

ETG 4: IMPROVING THE WORK-LIFE-BALANCE OF WOMEN AND MEN

EQUAL PROMOTES SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE

1. ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document presents the main results of the activities of the [European Thematic Group on Equal Opportunities](#) (ETG 4) related to the reconciliation of working and private life. These activities were undertaken in 2003 and 2004 and led to the identification of the key components of policies and practices that can enable gender equality to become a reality in the lives of women and men. The full report covering all the outcomes of the ETG4 is contained in two chapters of its "[Living Document](#)" - one focusing on [care and other family support services](#) and the other [on work-life-balance policies in companies and organisations](#).

2. RECONCILIATION – STILL A WOMEN’S PROBLEM

Reconciling a job and career with raising children and other family responsibilities and striving at the same time to participate in cultural and civic life presents an enormous challenge for many women in Europe. Reconciliation is still mainly perceived as a “women’s problem” and this is reflected in female employment patterns in almost all Member States.

Existing disparities between women and men in employment¹ are mainly due to this persistent problem. Women who have been absent from the labour market for some time encounter major difficulties when trying to re-enter it. One of the biggest of these hurdles is the lack of adequate care services that are available to women with young children and/or ageing parents.

Many women who are holding down a job also have to struggle to have a satisfying private life. Even if the flexibility of work organisation has increased in recent years, it is often the needs of enterprises for improved production processes and market competitiveness, which drive this flexibility. Consequently, the resultant flexibility does not necessarily contribute to a better reconciliation of work and private life. The solutions chosen by many women in combining their different roles of employees, wives, mothers and homemakers are frequently hampering their employment and career prospects. Some 37% of women with child care responsibilities work part-time², compared with only 17% of women who have no such responsibilities and 6.5% of men³. Whilst this choice is predominantly a voluntary decision, a growing number of women have no other option. Particularly in retail or personal services, employers are increasingly organising jobs on a part-time basis and even if these reduced working hours help women 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 benefits³.

Striking a balance between work and family life is an enormous challenge for people who regularly work long, full-time hours or overtime or have atypical work schedules. Moving from an industrial society with synchronised rhythms of work to a service and information society has increased these patterns of work during the last decade⁴. In the EU15, more than 30% of all

¹ Joint Employment Report (JER) 2004/05: Gender gaps in employment : EU 15: 17.2 and EU 15 + ACC: 16.3 percentage points

² Part-time arrangements vary greatly between Member States. See details in [Employment in Europe 2003](#)

³ Ibidem

⁴ Rachel Silvera: *Articuler vie familiale et vie professionnelle en Europe*, 2002

employees work on Saturdays, with the percentage of women being only slightly lower than that for men. Whilst night work remains a male domain, evening work has become a normal routine for 20% of female and 33% of male workers.

For both unemployed and employed women, the fact that they are providing the lion's share of unpaid care in the home exacerbates the problem of reconciliation. An equal distribution of family duties is still far from being a reality for most couples.

3. RECONCILIATION - A EUROPEAN POLICY PRIORITY

The European [Employment Strategy \(EES\)](#) (EES) links gender equality to the priorities of labour market policies. In order to reach the [Lisbon](#) target of an overall employment rate of 70% by 2010, the specific target of a 60% rate for female employment must be achieved. By the same deadline, the number of childcare facilities in each Member State should have been increased to 33% for 3 year olds and under and to 90% for children between 3 years of age and mandatory school age.

Also, the "Report on Equality of Women and Men 2005" and the "Report of the Employment Task Force (2003)" both underline the need for more flexible work organisation. Flexible, family-friendly working-time arrangements are emphasised as being the key to making gender equality a reality in the labour market and also to improving quality and productivity at work.

4. EQUAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO RECONCILIATION POLICIES AND PRACTICES

EQUAL Development Partnerships (DPs) that focus on gender equality have developed [good practices](#) that can help to facilitate the reconciliation between the different spheres of an individual's life. In many cases, DPs have combined a number of activities that address the different obstacles to establishing a more satisfying work-life-balance. These include:

- Creating more, and better, care services for children and other dependents;
- Setting up family support services;
- Developing flexible, family-friendly working time arrangements and other work-life-balance policies in public and private organisations;
- Forging territorial alliances for reconciliation, in particular through harmonising the opening hours of local authorities, childcare facilities, schools, stores and service providers and relating them to the schedules of the public transport systems;
- Enabling men and women to overcome traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

4.1. MORE AND BETTER CARE SERVICES

The creation of new care services has produced a double result: jobs for unemployed women with no/low formal qualifications and labour market access for other women – unemployed or inactive – who previously could not seek gainful employment due to the lack of care services.

Particularly in Belgium, France, Italy, Luxemburg and Spain, EQUAL has been able to stimulate this kind of change through using a multi-faceted approach. The decisive factor in generating such change has been the combination of several, or all, of the following components.

4.1.1. Basic training and accreditation for unemployed women

Integrating assessment and the validation of informal skills (Accreditation of Prior Learning [APL] or Bilan de compétences) into basic training for both childcare and care of the elderly has contributed significantly to the sustainable labour market integration of long-term, unemployed and inactive women. Valuing and certifying skills acquired, for instance, through raising a family

and running a household has produced a recognised set of educational credentials for a target group that does not meet the entry requirements for the care training offered by tertiary education. The approach not only promotes these women's employment prospects, it also creates opportunities for further education and life-long learning.

Some approaches to long-term unemployed and inactive women were especially successful and these included:

- Using a portfolio method, where prior learning and new achievements are collected in an individual progress record. This learning and these achievements are recognised as being equally as relevant as the requirements of formal education and training. In some cases, this approach has led to individuals being awarded a lower secondary school certificate and in others to a qualification that enables them to access care training provided by tertiary educational institutions;
- Accommodating the needs of inexperienced learners through schemes that are modular and shorter than regular training courses. By no means do these schemes represent a dilution of the established syllabus but they are very focused on the needs of specific age groups. For instance, training in after-school care was explicitly designed to enable women to run attractive programmes for school children including subjects such as environmental protection, gardening, recycling, handiwork, music, theatre, body expression, popular games and sports. Training for the care of the elderly gives participants the skills to carry out tasks such as basic nursing, preparing dietary meals or doing housework and these are complementary to the mainstream care services;
- Creating schemes that are largely work-based and combine practical training with theoretical instruction. Work placements in either existing care facilities or in new infrastructures, set up thanks to EQUAL, enable women to immediately apply their new competencies and interact with more experienced care staff. On-going supervision, networks allowing for exchange and support amongst colleagues and - in the case of elderly care - meetings with the professional care providers that help the same old person or couple have further strengthened the performance of the new carers and created a sound basis for a lasting relationship with the "customers" i.e. the senior citizens or parents.

4.1.2. Immediate transition from training to the workplace

Past experiences have shown that training women from disadvantaged groups and supporting them on the open labour market does not necessarily secure lasting employment. Therefore, EQUAL has linked training activities to the setting up of additional care services, which are both institutional and home-based. To prevent disadvantaged women from falling back into unemployment or inactivity, the partnerships have managed to have the new facilities up and running as soon as the training has been completed. Close cooperation with local governments has helped both to expand the services of existing care centres and to establish new service enterprises and thus to create a large number of new jobs. Such positive outcomes have been greatly facilitated by:

- Involving not only the social service departments but also those that have a responsibility for economic development. The focus of economic development on skills gaps and company needs has influenced municipalities to provide more and better care. EQUAL partners have also convinced authorities to extend the opening hours of their existing childcare centres and to open new centres for very small children and/or elderly people in areas that are near busy industrial and commercial zones. In this way, the local factories and firms have a better chance of attracting new female employees to respond to any unmet skill or labour force requirements;
- Joining forces with economic development agencies and business consultants to support social economy enterprises or micro companies. Such support is offered from the very early stages through to the start-up phase and well beyond. Besides accommodating the specific needs of women who have the potential to become entrepreneurs, EQUAL has also encouraged local NGOs to launch service cooperatives to avoid placing excessive business

responsibilities on individual women who, on their own, may not be able to respond adequately to the entrepreneurial challenge.

4.2. LINKING CARE TO OTHER FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Preliminary studies have explored how the organisation of care and other family support services can boost female employment and help improve the work-life-balance of parents and other people with care responsibilities. Services that alleviate daily housework or provide suitable transport have proved to be effective and have involved:

- Professionally led service agencies, set up thanks to EQUAL in France, Italy and Spain that are converting domestic tasks into regular jobs. The same approach has worked successfully for so-called “odd jobs” ranging from minor household repairs to accompanying children or old people to leisure activities or to doctors’ appointments. These service agencies are experiencing an increasing demand for many small tasks and some of them hire the service workers on a regular part-time or full-time basis. Others are helping the women who are trying to offer services to find customers, and they then also assist these customers with all of the necessary administrative procedures, such as calculating wages and drafting work contracts.
- Inventing new ways of commuting in areas that are not well served by public transport. In one remote rural area, an EQUAL partnership has bought mini vans and trained unemployed women as drivers in order to help them start a regular “bus service”. A venture with similar aims was launched in France, but this project introduced car sharing and bicycle rental as low-budget alternatives. In both cases, jobs were created and these have been filled by women (and men) who had been formerly unemployed and, at the same time, the improved transport services have opened up additional employment prospects for others.

4.3. SECURING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE NEW SERVICES

In the face of increasingly tight public budgets, new models of financing developed in EQUAL have ensured the sustainability of the novel types of services mentioned above. Many projects have launched public-private partnerships, involving local and regional authorities, employers, social partners, NGOs and service-users. This EQUAL partnership approach has proved to be an ideal way of engaging the commitment of all these players because:

- Benefiting from increased productivity and reduced absenteeism has led employers to understand that financial support for needs-tailored care is a good business investment. Large companies have contributed to the set-up and running costs of local facilities or, less frequently, have created company-based childcare provision that has also received subsidies from the local municipalities. Even SMEs that had previously seen these “in-house” solutions as being beyond their means have become partners in local care cooperatives. Tax incentives for businesses such as those that have been introduced in Italy, have also played a catalytic role;
- Realising that adequate transport enables people to take advantage of “more distant” job opportunities has stimulated key players to take action to ensure the survival of the services. Companies, local associations and tourist agencies have become regular customers and thus helped to consolidate the new ventures. In a rural area with high unemployment rates, EQUAL was instrumental in creating a legal framework that has allowed small municipalities to sub-contract transport services to the new businesses;
- It has been possible to develop and strengthen two promising financing models. One model provides State Service Vouchers to disadvantaged families and single parents, whilst the other markets commercial services for people who can afford to pay for this kind of support. In a few countries, partnerships have succeeded in convincing companies to include these services in the benefits packages that they offer their employees.

4.4. WORK-LIFE-BALANCE POLICIES IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ORGANISATIONS

The second major building block of EQUAL's strategies to improve the balance between working and private life is the introduction of comprehensive work-life-balance policies in public and private enterprises and organisations. The models that have been developed included both new flexible work organisation and family support services.

4.4.1. Convincing employers

Many companies, and particularly SMEs, shy away from the introduction of work-life-balance policies because they assume they cannot afford the costs. To overcome the reticence of employers, EQUAL partnerships have been collecting and studying success stories from throughout Europe. Those good practices clearly indicate that employers can gain substantially through work-life-balance packages. Hard facts such as those presented in the following example have motivated companies to introduce family-friendly personnel policies.

- On behalf of the German Government, 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, tele-work and childcare) helped each company to save several hundred thousands of euros. Model calculations that contrasted the losses incurred through staff turn-over and absenteeism with the cost of providing the "family package" demonstrated that, on average, a return of at least 25% could be expected on the investment in the family package.

4.4.2. Working time flexibility benefiting employees and employers

A careful analysis of employees' and employers' needs in terms of flexible working time, has enabled EQUAL partners in all Member States to design and test a variety of different solutions.

- EQUAL has supported companies in condensing a normal full-time working week to four days, introducing periodic home working and tele-work, combining longer and shorter days and working longer hours over a defined period to accrue non-working blocks of time. These banked hours can, for instance, be used during schools holidays or family emergencies. The results have been very satisfying, especially for female employees. Mothers have appreciated the general reduction of stress and also the opportunity to create a better balance between working time and childcare provision, and to spend more quality time with their children and partners. Employers have come to recognise that both job performance and productivity can be increased through such solutions.

4.4.3. Tackling the disadvantages of flexibility

In some Member States, EQUAL has managed to change atypical working patterns that severely hampered reconciliation. In France, EQUAL partnerships have been linking new work schedules to a process of (re)assessing and reorganising working environments and job content and this has resulted in:

- Dismantling the "broken shifts" that were the usual pattern for the cleaning of all the municipal buildings of the city of Rennes. Previously, the predominantly female staff had to work two shifts to make enough income, 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. Team work is a key element of the new model. Whilst in the past, one person had been assigned a certain number of square metres two women are now sharing the work of cleaning 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 new scheme has enabled 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%;
- Reducing the alarming turnover and absenteeism of the female staff of a large hotel chain. For example, a new solution was found for receptionists who had been covering the two busiest periods – the morning when guests were checking out and the evening when new arrivals were piling up. The free hours in between did not really help to improve family life,

since employees had to leave for their second shift just as their children or partners would be returning home. The establishing of multi-skills programme was the turning point, as employees were able to be trained to undertake 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 a full day's work instead of the "broken" schedules. In addition, the approach helps employees to develop their careers and obtain increases in pay.

4.4.4. Meeting care and other family needs

Besides soliciting the financial support of employers to establish or improve care services for their employees, developing "help desks for family matters" has proved to be a successful approach to meeting family needs while at the same time helping companies attract and retain qualified staff. For example:

- In [Germany, Italy, Spain and Portugal](#), EQUAL training programmes have enabled women, both employed and unemployed, to provide counselling and practical advice to other employees. This may include support in locating the most suitable childcare or care for the elderly service and in finding speedy solutions to almost any kind of emergency. Developing personalised working time arrangements and career planning for parents and people with care responsibilities are also part of their tasks. The "help desks" that have often become permanent facilities are also ensuring that people on parental leave can stay in touch with their company. This includes facilitating regular or occasional part-time work and participation in training, both of which enable parents to keep their skills up-dated and to return to the workplace well-prepared;
- Company help desks have been particularly successful when they have worked closely with regional initiatives for work-life-balance. This cooperation has widened the choice and availability of support measures and resulted in lasting coalitions of local or regional employers, municipalities and relevant service providers. A French example demonstrates how a local partnership resolved the problems of women working in precarious jobs within a large super market chain. To increase both the quality of work and the employees' job security, the partnership offered basic ICT training to help them meet the most essential skill requirements for cashiers and stock-clerks. However, the women felt that in the light of their responsibilities for their families, they could not afford the additional time to undertake the training and so an innovative solution had to be found. The company decided that the employees could barter each hour they spent on training for an hour of housework that would be supplied by a local social economy enterprise and paid for by the company. In addition, needs-tailored services with local providers of childcare were negotiated and more suitable arrangements for transport, particularly late in the evening and on weekends, were made.

4.4.5. Turning work-life-balance schemes into a process of cultural change

In some countries, work-life-balance programmes such as those described above were only the beginning of a long-term process of change. Milestones have already been reached and the progress made indicates that lasting impact will be achieved, as follows:

- In [Italy, Portugal and Spain](#), EQUAL has involved the social partners in a geographical area or economic sector, and succeeded in influencing the content of collective bargaining. Awareness raising and training for decision-makers in trade unions and employers organisations has led to "Memoranda of Understanding" being signed. These commit employers and unions to negotiate work-life-balance measures for women and men as part of collective agreements and to include relevant EQUAL achievements as part of these measures. In Spain, collective agreements are granting reduced working hours and flexible leave schemes for parents and employees with care responsibilities that go beyond the current legal provision;
- [In Ireland, a large partnership](#) linking six major companies operating in key economic sectors 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 extends those measures to a wider group, involving fathers or people with

other care responsibilities. During the deepening stage a more consistent combination of policies emerges that gradually becomes available to all personnel. Policies are now seen as a response to business needs and a way of attracting and retaining staff. At this point, relevant HR skills are being developed and the up-take of programmes is monitored. When it reaches the mature stage, an enterprise will be meeting its organisational goals and its employees' work-life-needs without prejudicing the interests of either side.

To enable all partners to embark on this "continuum of change", EQUAL established a Work-Life-Balance Group in each of the participating organisations. These groups involve representatives of management and trade unions who together assess the work-life-balance provision of the company. The next step is to apply the work-life-balance criteria that are based on research and good practices collected earlier and to identify from which stage of the continuum the organisation should begin. Diagnostic checklists produced by the partnership have assisted the organisations during this evolutionary process. All partners agree that cultural change is well underway and that their organisations are considerably different than at the beginning of the endeavour.

4.5. TERRITORIAL ALLIANCES FOR RECONCILIATION

Many EQUAL partnerships have forged territorial coalitions aimed at turning a local area or region into a better place to live and work, particularly for people with care responsibilities. Time Bureaus or Agencies, created and/or strengthened by EQUAL, especially in France, Italy and Spain provide the most successful examples in this context. These agencies are physical infrastructures that attempt to improve the availability of needs-tailored care services and family-friendly working time arrangements. Thus, they strive to harmonise "city times" or in other words the opening hours of a range of facilities and services to make them more suitable for working parents. In addition, they try to trigger changes in attitudes that enable a more even sharing between women and men of unpaid work in the home.

Achievements in these four areas have made a real difference to the daily lives of women and men and, at the same time, they have enhanced the "soft factors" in economic development, i.e. the general quality of life.

4.5.1. Joining forces for change

Creating local, powerful, pro-active alliances has been the most important factor in promoting efficient, territorial, work-life-balance policies. The EQUAL partnership approach has proved to be the optimal way of enabling political decision-makers, public authorities, social partners, employers and citizens to come together around this issue. Investing time and resources in preparing the ground for the growth of activities in the areas detailed above has generated a lasting commitment on the part of the different players. Four strategies have proved to be particularly effective:

- Placing the agencies under the direct responsibility of a mayor or high-level regional decision-maker has helped to emphasise or strengthen the policy priority that has been accorded to eliminating gender disparities in the use of time;
- Pleading the business cases for the introduction of the approach has been essential in developing a common vision on the benefits of Time Agencies to the region, and also to each of the partners and their respective institutions;
- To move from vision to action, EQUAL partners have convened commissions, committees or working groups that assemble the top decision-makers. These groups have sometimes brought together up to 100 people and have often been formed at high profile events. All the practical details of the different institutions' contributions have been developed by smaller teams of practitioners in the field of work organisation, transport, education, social care and culture. This intensive cooperation spread over a period of months has paved the way to inter-agency approaches that are crucial for the success of these activities. Some partnerships insisted on parity of male and female members in both policy maker and practitioner groupings;

- Involving various groups of citizens in [surveys](#) that identify the most alarming “time eaters” in their daily lives and their needs for an improved work-life-balance has stimulated lasting interest. In parallel, studies have explored the needs and constraints of companies in terms of more flexible work organisation. Information campaigns, town meetings and round tables have further enhanced the motivation to be part of this process of change and have created a new “societal dialogue” in the territory that has gone beyond the traditional social dialogue between employers and trade unions.

4.5.2. Harmonising “city times”: public authorities as pioneers

By creating one-stop-shops, local and regional governments have generated the momentum for the activities of all partners. Based in a single location, one-stop-shops help people save precious time by catering for almost every type of demand from getting a copy of a birth certificate, through using health and social care services, to setting up an appointment with a careers guidance or placement officer. Thanks to EQUAL, one-stop-shops are becoming a permanent feature in cities and regions and they include:

- In France, “neighbourhood town halls” that provide services during opening hours that suit the work schedules of the population instead of the usual 9 to 5 rhythm of public administrations;
- A combination of services for groups of citizens, such as families with children. These centres specialise in early childhood and educational activities, in financial aid and health issues like family planning, pregnancy care and in supporting couples in crisis situations;
- A very specific service in [France](#) centred on the start of the school year, which is an impressive demonstration of how much time can be gained at very little cost. At the end of every summer before school begins, parents can find all the information that they need in one place. In the past, this was a tedious task that took two half days, and required parents to run back and forth between different offices. Now everything can be dealt with in less than 45 minutes and, in addition, parents can enrol their children in extra-curricular activities, buy transport coupons and obtain lunch vouchers. Involving more than a dozen public services and around forty associations, these “guichets uniques” are also a showcase for non-profit organisations and a welcoming point for newcomers to the city.

An important feature of these territorial alliances has also been the widening of the concept of reconciliation. The DPs are not only enabling women and men to achieve a better reconciliation between their duties at work and in the home, but also helping them to lead a fuller and more satisfying life. Such a life should include time to socialise with friends, time to participate in cultural and civic activities and – at least now and again – time for oneself.

- A study carried out by a French DP revealed that the timings and venues of cultural events almost entirely excluded people with care responsibilities or those living on the outskirts of the city. Several ways of remedying this situation were tested in the city of Rennes. For instance, midday concerts were organised in an industrial complex for people who could not, or would not normally, attend evening performances of classical music. The offer was a package that included lunch and drinks, all for a reasonable sum of somewhere between 6 to 10 euro. Each concert was fully booked and 80% of the audience were female, whereas in terms of the overall workforce in this industrial zone, women account for only 20%. Another example of these new cultural opportunities are the “Happy Hours” at the Rennes Theatre. These short performances take place between 18.00 and 20.00, so that people go to the theatre straight after work. A ticket costs only three euro and for that price, parents can also leave their offspring in the theatre’s crèche.

4.5.3. Smarter transport solutions

Commuting from home to work, to kindergarten, to school, to shops and to other services has been identified by EQUAL partnerships as one of the most time consuming and unproductive daily tasks. This is particularly true for women who are less likely to own a car or have access to their family’s car. Thus for years and often unsuccessfully, gender equality bodies and NGOs have been lobbying bus and train services to adapt their timetables to the needs of working women. However, EQUAL has helped to link this goal with the policy priorities of local or regional governments and the business interests of the transport companies. It has been an excellent opportunity for these companies to attract new customers and to develop more cost-effective

services and this is also very much in line with the aim of governments to reduce environmental pollution and traffic jams through minimising the use of cars for individual travel to and from the workplace.

- In Barcelona [a partnership](#) working with the Metropolitan Transport Corporation and the bus services of the neighbouring communities has integrated all of the different transport systems that had previously been operating independently. This included an analysis of an urban bus line, to check if and how its route connected the areas and services which were most crucial to people with family responsibilities. Other pilot actions have facilitated mobility between the communities where people live and major industrial areas and transport between the different municipalities and the central commercial areas in down-town Barcelona.
- In Italy, a [municipality](#) in an EQUAL partnership joined forces with the employers' consortium from a huge industrial zone. The consortium, which had a reputation for its innovative environmental protection programmes, was keen to reduce the pollution caused by the daily traffic jams. Car sharing and a transport system using electric and low-emission cars were introduced. Whilst the municipality invested in the cars, the consortium has covered the running costs of this new service, which has significantly reduced both pollution and employees' commuting time.

4.6. LEARNING NEW, AND UN-LEARNING OLD, GENDER ROLES

EQUAL has promoted equality in unpaid care and family work through strategies and concepts that trigger changes in roles and task sharing between women and men from the current generation of parents. In some Member States, these activities were combined with strategies that addressed young people, and even children and challenged stereotypes during the crucial stages when gender roles are being determined. A variety of actions were tested and carefully monitored and the most successful of these are presented below.

4.6.1. Media campaigns

The most significant EQUAL media campaign was implemented in the Netherlands. It was shaped just like a marketing strategy for any new commercial product. Such strategies take account of particular life styles and characteristics of a given target group and are intended to create a critical mass of people that, having received the message, will adopt or continue to buy the new product. In this case, the critical mass was intended to trigger a chain reaction producing an on-going process of multiplication and eventually engendering sustainable change. The campaign was fronted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs in the Netherlands under the slogan of "Men Taking the Lead".

The idea was simple – *"if men were prepared to become more involved in 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."* However, instead of using representatives of the Ministry or gender equality bodies to "preach" a politically correct message as had often happened in previous campaigns, the EQUAL partners used a sophisticated mix of activities to initiate "discussions at people's kitchen tables" as the first decisive step towards changing attitudes and behaviour.

Members of the general public were bombarded with a series of TV and radio commercials, supported by a number of other activities such as press conferences, an [Internet site](#), talk shows and countless events throughout the country. The first message confronted men with the excuses that they invent to avoid taking on 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 addressed 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 EQUAL Partnership convinced other organisations to join in. 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 the facts speak for themselves:

- Three months after its launch, the campaign was known to, and recognised by, 55% of the Dutch population;
- During the same period, a change of in public attitudes was recorded in relation to the statement: *"If young children are part of the family, their mother should not have a job"*. In January 2003, 40% of the respondents who had lower educational qualifications agreed with that statement compared to only 25% in April of the same year. For those who had completed tertiary education, the figures were 38% who agreed in January but this had dropped to 30% in April;
- According to the final analysis in May 2004, 59% of men and 52% of women were reported as discussing the division of family tasks at least once a month. Agreements on the sharing of tasks were mentioned as the most frequent result of these discussions. This repeated telephone survey of 700 individual men and women also revealed that 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 transferred these good practices from the Netherlands to EQUAL Partnerships in other Member States. In France, the Ministry of Labour has included this type of activity within the range of measures that are eligible for financing from the European Social Fund.

4.6.2. Learning by doing makes all the difference

Practical training in, and exposure to, new roles and tasks has proved to be particularly successful when account is taken of the specific cultural context. In France, where kindergartens or schools are rarely meeting points for parents, new neighbourhood centres have been welcomed by both women and men. Users appreciate the idea of transferring the locus of the discussion on task sharing from their homes to a more neutral space and in several regions, EQUAL has provided opportunities for men and women to pursue this debate with or without the support of professionals.

- The Paris-based L' Ecole des parents (School for Parents) organised workshops to promote 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 made them think more seriously about accepting more responsibilities and perhaps even taking parental leave.
- In other cities, "parents' cafés" have invited men and women to express what they feel and think about old and new gender roles. Parents are also encouraged to meet - with or without their children - and to embark on practical activities which involved role changes. Through these cafés, men have discovered that they possess skills that are often regarded as being a woman's preserve, such as cooking, reading stories or singing lullabies and women have also learnt that they can be good at typical male activities such as constructing technical toys or playing football. Together, they have been able to explore and enjoy these new horizons.

In Italy, EQUAL strategies to engender 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, as for example:

- EQUAL projects took men on a journey of change and supported them in attaining a concrete goal. Such a goal might be completing a course in neo-natal care or dedicating Saturday mornings to spend quality time with their kids or preparing a meal for the family once a week, including all of the shopping and cleaning up the kitchen that is involved;
- Through "men only" courses, other EQUAL partnerships have helped men to assess and improve their skills in household management. The programmes provide learning by doing in

domestic jobs such as ironing, cooking, washing or cleaning the house. At the same time, the participants said that they have become more aware of the value and also the burden of unpaid family work.

4.6.3. Addressing gender from kindergarten to university

In working with children and young people, EQUAL has highlighted the prevailing attitudes of current parents and explained the roles and the vocational choices that are available to future generations of parents.

- Training and further education of kindergarten and primary school teachers developed by EQUAL in many countries has enabled them to help boys and girls explore existing gender differences and reconsider 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 on how the children envisaged their future adult lives. Almost inevitably, this process stimulated further discussions within the children's own families. Through awareness raising activities and training events, parents became more willing to review their own performance as role models and more open to possible changes. [Didactic material and tools](#) prepared by the projects are being used in the wider dissemination of this approach.
- A [Spanish partnership](#) has created and tested innovative curricula for primary and secondary schools, which challenge 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, and 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 and as a result, the educational authority is now considering the general adoption of this EQUAL approach.
- In the Netherlands, EQUAL has also been building on research that has indicated that young men at the beginning of their career have a more egalitarian vision than their previous generation when it comes to sharing care responsibilities with their wives or partners. For instance, it appeared that 40% of Dutch engineers would like to work fewer hours so as they could be more pro-active fathers but this wish had not been translated into action. Through an [Internet tool](#) an EQUAL partnership encouraged men to identify those barriers that prevented them spending more time with their children and to proposed practical solutions as to how these hurdles might be overcome. Moreover, EQUAL tested ways of addressing the topics of parenthood and gender roles in secondary and tertiary education, when career paths are being formed. Engineers who were actually combining work with the care of their children were trained as a group of ["ambassadors"](#) for this new male role model. They became visiting lecturers and passed on their "hard-won" experience to the students. All their experiences were synthesised and integrated into teaching materials and tools, including a training module as part of technical education programmes at universities. These are now in growing demand within a number of educational institutions.

5. EQUAL WORK-LIFE-BALANCE STRATEGIES HELP EVERYBODY WIN

The proper reconciliation of work and family life is one of the persistent obstacles that have hampered the equal treatment of women and men on the labour market. There is a long track record of attempts to tackle the problems at both European and national level. These include legislation, model programmes and a large number of good practices related particularly to childcare, working time arrangements and attitudinal changes. However, evidence of a lasting impact is slow to appear.

The EQUAL good practices presented in this document have generated significant changes, the full impact of which will only become visible over the next few years. However, EQUAL has successfully launched a process which incorporates the key elements of work-life-balance policies and practices in the local areas and regions as well as in the public and private

organisations that have been involved in its Development Partnerships. EQUAL DPs have demonstrated that it is possible to win over top level decision-makers and to get their lasting commitment to social and cultural change. This has become possible because EQUAL has established convincing business cases that have demonstrated the substantial advantages of the introduction of work-life-balance policies and practices in terms of the economic development of companies, organisations and even territories.

The EQUAL achievements include a wealth of curricula, methodologies and tools that can support administrations at national, regional and local level and also public and private organisations in improving the work-life-balance of women and men. These products also provide important background information for those DPs that will focus on reconciliation in the second round of EQUAL and, in most cases, the products be can accessed via the DPs' websites listed in the annex to this document.