

## **A GENDERING THE USE OF TIME**

### **TERRITORIAL APPROACHES TO IMPROVE THE ARTICULATION OF WORK AND PRIVATE LIFE**

#### **TIME TO ENGENDER THE RIGHT WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

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Whilst during the last decade collectively agreed working time in the EU has been falling, the number of hours actually performed has grown in many Member States. According to research<sup>[1]</sup>, a large part of the working population is under constant time pressures. This finding is symptomatic for the change of moving from an industrial society with synchronised work patterns, to a service and information society with rhythms increasingly out of sync. Working hours tend to become more and more irregular, but the "times of the city" - opening hours of local authorities, stores and other service providers, childcare facilities and schools and the schedules of public transport systems, are slow to follow suit. This makes it difficult for people to balance the conflicting pressures of their daily lives.

Women with care responsibilities for children and/or other dependants suffer more from this daily battle against time than men. Coping with a job and managing a family leaves no time for social, cultural or civic activities, and "personal time" is often out of the question. Even in two-income households, the unpaid work at home is not being shared equally. The prevailing pattern of work organisation is shaped as if the entire workforce were male and had no care obligations. High levels of stress and frustration are the norm, and not the exception, for many working women. Obviously, this can have an impact on their job performance and productivity, and cause absenteeism and unwanted company staff turnover.

#### **TOWARDS SOCIAL INCLUSION WITH TIME-MANAGEMENT SUPPORT FOR WORKING COUPLES**

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Clearly, introducing positive change to balance work and private life requires local and company-level approaches, since this is where women and men try to juggle time to manage the different demands of their lives. The European Employment Strategy<sup>[2]</sup> emphasises the crucial importance of local development in combating discrimination and social exclusion. Integrating a gender dimension is seen as a must for the development of localised strategies for more and better jobs, and improved working and living conditions for all.

#### **LEADING THE WAY: AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY**

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**Time Bureaus or Agencies**, created and/or strengthened by EQUAL, particularly in France, Italy and Spain, have produced solutions to the dilemma of juggling conflicting pressures life times. Those agencies are physical infrastructures working along four major avenues:

- harmonising "city times";
- introducing more flexible work organisation benefiting both employees and employers;
- tailored needs, flexible care and other family support services; and
- triggering changes in attitude to enable a more even sharing of unpaid work at home between women and men.

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

#### ***Joining forces for change***

Creating local powerful, pro-active alliances was the most important factor for efficient and successful Time Agencies. The EQUAL partnership approach proved to be optimal to enabling all players to come together: political decision-makers, public authorities, social partners, employers and citizens. Investing time and resources to carefully prepare the ground for the multi-faceted

actions in the four areas above generated a lasting commitment of the different players. Four strategies were particularly effective:

- **Placing the agencies under the direct responsibility of a mayor** or high-level regional decision-maker helped to emphasise the policy priority accorded to eliminating gender disparities in the use of time.
- Pleading **business cases** for the approach was essential to develop a common vision on the benefits of Time Agencies to the region, but also to each partner and their respective institutions.
- To move from vision to action, EQUAL partners convened commissions **assembling the top decision-makers**. These groups that sometimes brought together up to 100 people met first at a high-level visibility event and then met to take final decisions. All the practical details of the different institutions' contributions were elaborated by smaller teams of practitioners in the field of work organisation, transport, education, social care and culture. Lasting months, their intensive cooperation paved the way to **inter-agency approaches**, which were crucial for these activities to take place. To integrate a gender perspective some partnerships insisted on parity of male and female members in both groups.
- **Involving various groups of citizens** in [surveys](#) that identified the most alarming "time eaters" in their daily lives and their needs for an improved work-life-balance stimulated lasting interest. In parallel, studies were carried out to explore the needs and constraints of companies in terms of more flexible work organisation. Information campaigns, town meetings and round tables further enhanced motivation to be part of the change process and created a **new "societal dialogue" in the territory** that went beyond the traditional social dialogue between employers and trade unions.

### **Harmonising "city times"**

#### ***Public Authorities as pioneers***

By creating **one-stop-shops** local and regional governments set the momentum for the activities of all partners. Based in one 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.

- In France, EQUAL was instrumental in the emergence of "neighbourhood town halls". They provide services at opening hours that suit the work schedules of the population instead of the usual 9 to 5 rhythm of public administrations.
- Another kind of one-stop shop combines services for specific groups of citizens, such as families with children. These centres specialise in early childhood and educational activities, financial aid and health issues like family planning, pregnancy care and supporting couples in crisis situations.
- A very specific one-stop-shop in France is centred around the start of the school year and shows impressively how much time can be gained at very little cost. At the end of every summer before school begins, parents can find all relevant information in one place. In the past, this was a tedious job 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, get lunch vouchers, etc. Involving more than a dozen public services and around forty associations, these "guichets uniques" are also a showcase for non-profit organisations and an opportunity to welcome newcomers to the city.

#### ***Smarter transport solutions***

Commuting from home to work to kindergarten or school, and to shopping and other service areas was identified by EQUAL partnerships as one of the most time consuming and unproductive daily tasks. This is particularly true for women who - to a lesser extent than men - own a car or have the family car at their disposal. For years, gender equality bodies and NGOs have been pushing to adapt bus and train services to the needs of working women - in most

cases unsuccessfully. EQUAL helped to link that goal to both the policy priorities of local or regional governments, and to the business interests of transport companies. Testing new solutions was an excellent opportunity for those enterprises to attract customers and to develop more cost-effective services. This was very much in line with the aim of governments to reduce environmental pollution and traffic jams through minimising individual car travel with a more flexible and user-friendly transport system.

- In Barcelona a partnership working with the Metropolitan Transport Corporation and the bus services of the neighbouring local communities enabled the integration of the different systems, which before had been operating independently. The pilot actions developed thanks to EQUAL included the analysis of an urban bus line, to check if and how its route connects the areas and services which are most crucial to people with family responsibilities. Other pilots facilitated the mobility between the communities where people live and their places of work in industrial zones, and the transport between the different municipalities and the central commercial areas.
- In Italy, a municipality participating in an EQUAL partnership joined forces with the employers' consortium of a huge industrial zone. The consortium, which has a reputation for its innovative environmental protection programmes, was keen to reduce the pollution caused by the daily traffic jam of its employees driving to work in their private cars. In the framework of EQUAL, car sharing and a transport system using electric and low-emission cars were introduced. Whilst the municipality invested in the cars, the consortium is covering the running costs of the new service, significantly reducing both pollution and the employees' commuting time.

### **Time for a chance in working practice**

- Family-friendly flexible work arrangements in companies and organisations are a major achievement of the Time Agencies. They supported employers to experiment with a much wider choice of working time variations than just part-time work. In some cases, cooperating with Local or Regional Employment Pacts enabled EQUAL partnerships to build on existing working relations with employers and trade unions. This aided agreements on more family-friendly working time arrangements that were then introduced into collective bargaining. New solutions brought positive change, in particular, for people working unsociable hours that are hardly compatible with raising children. In some cases, the schemes enabled unemployed women to access employment in local areas where job openings are scarce and childcare is running only on the usual 9 to 5 schedule.
- In Brittany EQUAL is piloting a model that is accommodating young parents' needs who, in order to hold a job in the local food industry, were facing antisocial hours, working either an early morning or an evening shift. The model is based on the fact that whilst some production units are running full blast with large work teams at certain periods of the day, they function with much smaller teams during others. To get to grips with these ups and downs, the companies have so far been contracting temporary workers. The idea to be tested under EQUAL was to re-organise the work and, instead of hiring temps, to create permanent jobs for young parents. Those jobs involve work in both a regular team and a "relief-team" that steps in during peak hours. The jobs can be performed during the day, when local childcare centres are open. Employers are recognising the value of the approach, since quick responses to changing production needs are more efficient if carried out with permanent staff who are familiar with the specific job requirements and company culture.

More examples of good practice related to new work organisation are contained in a separate [Policy Brief](#) (Holding a job, having a life).

### **Supporting the family with tailored services**

The provision of flexible care for children and other dependants outside of the usual "7 to 6 o'clock bracket" is a lifeline for women working around the clock and on weekends, such as in super markets, hotels, restaurants or hospitals. The EQUAL Time Agencies have reinforced that lifeline through the **extension of opening hours in existing care facilities and the creation of new services often supplied by small businesses and social economy enterprises**. This includes both home and institution-based emergency [services](#). Success stories are presented in the [Policy Brief](#) focusing on care and other family support services (A Job Machine for Women).

## A question of attitude

Time Agencies supported by EQUAL were well aware that achieving gender equality in the use of time requires drastic attitudinal changes when it comes to sharing unpaid work at home. This is why those partnerships ran **awareness-raising campaigns promoting equality in parenting** and a variety of actions targeted at young families. Mothers **and** fathers were invited to discuss problems of daily life, exchange experiences and learn from each other. Other programmes targeted [only men](#) and provided learning by doing domestic tasks. As a result, a substantial number of men who have participated in those schemes now claim to be spending more quality time with their kids and partners. Detailed information on strategies for attitudinal changes can be found in the [Policy Brief](#) entitled "Farewell to the Male-Bread-Winner-Model?".

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

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EQUAL Time Agencies considerably improved the "time management" capacities of key players at local and regional level, and have proven to be an important asset to economic development and the involvement of citizens in shaping the future of their cities or regions. A substantial number of available methods and tools support territorial policy makers and authorities when embarking on similar ventures.

**Policy makers** should note that:

- Time Agencies do not necessarily require large amounts of funding, but rather the political willingness and commitment to **improve the coordination and delivery of existing services**.

Building on EQUAL good practices **authorities** should:

- **Map out the state-of-the-art concerning "city times"** and apply a gender mainstreaming approach, i.e. find out about the benefits and problems of the various public and private services, their opening hours and schedules for both women and men.
- Make use of the **Guidebooks on Gender Mainstreaming** produced in the framework of EQUAL by the Commission and several EU Member States.
- **Combine top-down and bottom-up approaches** by creating territorial alliances to reinforce the common interests of decision-makers and citizens in the development of their territory.
- Organise **awareness raising and training for civil servants** and employees of different administrations to enable interagency approaches.
- **Reach out to companies and social partners** in their local area and **stimulate a common learning process** on how harmonising "city times" and working time arrangements can make everybody win.
- **Integrate Time Agencies into** existing or emerging **Local or Regional Employment Pacts** to strengthen the supportive environment for creating and retaining more and better jobs.

## Endnotes

[1] [Thalys/Ipsos Study 2001: Le temps au des préoccupations des sociétés européennes - www.observatoire.thalys.com](#)

[2] [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/local\\_employment/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/local_employment/index_en.htm)