouraged to join forces with the centres. Con-tempo also worked to influence role and task sharing of couples and in families, promoting new models that enable a more balanced distribution of unpaid work at home. Awareness raising strategies were implemented via a website, seminars and meetings targeting the public-at-large.*

*Each centre created a welcoming and friendly environment for women and men, mothers, fathers, children and grandparents. Public and private companies and territorial associations were invited to test and use the various services:*

- *Information and “maps” to find local services, associations, useful initiatives;*
- *Useful material and documentation on how to face the problems concerning family responsibilities and work commitments;*
- *Information on equal opportunities legislation, maternity and parental leave, family and reconciliation policies;*
- *Seminars and meetings devoted to fathers;*
- *Initiatives and expert counselling on reconciliation issues, including childcare and/or elderly care;*
- *A meeting place for women’s groups and associations;*
- *A space exclusively devoted to little boys and girls.*

[IT-G-LOM-0016 Con-tempo](#)

One of the main concerns of the Spanish @CCEDE DP was to improve both the availability and the delivery of care services. To this end it centralised the information and the management of all childcare facilities in the territory, whilst at the same time creating a broader variety of needs-tailored services. Also, the creation of an innovative centre for elderly care in one municipality became an important territorial “landmark” .

*The first step of the childcare strategy was to elaborate the already mentioned “reconciliation resource map” to help everybody requiring care services to locate the most suitable solution. The DP compiled information on all existing public and private childcare services and set up a database, which can be searched by opening hours, price, type of service, etc. Assembling all the information has not been easy. Many of the existing offers were “hidden” and only transmitted by word-of-mouth. In addition, a study on parents’ needs was carried out. It reflected the lack of reconciliation policies in the territory and revealed as the most urgent needs those of parents with children aged from 0 to 11 years. Parents require:*

- *Transport to and from the school centres;*
- *High quality homecare services for children;*
- *Company kindergartens in industrial estates;*

- Decrease of “reconciliation costs”, i.e. affordable prices for care services.

*Satisfying those demands with the currently available offer is virtually impossible. But the additional services and the new centralised childcare office, both established thanks to EQUAL, make things a lot easier for parents. The office is accessible physically and on-line and its database, which is being up-dated on a regular basis, provides the latest information on all infrastructures and resources. Based in Tres Cantos, the office is also managing the subsidies for childcare and handling all queries from people using its services. The objective for the future is to open similar offices in different cities of the region.*

*In addition, a community centre was set up which is designed as a place that offers leisure time activities for senior citizens, but also highly flexible elderly care services at a moderate price for at least 32 users.*

*Similar to its job creation strategy in childcare, the DP set out to create career opportunities for unemployed women in this new institution. Training courses were developed and offered in different cities, giving preference to women who, due to family obligations, had been facing difficulties to access employment. Helping the trainees and future carers to reconcile their jobs with their care responsibilities was quite difficult. Compared to regular care services the new centre is catering for extended opening hours, and this is a problem for staff members with children. In the end, a childcare service was integrated into the elderly care centre to accommodate the needs of parents who have no other option.*

*Promotion and publicity of the new community centre was handled directly by the municipality’s Local Development and Employment Department, through meetings with Women’s Associations and also through special actions such as a Cinema Forum, developed to make people more aware of the work-life-balance dilemma.*

*It is still too early to assess the impact of these activities. But the DP is proud to have successfully trained a group of women who, mostly, had only a basic school certificate, and to have enabled their access to the labour market. Also, thanks to EQUAL, for the first time, a facility has been set up that offers elderly care with flexible opening hours, thus supporting workers with care responsibilities for ageing or ailing dependants who cannot afford to pay for a private service. This possibility did not exist before in the municipalities participating in the DP, and it is hoped that more local governments will follow that example.*

[ES-ES535 @CCEDE](mailto:ES-ES535@CCEDE)

### **3.3. TIME BUREAUS AS MAJOR AGENTS OF CHANGE**

Particularly in France, Italy and Spain, DPs focusing on work-life- balance have created and/or strengthened Time Bureaus or Agencies<sup>22</sup>. Those agencies are physical infrastructures that are covering many of the activities described above, such as:

- introducing more flexible work organisation benefiting both employees and employers;
- providing needs-tailored, flexible care and other family support services and
- triggering attitudinal changes to enable a more even sharing of family duties between women and men.

In addition, harmonising “the times of the city”, i.e. the opening hours of local authorities, stores and other service providers, childcare facilities and schools and the schedules of public transport systems public authorities is their major strategy to enable a better work-life-balance for all. Achievements have succeeded to make a real difference in the daily lives of women and men, whilst at the same time improving the “soft factors” for economic development, i.e. the general quality of work and life in each territory of operation.

The French Egalité des temps DP is contributing to the further development of the Time Bureau in Rennes that has been created in 2002. The Time Bureau employs three staff and is closely cooperating with the relevant departments of the local government. It is raising the awareness of policy makers and authorities in the Rennes agglomeration to the different needs and constraints

<sup>22</sup> See Living Document 2003: Reconciliation of working and family life.

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equal/index.cfm?file=detart.cfm&art\\_id=11981&nav\\_id\\_menu=10678&lang\\_id=5&news\\_flash=N&news=N](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equal/index.cfm?file=detart.cfm&art_id=11981&nav_id_menu=10678&lang_id=5&news_flash=N&news=N)

in terms of time as experienced by employees, employers and providers of services. In addition, it seeks to sensitise the public-at-large for those questions and to develop new services to facilitate the reconciliation of working and private life. The objectives of the Time Bureau include:

- Combating all forms of discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, place of residence, educational background;
- Stimulating and implementing public policies that support access to the labour market and sustainable employment for all, in particular through harmonising life times;
- Establishing neighbourhood services;
- Developing participative democracy;
- Improving the quality of life in the territory.

Besides contributing to the development of the pilot programmes for managers and cleaning staff in the municipal administration, mentioned earlier in this document, and to the emergency childcare services, the bureau des temps also joined forces with the DP in an effort to provide cultural activities to suit the schedules of working people with care responsibilities.

*A survey was carried out on the up-take of cultural activities in Rennes and on how the schedules and locations of those events can hamper the participation of people with care responsibilities and/or living at the outskirts of the city. As a result several pilot actions were implemented:*

- *Midday concerts in industrial zones for busy people who normally can't make it to the usual evening performances to enjoy classical music. The offer comes as a package including food and drinks for a moderate sum of 6 to 10 euro. Each concert has been fully booked, and 80 % of the audience were women, in spite of the fact that they form only 20 % of the workforce in those zones.*
- *A dozen lectures and town meetings targeting the public-at-large and focusing on different aspects of the use of time. Between 200 and 600 people attended those events.*
- *A partnership agreement with the Rennes TV station to produce five documentaries of 26 minutes each, portraying people who are tackling the reconciliation of their different life times. The films were on the air from September 2004 and followed by public discussions in the neighbourhoods of the city.*
- *The website of the city of Rennes is being restructured to better accommodate citizen's needs. It will offer a special service entitled "Tic Tac, le temps à la carte" that provides real time information on all relevant services and events and a tool to track the most conveniently located to either the homes or the worksites of the users*

*To secure mainstreaming and sustainability of its activities the DP established a commission whose work is complimentary to the earlier work of the Time Agency. Members are elected political decision-makers, representatives of local associations, trade unions, public authorities and major enterprises such as SNCF (the French Railway System), the Postal Services, Peugeot-Citroën, hospitals and transport companies.*

*The commission worked through both a plenary assembly and thematic working groups. Plenaries assembled as many as 100 people and usually took place once or twice a year; working groups were consisting of 20 participants who dedicated time to up to eight meetings during the same period, focusing on:*

- *The different use of time by women and men ;*
- *The organisation of public family support services, including childcare;*
- *Access to cultural activities;*
- *Mobility and transport. (Part of this task is to centralise, exchange and exploit the various sources of data concerning traffic and transportation in the Rennes area.*

[FR BRE 200110587 - Rennes égalité des temps](#)