

## Going flexible in and around Madrid

Only 14% of Spanish males share caring tasks in the home, as compared to 27% in Germany and 37% in the Netherlands. So it is no wonder that, in Spain, only 40% of the women with care responsibilities are gainfully employed. To make matters even worse, "flexible" working has a bad image, as it is perceived to benefit employers more than employees. It is against this unpromising background that the Spanish DP @CCEDE decided to tackle the issue of work-life balance in the Madrid area by forging a strong, local consortium that brought together several municipalities, employers organisations and trade unions. Its multi-faceted approach also covered work in schools on attitudinal change and developing care services for children.



### Getting the picture first

After a literature review of flexible work arrangements in companies that was conducted at local, regional, national and European levels, the DP developed guidelines for interviews with employers and produced information sheets that presented the case for flexibility in an attractive way. Companies were contacted via telephone and then in-depth interviews were arranged with HR managers. The aim of this exercise was to gain an overview of the work-life-balance measures that were already in place and to launch a dialogue about how to develop and implement the most appropriate flexible work arrangements in each company. Barriers to introducing such personnel policies were discussed and the needs of each enterprise were assessed. At the end of this process of exploration, 709 companies agreed to analyse the situation of their female employees in terms of recruitment, promotion and wage differentials.

Focusing on local companies, and using a sample of 118 male and 100 female workers, the DP carried out quantitative and qualitative research to identify the needs of working women and men. The study also surveyed the existing services that supported reconciliation and their capacities to meet the needs of such workers. The results showed that the main problem was not only the lack of services, but also the "reconciliation costs", which must be met by the workers themselves in order to care for children or other dependants. There were clearly not enough affordable services and, in general, the cost of care services was high compared to the income of working mothers. Except for some good practices found in a few private sector SMEs, the outcomes showed a lack of company policies on flexible family-friendly working time arrangements. As Alejandro Pérez de Cárdenas, the DP coordinator, pointed out "this result indicates that family obligations can become a factor in exclusion, as personnel policies tend to discriminate indirectly against people with care responsibilities when it comes to recruitment, training and promotion."

Finally, the study presented a plan to implement a range of activities that would promote reconciliation and flexible working conditions in the area. It concluded that two major steps had to be taken if gender equality was to become a reality, namely:

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



## A range of measures to go wider and deeper

Care of dependants is still generally regarded as being a woman's concern and for those who work, "arriving later, leaving earlier" with the actual timing agreed on an individual basis is the most common solution used to help them achieve a work-life balance. @CCEDE encouraged companies to develop a wider approach and to integrate different forms of work organisation for both women and men with family responsibilities, such a choice of shifts in the hotel and catering trade, team work in the industrial sector or an annual calculation of hours worked. Part of the DP's mission was to inform companies not only about the existing legal measures to support paid and unpaid maternity and parental leave, but also about the financial assistance that was available from the state. This included contributions to the costs of temporary replacements, help for schooling or children's holidays and, in a few cases of firms employing people with physical or mental disabilities, aid in dealing with the complicated administrative procedures and in finding adequate childcare for these employees.

A training course was established to support and encourage Human Resource Managers in the design and operation of new reconciliation programmes, through the introduction of flexible work schemes in their organisations. The benefits of this training process were three-fold:

- HR managers started to develop a vision of reconciliation measures that they could implement in their companies;
- The managers provided direct feedback on the implementation of these measures;
- This approach produced a "Domino" effect, raising the awareness of other companies that were based in the same geographical area.

## Transnationality based on five other strands of action

With its Flex@ction transnational partners, @CCEDE shared a wealth of its good practice.

Co-educational activities in infant and primary schools. The DP's aim was to introduce the issue of gender equality into the curriculum and to encourage role sharing in household tasks.

Under the slogan "Get involved at home", @CCEDE developed a series of tools, such as materials for teachers, folders and activity cards for pupils and family notebooks for parents. Meetings were organised with Heads of schools to disseminate these tools and seminars on non-sexist teaching and learning were organised through the Teacher Training Centre.

Training programmes in companies. Agreements were signed with companies that used flexible work-life-balance formulas for the training of women who had previously been unemployed because of reconciliation problems.

Creation of service companies to care for children and other dependents. Here, the first concern was to increase the existing provision of childcare outside the usual hours. The second objective was to establish new jobs for unemployed women, through enterprise creation in the care sector. Participants received training in infant care as well as in business management. The companies which were set up then received administrative support from the DP and financial support from the regional authorities. Three types of activity were tested and implemented, and these were: increased opening hours for existing care organisations, a service to pick up children before and after school and a home-based childcare service.

Creation of a management resource centre on reconciliation. After an in-depth study of parents' needs for childcare and the development of a database of all available resources, @CCEDE set up a Mothers' and Fathers' Service Bureau. This "one-stop-shop" provides information and advice but the feed-back it receives also helps to identify new parental needs.

Creation of a municipal leisure centre for children. This initiative served the double purpose of providing a service for up to 32 young clients per day and creating jobs for unemployed women after they had undertaken appropriate training. Naturally, this centre operates on the basis of flexible working hours.

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### Contact

Alejandro Pérez de Cárdenas

CONSORCIO RED LOCAL

C/ Cronos,63 3ª, Oficina 1

28037 Madrid

Tel: +34915734760

Fax: +34914091574

Email: stecnica@cestel.es

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