

FAREWELL TO THE MALE BREADWINNER MODEL EQUAL STRATEGIES TO DISMANTLE TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES

GENDER GAPS IN UNPAID WORK AT HOME

Some 62% of households are now "dual income", making this life arrangement the most dominant form among women and men in the European Union^[1]. Yet, despite increasing female participation in the labour market, the private lives of many couples are still showing the role pattern of the male breadwinner model. Men are perceived as providers for the family, whilst women are expected to shoulder the lion's share of unpaid work at home. So as to reconcile gainful employment and career ambitions, motherhood and marriage or partnership, homemaking and social life successfully, women are increasingly behaving as 'super women'.

Time use surveys^[2] comparing the number of hours spent by women and men on activities related to work, family duties and leisure reveal that this traditional pattern is hard to overcome. On average, in all EU Member States, if the total time of gainful employment and domestic tasks is considered, women's work days are longer than men's^[3]. Gender gaps in the use of time are widening when young children are in the household. Compared to women without children, mothers living in couples spend on average at least one hour less per day on paid jobs. The same mothers devote daily between 5½ and 7½ hours to parental and domestic tasks. For men living in couples the tendency is the same as for women: time spent on family duties increases with the arrival of children. But unlike for women, the time of gainful employment is rising or remains stable, when men become fathers.

There are, however, some encouraging trends that may be tipping the scales towards a more even distribution of care and domestic work between women and men. Qualitative research^[4] points at a growing number of men that are keen to live up to their responsibilities as fathers. Most often, though, their attempts are not encouraged by employers, colleagues at work or by the media that tend to convey traditional images of gender relations. In addition, men's contribution to the "second shift", e.g. unpaid work at home, is mainly restricted to feeding, bathing, changing nappies, taking kids to school or kindergarten and - most of all - playing with the children. Men's commitment to sharing household chores is much less pronounced.

STRIVING FOR CHANGES IN GENDER ROLES

Since the 1980s the Community Action Programmes for Equal Opportunities of Women and Men have been addressing the need to change attitudes towards gender roles, as a crucial component of gender equality policies. The current [Framework Strategy for Gender Equality \(2001-2005\)](#) emphasises that achieving equality is: "a question of promoting long lasting changes in parental roles, family structures, institutional practices, the organisation of work and time, (...) that also concerns men and the whole of society (...)".

LEARNING NEW AND UN-LEARNING OLD GENDER ROLES

EQUAL has contributed to promoting equality in unpaid care and family work through strategies and concepts aimed at triggering change in role and task sharing between women and men of the present parent generation. In some Member States this was combined with strategies that addressed young people, and even children, in order to challenge stereotypes during those crucial stages when gender roles are being formed. Whilst many of those approaches targeted men in the first instance, a substantial number were also aimed at overcoming both the "breadwinner" and the "super woman" model. A variety of actions were tested and carefully monitored, the most successful of which are presented below.

Media campaigns

In terms of measurable changes, the most significant EQUAL media campaign has been implemented in the Netherlands. It was shaped like a marketing strategy for a new commercial

product. Taking account of specific life styles and characteristics of a given target group, such strategies are intended to build a critical mass of people that would, after having received the message, adopt the new product as the most suitable. Similar to a nuclear chain reaction, that critical mass triggers an on-going process of multiplication and eventually creates sustainable change. Led by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Dutch campaign with the slogan of "Men Taking the Lead" has worked successfully along those lines.

The message was simple: if more men were prepared to become more involved with tasks at home, more women would be able to enter the labour market and reconcile their working and family lives in a more satisfying way. But instead of having the responsible Minister or gender equality bodies "preach" politically correct attitudes as often happened in the past, the EQUAL partners used a sophisticated mix of activities to initiate "discussions at peoples' kitchen tables" as the first decisive step towards change.

The discussions were stimulated by bombarding the public with a succession of TV and radio commercials, supported by a number of other activities such as press conferences, an [Internet site](#), a series of talk shows and countless events throughout the country. The first message communicated was **confronting men with the excuses they tend to make up in order to avoid taking up more responsibilities at home**. After a while, the strategy was fine-tuned and concentrated more on motivation and inspiration than on provocation. This second wave of messages was aimed at **addressing the need for women to learn to let go of their "household and care monopoly"** and of their strong beliefs about how things should be done. It also focused on the fact that most employers, male colleagues and friends do not react enthusiastically if a man undertakes more family work. Over a period of 16 months the campaign encouraged men to start a dialogue on the equal division of family tasks with their employers, as well as their friends and peers at work. With the project's assistance, this has resulted in many **men making "role sharing agreements" with their partners and/or employers**.

To spread its message, the Partnership under EQUAL convinced other organisations to join forces. Together with large companies, NGOs and the country's top football team, the Partnership organised activities to let fathers experience the fun and satisfaction that can be had from spending quality time with their kids, and the difference that this can make to the lives of their children and partners. The impact of the media campaign was monitored in great detail and is impressive:

- Three months after its launch, the campaign was known to 55% of the Dutch population.
- During the same period a change of attitude was recorded with regard to the statement: *"If young children are part of the family, a mother should not have a job"*. Whilst in January 2003, 40% of the less-educated respondents agreed with that statement, only 25% did so in April of the same year. Amongst the highly educated, 38% stated to "agree totally" in January as compared to only 30% in April 2003.
- According to the final analysis in May 2004, **59% of men and 52% of women were reported to be discussing the division of family tasks at least once a month**. Agreements on sharing those tasks is mentioned as the most frequent result. Between April 2003 and May 2004, **the number of men who had negotiated task-sharing agreements rose from 67% to 88%**, whilst the percentage among women remained stable at 72%.

Transnational cooperation and European thematic work have enabled the transfer of those Dutch good practices to EQUAL Partnerships in other Member States. In France, the Ministry of Labour has included this type of activity into the range of measures that are eligible for funding in the framework of the European Social Fund.

Learning by doing makes all the difference

Practical training in and exposure to new roles and tasks proved to be particularly successful when **taking account of the specific cultural context**. In France, where kindergartens or schools are rarely meeting points for parents, new neighbourhood centres were well received by both women and men. Users appreciated the idea of transferring the discussion on task sharing away from their homes to a neutral space. In several regions, EQUAL provided opportunities for men and women to meet and talk shop with or without the support of professionals.

- Paris-based L' Ecole des parents (**School for Parents**) organised workshops where parents learned about practical solutions to task sharing between mothers and fathers. At

first, there were more mothers, but over time the number of fathers attending the workshops grew significantly. Male participants claim that **learning from peers** who were more advanced in overcoming traditional gender roles has helped them to consider doing the same more seriously, for instance, by taking parental leave.

- In other cities, "parents' cafés" invited men and women to give voice to what they feel and think about old and new gender roles. Here, parents were also encouraged to meet - with or without their children - and to embark on **practical activities which involved role changes**. Men and women discovered that they possess skills that are often labelled as typical of the other gender, such as cooking, constructing technical toys, playing football, telling stories, making music or singing lullabies and that they also enjoyed using them.

In Italy, EQUAL strategies for attitudinal changes were based on the assumption that men like to plan and implement projects over a certain period of time, as opposed to being permanently "condemned" to household or care tasks. "Project work" was used to pave the way to improved and lasting male involvement in family duties.

- EQUAL projects took men on a **journey of change** from where they actually stood and supported them **to reach a concrete goal**: for instance completing a [course](#) in neo-natal care, dedicating Saturday mornings to spend quality time with their kids or preparing a meal for the family once a week, including shopping and cleaning up the kitchen afterwards.
- Through **"men only" courses**, other EQUAL partnerships helped men to assess and **improve their skills in household management**. The programmes provided learning by doing domestic jobs such as ironing, cooking, washing or cleaning a house. At the same time, so they said, they became more aware of the value and burden of unpaid family work.

Addressing gender from kindergarten to university

Through working with children and youth, EQUAL addressed not only role sharing and vocational choices of future generations, but also the prevailing attitudinal patterns of the current parent generation.

Training and further education developed by EQUAL partners in many countries enabled **kindergarten and primary school teachers** to let boys and girls explore existing gender differences and to break with stereotyped perceptions of men and women. For instance, role patterns discovered in the kindergarten groups were linked to the analysis of the different tasks performed by mothers and fathers at home. Role play and discussions triggered questions about the causes of inequality and ideas on how the children envisaged their own adult life. Almost inevitably, this process stimulated more discussions in the families. Supported by awareness raising and training events, parents became more open to review their own performance as role models and to consider changes. [Didactic material and tools](#) prepared by the projects are helping to disseminate the approach further.

A **Spanish partnership** created and tested **innovative curricula for primary and secondary schools**, which challenged traditional gender roles and also the subtle integration of the related stereotypes into science and technology. Rather than offering extra general courses on equal opportunities, these schemes use household processes, such as cooking, baking or ironing to explain certain phenomena in chemistry and physics. The [model](#) has succeeded, as youngsters, particularly boys, have begun to realise the value of unpaid female work and to accept more responsibilities at home. The scheme has created a lot of media attention and prompted much discussion amongst teachers and parents, which has led the competent authorities to consider adopting EQUAL's approach.

In the Netherlands, EQUAL has also been building on research indicating that young men at the beginning of their career have a more egalitarian vision than the previous generation when it comes to sharing care responsibilities with their wives or partners. For instance, to be more proactive fathers, 40% of Dutch engineers would like to work fewer hours, but, due to various barriers, do not act accordingly. Through an [Internet tool](#) a partnership encouraged men to make those barriers visible and also proposed practical solutions to remove them. Moreover, EQUAL tested ways to address parenthood and gender roles in secondary and tertiary education, i.e. at an age when career paths are being formed. A group of engineers who are actually combining work and care was trained as **"ambassadors" of a new male role model**. They acted as visiting

lecturers and passed on their experience to the students. All these positive experiences were synthesised and integrated into teaching materials and tools, including a training module as part of technical education programmes at universities, which are now in demand in a growing number of educational institutions.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Changing attitudes and perceptions related to role and task sharing of women and men requires long-term strategies and relentless persistence. EQUAL good practices and a huge body of materials and tools, developed by partnerships, are available to help different categories of policy makers push for change.

EQUAL Managing Authorities in the Member States should be aware that DPs could in most cases only achieve the first crucial steps to tipping the scales towards a more even division of care and other family responsibilities. To enable further action they should cooperate with the competent authorities to secure:

- **funding for media campaigns over a longer period time and not just as short-lived publicity events;**
- financing for such **campaigns as an integral part of publicly subsidised programmes aimed at gender equality in the labour market.**

Political decision makers and authorities that are **in charge of education and training** should:

- Review curricula at all levels and ensure not only the integration of gender equality aspects as a cross-cutting issue, but also introduce **distinct modules focusing on a more equal distribution of care and other unpaid work at home.**
- Include this specific issue in **teachers' training and continuing education.**

Local policy makers should:

- **Put the future of parenting on the agenda** and consider turning community centres, kindergartens and schools into places where women and men can meet to learn new gender roles and to "un-learn" stereotypes and attitudes that hamper progress towards a society which values and needs the full potential of both women and men.

Endnotes

[1] Eurostat: Statistics in focus, Theme 3 -9/2002

[2] Eurostat: Statistics in Focus: How women and men spend their time, Results from 13 European countries, 2004

[3] With the exception of Denmark, Finland Sweden and the UK where it is almost equivalent.

[4] For instance: Margret Fine-Davis et al. : Fathers and mothers - Dilemmas of the Work-Life-Balance, Dublin, 2002