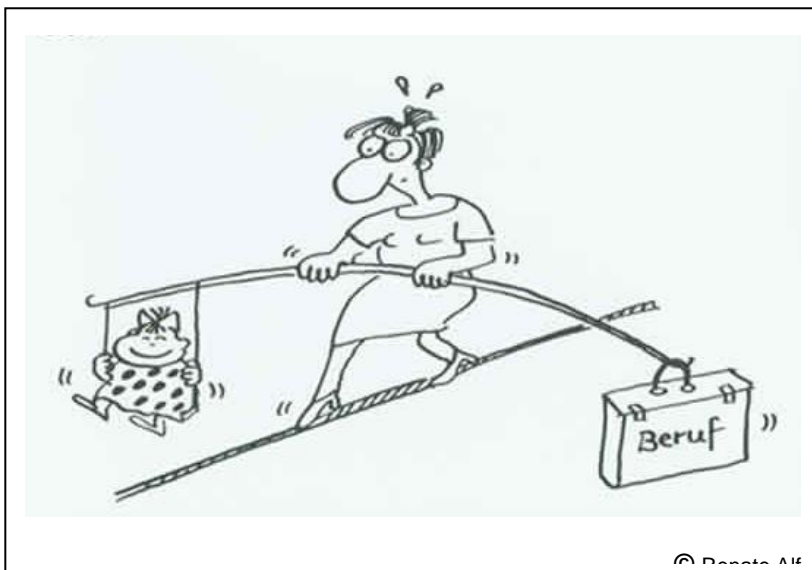


**The information in this document reflects the situation when it was written in 2006. Please bear in mind that some contact information may since have changed.**

## FAREWELL TO MUTTI-LAND

*In Germany the EQUAL National Thematic Network (NTN) on Work-life-Balance makes a substantial contribution to creating family friendly working conditions and to overcoming traditional gender roles and stereotypes. EQUAL good practices are being spread across the country, which has been labelled “Mutti-Land” or Mummy-Land by a major weekly newspaper because 65% of women leave the labour market when they become mothers.*



The activities of the NTN are fully in line with the priorities of the German Government that wants to create living and working conditions enabling women and men to have both a career and a satisfying personal life, which would mean that young mothers would be more willing to remain in employment. In the face of demographic changes and the dramatically low fertility rates, in particular those of women university graduates, reconciliation has become one of the hot issues that is being discussed both in the political arena and by the public-at-large. The Government has launched a whole package

of measures to tackle the continuing lack of flexible, good quality childcare in the western Federal States and to combat prejudices and stereotypes about working mothers. The package aims to promote local and regional alliances for work-life-balance, to convince employers of the business advantages of family-friendly personnel policies and to increase both the quantity and quality of childcare. Moreover, by 2007, the system of German parental leave<sup>1</sup> will be transformed in a way that is more likely to attract men to discovering the joys and responsibilities of fatherhood. Approaches and products that have been successfully tested by EQUAL first Round Development Partnerships (DP) and the first NTN on Work-life-Balance have informed this process of change.

Building on these prior achievements, a new, second Round network was formed. From the beginning, it has been split into two working groups, each focusing on a crucial aspect of reconciliation policies.

### MAKING RECONCILIATION AN ASSET FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

This NTN working group is entirely dedicated to integrating the issue of work-life-balance for women and men into existing systems of quality management. The group has agreed to move beyond the gender equality labels and awards that have been established over the last decade and to work exclusively on turning reconciliation-oriented policies into a quality standard in the context of organisational development. To this end, the NTN is targeting the European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM) since the

<sup>1</sup> The current parental leave system in Germany grants leave with an accompanying guarantee, which lasts for three years, of continued employment. An allocation of between 300 and 450 euro, depending on the length of the career break, is paid only to parents with an income below 30.000 euro. Whilst the maximum of three years' absence for childrearing stays untouched, a new solution called "Elterngeld" provides for a one year financial allocation which amounts to two thirds of the lost income of the partner taking the "family break". If men decide to share this with their female partners they will be entitled to two extra months of paid leave.

group members feel that its approach of enabling extensive quality control and comprehensive management systems is the most suitable for their task. As a first step, they have secured the support of one of the most experienced EFQM experts in the country, who is also a co-founder of the distinguished Ludwig-Erhard-Preis award for German enterprises that excel in quality management. He is helping the NTN to develop new categories and criteria that would enable a work-life-balance model to be integrated into the EFQM system. At the NTN's next meeting in December 2006, this proposal will be presented to, and discussed with, the EFQM director for Germany. A final text will then be provided to the German EFQM Headquarters at the beginning of 2007, so that new criteria involving the reconciliation of work and private life can be incorporated into its quality management structure.

## **A BIG BANG TO COVER WORK-LIFE-BALANCE IN THE MEDIA**

Conceiving creative ideas to promote work-life-balance in the media is the focus of the second working group. The idea is to organise a national competition targeting advertising and marketing agencies and stimulating them to come up with messages that capture the most crucial aspects of reconciliation whilst presenting new solutions for both women and men. In the autumn of 2006, the design will be completed and the competition will be launched, so that a high level jury can select the best of the competing proposals at the beginning of 2007. Under the motto "Dare to take the adventure of reconciliation" these will be presented at a visibility event in Berlin and then used to kick off a national debate about the issue. The intended big bang in the German media was inspired by the Dutch "Journey along cultures" DP whose successful campaign included commercials on TV and on radio, press conferences, the DP's Internet site ([www.wiedoetwat.nl](http://www.wiedoetwat.nl)) and a series of talk shows. Under the title "[Men taking the Lead](#)" this first round EQUAL project managed to encourage men throughout the country to initiate a dialogue on the equal division of family tasks with their partners and also with their employers, colleagues and friends. Further assistance from the project has resulted in many men making "role sharing agreements" with their partners and/or employers.

## **A VIRTUAL GUIDE TO BETTER RECONCILIATION**

The most important achievement of the first generation NTN is a well-used website. It is a virtual guide for parents and other people with care responsibilities, and also for employers, social partners and local policy makers who intend to make a difference in the lives of all those who have to juggle the conflicting pressures of work and family tasks. The [virtual guide](#) contains a wealth of information on relevant legislation and family financial support provided by the state, with a special emphasis on parental leave.

## **Der Vereinbarkeitslotse**



Companies can find plenty of business cases including the hard facts and figures that prove how family friendly personnel policies can help them to save as much as several hundred thousand euro in reduced costs. Model calculations based on the loss incurred through staff turn-over and absenteeism on the one hand, and on the cost of introducing a family package of counselling for parents, individualised flexi-time, tele-work and childcare on the other, demonstrate an average return on the investment of at least 25%. In addition, examples of good practice are presented in great detail on the site, as are studies, brochures and interactive tools for awareness raising and training, many of them developed by EQUAL DPs. Users can also choose from a number of products designed to trigger attitudinal changes including media campaigns, TV spots and cartoons. Quotes from "normal people" and VIPs illustrate the impact of both the lack and the development of a more satisfying work-life-balance and indicate that even top level career women have a hard time getting to grips with the dilemma of reconciliation. Jutta Limbach for instance, the former President of Germany's Constitutional Court admitted that "*I had feelings of guilt – like all gainfully employed mothers,*" and said that her husband helped her get rid of those feelings by explaining that "*if you feel guilty as the mother, so should I as the father*".

