



European  
Commission



# Work-life balance for all:

Best practice examples from  
EU Member States



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## Foreword

Balancing professional and family life is at the forefront of transformations in the world of work in the 21st century. It is a key priority of the European Commission to promote equality of opportunities between men and women.

We face many challenges, such as demographic ageing, a shrinking workforce, digitalisation and globalisation in our daily lives and at work. Striking a balance between work and life at home is crucial for people of working age across the EU. It is not just about the well-being of workers and their families, but also the underrepresentation of women in the labour market.

By proclaiming the European Pillar of Social Rights, all the EU Institutions and Member States have committed to promoting the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men. It serves as a compass for our policies, including on gender equality. A concrete deliverable is the Directive on work-life balance. A gender-balanced take-up of family leaves and flexible working arrangements is essential to ensure a better work-life balance for all. With our broader work-life balance initiative, we can help Member States address the challenges that the fast-paced, digitalised world of work poses and reduce the gender gaps in employment, pay and pensions. This means a stronger investment in people: children, parents, carers, workers, employers, older people and people with disabilities. It will tackle underrepresentation of women in the labour market by:

- **Improving the design and gender-balanced take-up of family leaves and flexible working arrangements;**
- **Improving the quality, affordability and access to childcare and long-term care;**
- **Addressing economic disincentives for parents and carers to work.**



The European Structural and Investment Funds, and in particular the European Social Fund, have a crucial role to play in supporting Member-State action. This selection of best practice examples is taken from the 2007-2013 and 2014-2020 programming periods and has been developed to encourage the exchange of experience, and the implementation of innovative approaches to fostering work-life balance in Member States.

I have no doubt that it will help you in your endeavour to bring about a fairer, more inclusive and social Europe.

*Marianne Thyssen*

*European Commissioner for Employment,  
Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility*

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'M. Thyssen'.



## Putting care workers 'at the wheel' of their own careers

Belgium

**Working as a carer is a high-stress job. The nature of the role is such that care workers are at constant risk of overburden. The demand for high-quality care in society is increasing, and many carers are required to look after people with different, specific needs.**

For organisations such as Flemish home care provider Landelijke Thuiszorg, it is essential to motivate staff to retain them in the long term. Such organisations have to ensure their carers have the necessary skills to remain resilient and develop in their roles as the demands change.

It's also essential to make sure staff can reconcile their responsibilities inside and outside of work in order to maintain a work-life balance and a sustainable career.

### Skills, values and health

In 2015, Landelijke Thuiszorg introduced a new sustainable career policy. It wanted to make its staff more flexible to undertake different roles and give employees control over their own careers.

Its strategy was based around two main actions:

- **a monthly internal working group and focus groups** made up of carers and other staff;
- **regional information evenings** structured around the theme 'at the wheel of your own career'.

The idea of the working group was to encourage staff in different positions to share their experiences, combine expertise and shape further action.

The information evenings were centred around the 'house of work ability' tool. The house is made up of four different floors: work; values; skills; and health – the idea being to think about how these different floors interact.

Through this tool, employees are encouraged to consider their physical and mental health. This means thinking about how they balance their work responsibilities with their home life, and is particularly important for workers who have care responsibilities of their own at home, such as those with children or sick or elderly relatives.

'The aim is to raise awareness of the fact that you can take a large part of your work capacity into your own hands by sitting at the wheel of your own career,' explains Pascale Balemans, head of education and training at Landelijke Thuiszorg.

### Sustainable careers

The organisation provides 'tailor-made support to all employees in their careers,' says Pascale. 'Your own career can become more sustainable if you take control of your own work capacity.'

By giving its employees more control over their careers and encouraging them to find balance with their responsibilities outside of work, Landelijke Thuiszorg helped ensure its staff can handle a challenging and sometimes stressful job and enjoy a well-balanced, sustainable career.



People-oriented business



October 2015 – September 2016



€ 26 283



[www.landelijkethuiszorg.be](http://www.landelijkethuiszorg.be)



# Helping employees take control of their careers

Belgium

**In December 2017, global transport and logistics provider Kuehne + Nagel unveiled a new corporate strategy. The five-year strategy, branded 'KN + NextGen 2022', would focus on three pillars: customers, technology and – crucially – people.**

In Belgium, Kuehne + Nagel's key initiative to develop the final pillar was to streamline the HR approach across its 10 sites around the country, each of which had previously been driven by its own local HR strategy, training policy and recruitment policy.

To do so, Kuehne + Nagel set out to standardise existing HR policies where possible and manage them centrally.

Its aim? To help employees take control of their own careers, with the support of the company, in pursuit of work-life balance.

## Ownership and mutual responsibility

This programme has been developed by more than 15 HR employees, as the project's coordinator Steven De Graeve, Learning & Development Specialist explains. 'We are building this new HR approach, like a new house, in different steps, through a well-organised plan. Kuehne + Nagel supports all employees who can brighten up this way of working with new ideas.'

Staff had the chance to take on one of three different roles as part of the project: promoter, owner or supporter. These roles helped to give ownership and ensure the new HR approach fit with the vision of the employees themselves.

In line with this, the role of HR at Kuehne + Nagel has evolved into one of facilitation, meaning employees are supported and given the tools to meet their needs, including the need to balance their own careers with their responsibilities outside

of work, for example as parents or carers. The company's personalised approach to HR means that all employees individual situations and needs are taken into account.

'Our career policy focuses on mutual responsibility between the employer and the employee,' explains Steven. 'People take control of their career and the company supports it.'



## Personal development programmes

A key initiative of the new HR policy was to improve the induction process for employees. All staff starting new positions now receive a personal induction plan.

Importantly, each individual employee is able to put together their own development programme with their supervisor. This ensures they are continuously in the driving seat of their own career and able to shape it to their own life and aspirations.

## Searching for 'the perfect work-life balance'

'Together, we look for the perfect work-life balance,' Steven says. 'We want to stimulate our employees to find a position which matches their interests, abilities and lifestyle.'

- 
**The connecting role of HR: from Island to We-land**
- 
**July 2017 – July 2018**
- 
**€ 80 000**
- 
**be.kuehne-nagel.com**





## Offering dedicated childcare to help parents return to work

Czechia

Statistics suggest that Czechia experienced something of a baby boom following the turn of the 21st century. According to the Czech Statistical Office<sup>1</sup>, nearly 92 000 children were born in the country in 2002. By 2009, this number had increased to over 118 000.

However, places in state-funded nurseries are few and far between, and this lack of availability of state-run childcare has led increasing numbers of families to turn to private nurseries.

Unfortunately, private nurseries are too expensive for many parents, particularly younger ones, meaning they are left with no choice but to stay at home and look after their children until they begin school at the age of six.

This can make combining work and family almost impossible for some parents, particularly young mothers. Inevitably, this is disruptive to their careers and it can have a negative impact on their long-term career prospects, living standards and self-esteem.

### Helping nurses by creating a nursery

Thankfully, nurses at the General University Hospital in Prague can count on cheap access to pre-school childcare, thanks to an ESF-backed project.

The hospital decided to use this EU assistance to support its employees directly, by founding its own nursery to accommodate their children. The nursery has space for 24 children between the ages of three and six.

Due to the limited spaces available, priority for places is given to the children of nurses working at the hospital, as they already tend to be among the most disadvantaged health professionals. However, doctors and other hospital staff, both male and female, can also claim any spare spaces for their children.

### Enabling parents to return to work after leave

According to Zuzana Janoušková DiS, kindergarten's Managing Principal, such 'corporate kindergartens' have become a popular employee benefit offered by organisations in Czechia due to the insufficient capacity of state-run nurseries.

'The main goal of our project was to enable the staff of the hospital to take up their jobs upon ending their maternity -leave period, or while still being on maternity leave,' explains Janoušková.

'Having the possibility of professional childcare enabled the parents to return to the job market and helped the hospital to decrease its deficiency in staff, especially nurses.'

As Ing. Eva Hejlová, HR Director of the General University Hospital in Prague explains, the number of beneficiaries demonstrates the impact of the project.

'Thanks to the project, we have helped more than 70 employees who returned to their workplace [due to] having the possibility to have their child taken care of while they work,' she says.

<sup>1</sup> Table 1.1 <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/20566735/400811a1.pdf/14a0edab-1b31-4ff9-8e32-34bbb120c61f?version=1.0>



Kindergarten for children of staff in the General University Hospital in Prague



May 2012 – November 2014



€ 167 600



[www.vfn.cz](http://www.vfn.cz)  
[europa.eu/!Ur64fk](http://europa.eu/!Ur64fk)



## Altering perceptions of parenthood

Czechia

**The ESF-backed MATAPE project, based in the town of Holic in Czechia, aimed to support women returning to working life after maternity leave.**

The main objective of the project – a joint initiative between the local council, NGO Oblastni Charita Pardubice and private company RPIC Pardubice – was to reduce the risk of social exclusion faced by new mothers.

### Expert support to both employees and employers

The project offered expert-led training and coaching for women. Participants learned practical skills to help them apply for jobs and participate in interviews, including how to negotiate flexible working arrangements. Other training topics included personal development, entrepreneurship communication and presentation skills, computer skills and time management.

The project's experts also conducted 'gender audits' of 10 local companies and provided feedback and recommendations on their approaches to enabling the flexible or part-time employment of parents and carers. The companies' HR specialists were invited to the training courses to meet and talk to potential employees.

Further outputs from the project included a **video** with examples of good practice and a brochure for employers and employees.

### Altering perceptions of parenthood

Importantly, participating women not only gained various work-based skills to help them re-enter the labour market, but also learned how to communicate with their partners differently, express their feelings and needs, and ask for support.

The project thereby aimed to alter stereotypes, change perceptions of parenthood and promote increased participation in childcare among men.

This helped many female participants to shift their mindsets. As Project Manager Vladimira Krejckova puts it, from thinking 'I have to do everything and if I am lucky my partner might sometimes help me', to 'we all participate on our common duties, share them, cooperate and give a positive example to our children'.

### Proud of the project's work

Radka Janebová, one of the expert auditors, could see the project's impact:

'I am proud that I could as a gender auditor and lecturer participate in the work of the highly professional team of MATAPE. I could see the surprise and sometimes even outrage of participants who often for the first time started thinking about the division of gender roles and about their "fairness" and how "natural" they are.

'I believe that MATAPE changed the lives of many participants in a positive way. I hope that based on gender audits at least some employers started to think about the benefits and advantages of creating suitable conditions for working parents and other carers.'

The project was also rewarded for its efforts with Euroguidance's **'National Career Guidance Award'** in 2014.



MATAPE



September 2012 – June 2015



€ 212 370



[www.matape.cz/home/english](http://www.matape.cz/home/english)  
[europa.eu/!wU43Tn](http://europa.eu/!wU43Tn)

## Guiding women entrepreneurs into self-employment in Munich

Germany

**The 'guide' project began providing individual, gender-oriented training, advice and support to women entrepreneurs in Munich, Germany, in 2008.**

According to Project Leader and Advisor Dr Bettina Wenzel, the project's aim is to 'help Munich's female founders prepare their self-employment professionally, so that their businesses are sustainable and the women can combine the requirements of family and business'.

### Holistic individual support

Co-financed by the European Social Fund, the project tailors its support to the specific needs and situations of its beneficiaries. It takes into account many aspects of individual women's lives, including their employment history, health, family commitments and personal interests.

This practical approach helps guide's advisors to make a realistic assessment of how setting up a business will affect the individual entrepreneur's life.

Although its support is very much dependent on the individual, guide targets several key groups who are in particular need of support. These include:

- women who are returning to the labour market after a break due to raising a family;
- women over the age of 50 who want to be self-employed;
- unemployed women who want to be self-employed;
- women with a migration background who want to start up a small business.

### Why target women entrepreneurs?

'Women set up their businesses in a special way,' explains Bettina. 'For this reason, they need a special sort of support.'

The German context is also important. An OECD report<sup>1</sup> published in 2016 found that 'German society continues to ascribe housebound and family-related roles to women, thus

implicitly rendering entrepreneurship as a less desirable career choice for women'.

It also reported that 'Germany ranks 24th among European Union countries for ease of business start-up' and that 'more can be done to encourage young women to pursue growth-oriented businesses with role models and mentors who have grown successful companies'.

guide seeks to change this by regularly holding seminars, workshops and networking events where successful entrepreneurs share their experiences and stories.

Its 'guide contest' competition further motivates women to refine their ideas, come up with solutions and present their projects and their elevator pitches.

### Two-thirds of beneficiaries start a business

By 2018, guide had assisted an estimated **5 500** women entrepreneurs in Munich, a number that continues to grow.

Around **two-thirds** of their beneficiaries had already successfully started their own businesses during the consulting process.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/employment/leed/Rapid-policy-assessment-Germany-final.pdf>



guide  
Support for Female Entrepreneurs



February 2008 – July 2021 (projected)



€ 150 000 per year



[www.guide-muenchen.de](http://www.guide-muenchen.de)  
[europa.eu/!Mc69wR](http://europa.eu/!Mc69wR)

## Providing a pathway into work through part-time training

Germany

**Many parents and carers – particularly those who have cared for others from a young age – may find themselves lacking the professional skills, work experience or educational qualifications required to access certain jobs and careers.**

Vocational training represents an opportunity to gain specialised knowledge and skills that offer a clear route into a career, and the well-established dual apprenticeship system in Germany is a popular choice for young people.

Although part-time training in Germany was made possible in 2005 through the Vocational Training Act (Berufsbildungsgesetz), those with care responsibilities often experience difficulties to find a place on training schemes due to a lack of flexible opportunities.

Their care responsibilities are also likely to mean they are unable to work in full-time jobs or find part-time educational or training opportunities to increase their chances of finding work.

### Part-time training: opening up opportunities

The 'Part-time Vocational Training - Supporting Entry - Opening Prospects (TEP)' programme aims to inform and assist both young parents and companies about the possibility of part-time vocational training.

Through TEP, apprenticeships are made available to those who cannot work full-time, on the condition that childcare is found and organised, and working hours agreed with the company.

The overall coordination of the programme is led by the Aachen regional agency, one of 16 regional agencies in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia. The programme is also funded with the help of the European Social Fund through its 'opening pathways into work' initiative and supported by the Gesellschaft für innovative Beschäftigungsförderung (GIB), the 'association for innovative promotion of employment'.

### Hundreds of beneficiaries

Between 2009 and 2016, the programme offered 50 training places in Aachen each year – helping to change the lives of hundreds of citizens – and it continues to be in operation today.

By supporting parents and carers to find vocational training programmes that fit with their care commitments, TEP has helped its beneficiaries gain the skills they need to kick-start their careers and open up opportunities for the future.



**Part-time vocational training – supporting entry – opening perspectives (TEP)**



**2009 – present**



**€ 1 269 970** in the period 2015 - 2020



**[www.gib.nrw.de/themen/jugend-und-beruf/teilzeitberufsausbildung](http://www.gib.nrw.de/themen/jugend-und-beruf/teilzeitberufsausbildung)**

## Promoting gender equality and work-life balance in German industry

Germany

In 2010, IG Metall – the most prominent metalworkers' union in Germany and one of the largest industrial unions in Europe – developed a nationwide project together with the consultancy Wert.Arbeit GmbH Berlin to support the employment of women in industrial sectors.

The project was carried out in the framework of the federal initiative for equality of women in business, with support from the European Social Fund and BMAS, the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

### Making work and family compatible

One of the project's key focus areas was the **compatibility of family, work and private life**. In particular, it aimed to ensure companies offer manageable working hours that meet individual workers' needs and provide flexibility for staff to care for children and family members.

The project helped businesses organise internal project steering groups, staff surveys, interviews and workshops to help identify issues and develop policies to improve work-life balance.

### Encouraging equality in business

The project focused on four sectors: carmakers, automotive suppliers, electrical engineering and information technology. These industries employ around 1.6 million women in Germany, although they remain underrepresented in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, with 6 times more men than women<sup>1</sup>.

The 25 businesses who participated in the project were supported and encouraged to implement policy measures in the interest of equality.

### 'Men and women must be able to reconcile their work and private lives'

As IG Metall explained in its good practice guide for the project, equality and work-life balance ultimately benefit all workers: <sup>2</sup> 'Equality benefits not only women who look after children. Young men place just as much importance on family-friendly working conditions in companies.'

'Men and women must be able to reconcile their work and private lives in a way that meets their needs, irrespective of their family situation or household income.'

Statistics from the European Institute of Gender Quality <sup>3</sup> indicate that we are seeing progress in the area of gender equality in Germany. There's no doubt that initiatives such as this, which have helped to promote work-life balance for all and support the participation of women in industry, have played a role in achieving this positive change.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-germany>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.heidelberg.igm.de/downloads/artikel/attachments/ARTID\\_61909\\_MZ8ao9?name=gleich.pdf](http://www.heidelberg.igm.de/downloads/artikel/attachments/ARTID_61909_MZ8ao9?name=gleich.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-germany>



Work-oriented innovation policy to support and promote the employment of women in industrial sectors



August 2010 – July 2013



€ 480 742.68



[www.igmetall.de](http://www.igmetall.de)

## Encouraging all parents to balance their work and care responsibilities

Ireland

**Women often face difficulties, both personal and professional, during their maternity leave and reintegration into the workforce. When new mothers return to work, they are commonly faced with a lack of opportunities to train and upskill.**

When Ireland introduced its National Women's Strategy in 2009, one of its key concerns was that women were at risk of falling behind in their careers due to a lack of support during this period.

To combat this, Ibec – Ireland's largest lobby group representing the country's business – developed the 'Maternity and Parenting Toolkit'. It contains a range of proactive resources and approaches to support pregnant employees and returning parents.

### Helping employers to help employees

The toolkit was made available to employers to help them better prepare for pregnancy and maternity and support their employees through the process in an equal and positive manner.

Specifically, the project set out to:

- help minimise reductions in the female workforce following pregnancy;
- increase awareness of the issues that women face;
- reduce the difficulties encountered by parents and employers and prevent discrimination.

### Supporting men as well as women

Although the project primarily focused on supporting women, it also targeted new fathers, aiming to highlight the responsibilities of all parents.

It aimed to move away from focusing on children and childcare as a female issue, whereby arrangements often focus on

pregnant employees, overlooking expectant fathers and partners as a result.

The toolkit introduced an innovative workshop for new fathers, helping them adjust to the challenges of their new role as working parents. The workshop outlines practical support and useful information and allows fathers to meet others in the same situation and build up a support network.

### Battling the 'double burden'

As Dr Kara McGann, Senior Labour Market Policy Executive at Ibec explains, this project recognised that supporting men to take on care responsibilities is integral to supporting women.

'For social, cultural and sometimes economic reasons, women typically make adjustments and spend disproportionately more time when it comes to caring responsibilities, creating a "double burden" of work for women and impacting their labour market participation,' explains Kara.

'If we are truly to achieve gender balance in our organisations and societies, we need to support and welcome the inclusion of men in caring responsibilities. Employers who have engaged with this toolkit not only show their commitment and support to such diversity and inclusion initiatives, but also provide employees with the tools to fully engage.'



**Maternity and Parenting Toolkit**



**December 2009 – November 2010**



**€ 10 000** (jointly funded by the European Social Fund and the Equality Authority)



**www.ibec.ie**

## Improving access to training for women in Rioja

Spain

The principles of equal treatment, non-discrimination and equal opportunities are incorporated in the Spanish constitution, which recognises that they are essential to a fair society. Nevertheless, when it comes to gender equality, the reality in Spain is that women remain overrepresented in many of the worst paid sectors and underrepresented in positions of responsibility, despite being highly qualified.

Two of the main reasons for this are caring responsibilities for children and household tasks, which make it more difficult for women to reconcile their work and family lives, and progress in their careers.

In 2014, the regional government of Spain's northern region of La Rioja took the initiative to incorporate a gender perspective into all of its actions receiving support from the European Social Fund, by changing how it drafted its calls for grants.

### Incorporating a gender perspective into calls for grants

La Rioja established this initiative in line with Spain's strategic plan for equal opportunities 2014-2016 (El Plan Estratégico de Igualdad de Oportunidades 2014-2016), which seeks to support work-life balance and promote equal opportunities between women and men in the education system.

Specifically, La Rioja's project focused on calls for grants for employment-related training – an essential component of professional development. Research showed that women with care responsibilities could often not participate in training courses because their timing was not compatible with the opening hours of schools or care centres, or because training facilities were not equipped for childcare.

### Bringing change through concrete actions

In concrete terms, the change to calls for training grants included a new assessment criterion on work-life balance and equal opportunities between women and men. This criterion focused on actions that facilitate women's access to training courses, for example through the adaptation of schedules to those of schools or the offering of dedicated areas for breastfeeding. Organisations were also obliged to include a mandatory module on gender equality and encouraged to introduce 'positive action plans'.

In terms of results, 79 % of the participating organisations implemented measures such as preparing spaces for breastfeeding and establishing schedules that facilitate work-life balance.

The project also hopes to have a long-lasting legacy by changing the way that organisations operate and address the issues of gender equality and work-life balance.



Equal opportunities in training programmes



2014 – 2016



€ 1 448 886



[www.larioja.org](http://www.larioja.org)  
[europa.eu/!TR66cj](http://europa.eu/!TR66cj)



## Changing practice and perceptions in Castile-la Mancha

Spain

Studies show that women in Spain spend an average of 27 hours a week doing unpaid work, compared to 14 hours for men,<sup>1</sup> and are 17 % less likely than men to work full time<sup>2</sup>. For some women, this can be an obstacle to their career progression. The gender differences in the parental leave system also mean that men often do not have the opportunity, or incentive, to share their care responsibilities.

In 2007, the **Council of Economy, Business and Employment** of the Castile-La Mancha region set out to change this by developing a Regional Plan for the Reconciliation of Work, Family and Personal Life.

'We are facing a social and labour challenge [...], driven by the large-scale incorporation of women into the labour market, the persistence of obstacles to a truly egalitarian labour market, [and] the permanence of an unequal distribution of domestic tasks and care for minors and dependents,' the project's founders said on its conception.

### Encouraging autonomy and flexibility

The project aimed to make work-life balance a reality for all – regardless of gender. In other words, flexible work and leave needed to be made available to all workers to help distribute domestic tasks more evenly.

Rather than introducing regulations, the plan proposed a model based on flexibility and autonomy. Social partners and employers were helped to develop their own work-life balance initiatives and plans, appropriate to their size and sector. The plan also provided financial assistance to companies, as well as to workers who needed to reduce their working hours to care for children or dependents.

By 2011, almost **34 000 people** had participated in the plan's actions. Around **85 % of male participants had completed so-called 'reconciliation plans'**. These flexible plans,

which were agreed between organisations and workers as a requirement of their participation in the project, outlined a set of measures designed to help workers balance their work and care responsibilities. In addition, 350 companies had benefited from the scheme, 60 of which had implemented measures specifically directed at tackling gender inequality.

### Changing perceptions for the future

The plan aimed to change not only practices, but also perceptions. It encouraged dialogue and cultural changes in society's notion of how work and care responsibilities are shared between men and women. Training and awareness-raising activities, as well as the creation of an award for organisations demonstrating excellence in work-life balance, helped to further promote and incentivise change.

These efforts to change perceptions, although more difficult to measure in the short term, should bring further positive changes and impacts on work and life in Spain in the future.

<sup>1</sup> [https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/02/13/inenglish/1518514387\\_016558.html](https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/02/13/inenglish/1518514387_016558.html)  
<sup>2</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/jjust/document.cfm?doc\\_id=50074](http://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/jjust/document.cfm?doc_id=50074)



**Regional Plan for the Reconciliation of Work, Family and Personal Life 2007 – 2010**



**2007 – 2010**



**€ 17 889 056**



**[empleoyformacion.jccm.es/principal/conciliacion-de-la-vida-laboral-familiar-y-personal/conoce-el-plan](http://empleoyformacion.jccm.es/principal/conciliacion-de-la-vida-laboral-familiar-y-personal/conoce-el-plan)**



## Making home-based childcare accessible to all

France

The 'Domi'Kid' project, which received financial support from the European Social Fund in 2013, offers home-based childcare services to support parents in nine municipalities of Lower Normandy, France.

The project offers 24/7 services and can respond to one-off or urgent requests where necessary. At the heart of this approach is a recognition that many parents who want – or need – to work are unable to balance their working hours with those of schools and childcare facilities, or simply unable to afford the high costs of many private childcare providers.

### Tailored support that is accessible to all

By making support available at any time of the day, the project enables working parents to balance their duty as parents with work or training, regardless of their working hours. This is particularly important for single parents and those in precarious jobs, many of whom can't rely on partners or other family members to take their children to and from school or feed them morning and night.

The project aims to help those who are most in need, describing itself as 'a childcare service that is accessible to all'. To achieve this, the organisation offers its beneficiaries a 50 % tax reduction on services and also makes tax credits available under certain conditions.

Domi'Kid's professional carers provide direct support at the recipient parent's home. A wide range of services are available, depending on the age and needs of the children and the resources and needs of their parent(s).

Its support may range from feeding and washing the children, to taking them to the park, picking them up from school, monitoring them while they do their homework, or even taking them to football training.

### An idea born out of personal experience

Domi'Kid's Director, Maryvonne Picot, came up with the idea for the project when her own daughter was finding it difficult to look after her child due to incompatible working hours.

'If we stop working, the parents [who receive our support] will be forced to find makeshift solutions,' Maryvonne explains.

The project has also directly created jobs for local workers. 'Thanks to the European Social Fund, we have created 24 jobs for early childcare professionals,' says Maryvonne.

In 2013 alone, Domi'Kid provided childcare services to almost 300 children, thereby helping parents in around 150 families to access jobs or stay in work.

The project continued to build on its success in the following years, and its services have since 2016 been integrated into the support offered by the region's Association Aide Familiale Populaire.



Domi'Kid



2013



€ 25 996



[www.aafp-cherbourg.com/service/garde-denfants](http://www.aafp-cherbourg.com/service/garde-denfants)

[www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr](http://www.europe-en-france.gouv.fr)

## Encouraging organisations to help workers find balance

Italy

The LaFemMe (EQUIPE2020<sup>1</sup>) project offered training and counselling services to promote work-life balance and facilitate the participation of women in the labour market. The initiative was funded by Italy's Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with support from the European Social Fund.

### Supporting employers and employees

The project aimed to support employers and employees alike by considering the organisational needs of companies and the right to work-life balance of workers.

The project held training courses and consultations for companies, social partners and labour market operators (such as employment agencies) to help them support workers.

Under LaFemMe, 49 training and information courses were held, in which 1 605 people participated. A further 900 people have participated since the project became EQUIPE2020 in 2015.

Specifically, the training focused on:

- Taking measures to improve organisation, productivity and flexibility within companies;
- Introducing 'corporate welfare measures' to reduce the cost of care services and encouraging employers to offer 'welfare plans' to staff;
- Improving maternity and paternity processes to help workers return to work;
- Encouraging company-level and territorial-level bargaining, improving industrial relations and supporting social partner participation;
- Disseminating know-how and best practice to raise awareness of work-life balance;
- Creating an online service portal to facilitate access to information and training.

The project also assisted nine regions to promote and design interventions on work-life balance, involving 15 companies, and reached 1 000 students with its dissemination activities to promote jobs in the green economy and 'white' economy (health and personal care).

### 'Several men have been able to benefit'

While the project ultimately aimed to help women participate in the labour market, it recognised that it is essential for organisations to make flexible arrangements available to men too.

Michele Manelli is the owner of Italian wine producer Salcheto, one of the employers to introduce an innovative organisational model with the project's support. Michele says 'it is interesting to note that several men have been able to benefit from instruments typically oriented to female employees'.

'The case of Emanuele is particularly significant,' he says. 'A single man responsible for two children, who has been able to organise his timetable based on the family needs, interacting with his colleagues to reach solutions [...] and benefiting from the support of the welfare plan.'

### Greater worker satisfaction and autonomy

Companies have seen positive financial effects, including reductions in absenteeism and wasted resources, and an increase in production.

Most importantly, companies have seen positive impacts on workers' wellbeing thanks to greater satisfaction, autonomy and access to welfare services – all of which contribute to a more positive work-life balance.

<sup>1</sup> From January 2015 – July 2017 the project was known as 'EQUIPE2020', although it still operated as it previously did under the name LaFemMe.



LaFemMe (EQUIPE2020)



May 2011 – July 2017



€ 2 032 800 (ESF contribution 2007 – 2013) and €1 500 000 (ESF contribution 2014 – 2020).



[www.equipeonline.it](http://www.equipeonline.it)



## Bringing down the cost of care for working parents

Italy

**The costs of education and care services for children are a significant expense in family budgets, especially in the early years, and this often leads parents – usually mothers – to take a break from work to look after their children.**

In 2005, the Autonomous Province of Trento recognised this issue and decided to begin awarding so-called ‘service vouchers’ to promote reconciliation between work and family care.

Essentially, the vouchers are individual grants that help recipients to access care and educational services for children up to the age of 14 (or 18 for children with a learning disability or other kind of disability).

### Reduced care costs provide an incentive to stay in work

The service vouchers help to reduce the costs of care and educational services for children, as long as the services are provided by accredited carers at dedicated facilities or at the family’s home.

Women who are employed or participating in training are eligible, as well as single fathers. In line with the ESF 2014-2020 programme, which provides financial support to the project, priority is also given to vulnerable groups.

Parents simply apply for the vouchers online and can have up to 40 hours of care a week financed by the vouchers, depending on various factors such as the hourly cost of the requested service, the child’s age, and the number of hours worked by the applicant parent. The vouchers are designed to be flexible and reflect individual needs, helping parents to access suitable care services that they can fit around their working lives.

### ‘I go to work knowing I’m leaving my daughter in good hands’

The Autonomous Province of Trento has around 540 000 inhabitants and over 100 000 families with children. Between 2014 and 2018, almost 25 000 vouchers were awarded, helping to provide care to more than 30 000 children.

Claudia works in a Trentino-based production company and she and her partner both work full time. Claudia was reluctantly planning to leave her job to look after her young daughter, as the local nursery’s opening hours were not compatible with her work schedule and private nurseries were too expensive. Thankfully, she heard about the service vouchers, which significantly brought down the costs of private care.

‘Thanks to the service vouchers, I managed to keep my job, and for this I thank the Province and all the people who supported me before and during the use of the vouchers,’ says Claudia. ‘I also go to work knowing I’m leaving my daughter in good hands.’



Service vouchers for reconciliation between work and family



2005 – present



€ 11.5 million



[fse.provincia.tn.it/Opportunita-per-le-persone/Buoni-di-servizio-per-la-conciliazione-tra-lavoro-e-famiglia](https://fse.provincia.tn.it/Opportunita-per-le-persone/Buoni-di-servizio-per-la-conciliazione-tra-lavoro-e-famiglia)

## Ensuring young mothers have the tools to lead successful careers

Lithuania

**In Lithuania, women are more likely than men to work part-time or be inactive due to care responsibilities. In couples with children, women are also significantly more likely than men to spend time caring for their family and doing housework.<sup>1</sup>**

These care responsibilities can make it difficult for young mothers to enter employment and lead a successful career, as many sacrifice career opportunities to fulfil their childcare commitments.

### Creating favourable conditions for women

Against this background, Lithuanian organisation the Kaunas Women Employment Information Centre prioritised helping young women to find an effective work-life balance.

In 2009, it founded the SUCCESS project, aiming to create 'favourable conditions' between family life and work commitments for young women. It wanted to develop tolerant attitudes towards employees, encourage fair career opportunities and emphasise the need for sustainable workplace strategies.

### Supporting jobseekers, employees and employers

The project supported 389 women, around half of which (193) were unemployed and half (196) in either part-time or full-time work. It involved five main activities:

- **childcare services** for unemployed participants aged 18–35;
- **individual jobseeking support;**
- consultations and general skills training for **unemployed** participants;
- information, consultations and training on work-life balance for **employees;**
- education, consultations and training **employers, municipalities and trade unions** on family-friendly measures in the workplace.

The childcare services aimed to ease the care demands on young people who were either unemployed or struggling for work-life balance. A childcare service was also provided to 241 children during the training seminars, allowing participants to be more actively involved.

The consultations and training seminars for unemployed participants focused on motivation and general skills, such as computer literacy, social interaction, communication and language.

Consultations were also provided to employers and municipal officials, focusing on strategies such as flexible working measures, work placements and the promotion of gender diversity in the workplace. Several partner workplaces also introduced work-life balance models.

### 'An impetus for employers and municipalities'

Around a third (32 %) of the 193 unemployed participants found jobs with the help of the support they received, while a further 27 % were seeking work at the end of the project.

'This successful project is an impetus for both employers and municipalities to implement family and workplace compatibility measures,' highlights Rasmina Čepkauskienė, Director of Kaunas Women's Employment Information Centre.

By combining childcare services with skills training and 'family-friendly' workplace measures, the SUCCESS project helped equip young women with the tools to engage in a successful career and maintain a sustainable balance between their work and care commitments.

<sup>1</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/rdc/eige-publications/gender-equality-index-2017-lithuania>



The SUCCESS project



September 2009 – November 2012



€ 597 429



[www.muic.lt](http://www.muic.lt)

## Supporting single parents and carers in rural areas

Lithuania

**Parents of young children and people who care for elderly or disabled friends and relatives often struggle to balance their care commitments with work. This is particularly the case for single parents who work shifts or non-standard hours, have low incomes or have nobody to whom they can entrust their care responsibilities in their absence.**

The 'Working for the welfare of the family' project aimed to make it easier for women in Pagėgiai municipality, in the Tauragė county of Lithuania, to combine their family and work responsibilities.

### Accessible and affordable care

The project did this by introducing various support measures:

- Unemployed participants received skills training focussing on foreign language skills, computer literacy and self-confidence.
- Over 100 participants – mostly single parents – received individual legal consultations on workers' rights. Around 45 beneficiaries participated in consultations on jobseeking and CV writing.
- 'Help at home' (daily social care) was offered to around 40 elderly and disabled relatives of participants.
- 60 parents took part in self-help groups, where they could share experiences and discuss problems.

Perhaps most significantly, nine childcare facilities were set up in the municipality, seven of which were in rural locations. Prior to the project, just one pre-school institution was available in Pagėgiai town, with only 60 places available.

This support directly helped parents to reconcile childcare and work by offering all-day care to children aged six and under and after-school care for children aged 7 to 10. It made childcare economically viable for working parents and available in locations close to their workplaces.

This was not only convenient – especially because the centres set their opening hours to fit with working hours – but also helped parents feel safe in the knowledge that they would be nearby if their children needed them. Some 230 children attended the nine centres during the project.

### 'I can go to work knowing that my daughter is well taken care of'

'I am a single mother raising a two-year-old daughter,' says participant Jurgita. 'I did not want to live on social benefits and needed to start working. However, I faced the problem of providing care for my daughter. I was not able to pay for a babysitter because I was on minimum income.'

'I am therefore grateful for the opportunity provided to send my daughter free of charge to the childcare facilities. Now I can go to work knowing that my daughter is well taken care of by the teachers.'



Working for the welfare of the family



September 2009 – May 2014



€ 1 113 520



[www.pagegiai.lt](http://www.pagegiai.lt)



## Offering practical and professional support to parents of young children

Hungary

**The Gézengúz Foundation is a Hungarian organisation that supports children with congenital medical conditions. The non-profit organisation was founded in 1990 and its unique activities support an estimated 2 000 children and families in Hungary each year.**

In 2012, the foundation established a family resource centre in the Győr subregion as part of a project supported by the European Social Fund.

Although the organisation's work largely focuses on children with medical conditions and disabilities, the centre – one of five run by the organisation across Hungary – is open to all children and families.

The centre's principal aim is to support mothers in the region raising young children, by providing a network of guidance and support services.

### Balancing family responsibilities with working life

The centre offers counselling sessions to mothers and holds a weekly forum where they can get together with staff and other mothers to share experiences and discuss any concerns or problems they are facing. The sessions focus on how participants can make their family responsibilities compatible with working life.

A key objective of establishing the centre was to help new mothers and mothers on maternity leave to get back into work. Staff at the centre are available to provide the children's parents with support in various areas, including legal questions relating to employment law and workers' rights. The centre's team also offers services to help mothers build up or refresh their interview techniques and draft effective CVs.

A HUF 19.5 million subsidy from the European Social Fund – around 85 % of the project's total budget of almost HUF 23 million (€72 000) – has also helped the project to offer further regular activities such as childminding services for local families.

### Building solidarity between families

The overall idea behind the forums is to build solidarity between families and help build up a support network for parents.

The project team also aim to raise awareness of the importance of family life and the value of raising children, as well as to support young people who have not yet started a family but are thinking of doing so.

Being a parent is one of the greatest responsibilities, and indeed challenges, that many people will face in their lifetimes. Thanks to the work of the centre, mothers in Győr have the tools and support networks in place to not only take on this challenge, but also to combine this responsibility with a successful and fulfilling career.



Establishment of a Family Resource Centre in the Győr Micro-Region



May 2012 – November 2013



HUF 19 515 196



gezenguz.hu



## Working with municipalities and businesses to achieve change

Austria

**In 2017, ABZ\*AUSTRIA started the V/Faktor project, together with project partners BAB Unternehmensberatung GmbH and ÖAR GmbH.**

The 'V' in 'V/Faktor' stands for 'Vereinbarkeit', meaning 'reconciliation'. The aim of the project is to improve reconciliation of work, family and private life for workers with responsibilities such as childcare, education, caring for relatives or volunteering.

At the same time, the team works with businesses, municipalities, regions and other stakeholders to find new and innovative solutions to improve work-life-balance.

### A top-down approach

The pilot project, in operation from 2017 until 2019, is funded by the European Social Fund and the Austrian Federal Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection (BMASGK). It focuses on three regions: Waldviertel, Obersteiermark West and Leoben, and Oststeiermark.

The project recognises that reconciliation is the responsibility of management, rather than individual workers, which is why it works directly with local municipalities and businesses. V/Faktor's teams combine the project partners' expertise to analyse the situations in the three regions and offer free consultations to municipalities and businesses to help develop and implement new approaches.

Such approaches can range from new, cooperative solutions for childcare and flexible equality-oriented working-time models, to systematic leave management, management training and changes to human resources management.

These changes are not only beneficial for workers, but also for businesses, as Daniela Schallert, executive director of ABZ\*AUSTRIA and project manager of V/Faktor, explains:

'Skilled personnel shortage is a big issue in many Austrian regions. Through the project we have been able to stress that companies who implement reconciliation and equality oriented

structures and cultures can more easily address women as potential employees and managers.'

### Work-life balance and gender

Awareness-raising is also an important part of V/Faktor's work. The project disseminates information materials and holds events to help exchange experience.

However, another important issue relates to dissolving existing stereotypes about work and gender. In Austria, reconciliation is an issue primarily associated with women; female workers are more likely to work part time and do unpaid work at home. In rural areas, in particular, more 'traditional' behaviour, values and ways of thinking can make it difficult to achieve change.

'A change in company structures and cultures is essential to bring the topic away from "reconciliation as a women's issue" to "reconciliation as a management issue for anybody," says Daniela.

'Promoting women employment and women careers brings more equality in partnerships and sufficient women salaries enable fathers to take over caring responsibilities.'

By focusing on policies, structures and cultures and encouraging change from the top down, V/Faktor hopes to make long-term improvements to support all workers to find a work-life balance.



V/Faktor



August 2017 – July 2019



€ 1.63 million



[www.vfaktor.at](http://www.vfaktor.at)

## Promoting telework to help women balance work with home life

Romania

**Teleworking refers to employees working from home – or another remote location instead of their employer’s primary workplace – and communicating with colleagues and clients by email and telephone.**

When it comes to achieving a healthy work-life balance, telework can be a valuable tool. It gives workers more freedom to organise their schedules and makes it easier to build in their personal responsibilities, such as picking up children from school or visiting sick relatives.

It is particularly important for staff who live far from their workplace and offers an alternative for the many workers – often female – who feel obliged to reduce their working hours to combine work with family life. For employers, telework can also increase efficiency and productivity, improve staff retention and reduce maintenance costs.

### Virtual learning platform

“Telework for life-work reconciliation in EU: promoting women participation and mobility – WOMEN IN” was an international EU-funded project that ran from 2011 to 2013. Its objective was to promote telework, with the specific aim of facilitating women’s participation in the labour market.

This project was funded by the ‘Transfer of Innovation’ sub-programme of the EU Leonardo da Vinci programme. It spanned six countries and was implemented by the following partner organisations: UGT Euskadi and INVESLAN (ES); BEST (AT); EEDE (EL); Infoart (BG); Gingerbread (UK); and INCSMPS (RO).

The project created a ‘virtual learning platform’ – an interactive online environment to encourage telework, provide essential technological skills and enable exchange of knowledge and experience. Moreover, it promoted telework at employer level, targeting managers and human resource directors to highlight the benefits.

Comparative research on flexible telework policies was also carried out in the partner countries and recommendations were given to employers on how to promote telework among female staff.

### Research and recommendations

In some countries, the project’s results were also promoted to governmental institutions. In Romania, for example, the project was implemented by INCSMPS, the country’s National Scientific Research Institute for Labour and Social Protection.

The research carried out by INCSMPS showed Romania to be underdeveloped with respect to telework. INCSMPS therefore promoted the results of its research to the country’s Ministry of Labour to support the development of new, modern measures and active labour policies.

By supporting take-up of telework among women and encouraging employers and governments to adopt telework-friendly policies, this project helped ensure women have the opportunity to adopt more flexible working conditions to help maintain a healthy work-life balance.



**Telework for life-work reconciliation in EU: promoting women participation and mobility – WOMEN IN**



**October 2011 – September 2013**



**€ 266 303**



**[www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/romania-promoting-economic-participation-romanian-women-innovative-work](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/news-and-press/news/romania-promoting-economic-participation-romanian-women-innovative-work)**



## Making full-time jobs the norm for female care workers

Sweden

**More women than men work part-time in Sweden, often because they are unable to find full-time job opportunities. Since the turn of the century, however, the country's unions, political parties and women's organisations have been pushing to promote full-time employment.**

In recent years, local municipalities have started to make commitments to bring change. One such municipality is the Avesta Municipality, which in January 2011 adopted an unusual approach in its municipal care administration: it made all its permanent staff full-time employees.

### Full-time by default

Around 95 % of employees in Avesta Municipality's care administration are female. Back in 2008, 122 of the administration's 738 staff – including nurses, carers and administrators – worked part-time.

This was not only difficult for the organisation to manage, but there were also many female workers who were willing to switch to working full-time if given the opportunity.

In 2011, as part of the ESF-funded project '100 procent stolt och kompetent' ('100 % proud and competent'), the administration decided to make all staff full-time employees by default. If necessary, workers had the option to notify the organisation each year if they needed to work part-time and indicate their desired percentage of leave. Suitable cover could then be arranged in advance thanks to a pool of stand-in workers.

The project also introduced a new timetabling system whereby employees are given responsibility for their own schedules. This was helped by the adoption of new IT-based software called 'Time Care', which would allow each employee to indicate their desired timetable and negotiate this with their employer.

### Training, awareness raising and research trips

To support this change, the project also targeted sustainable skills development focused on lifelong learning, responsibility and self-confidence. Participating workers undertook an average of 33 hours of skills development over the course of the project. The project also offered training at home to ensure single parents with children could attend.

Managers participated in accessibility and gender equality courses and a steering group helped develop a long-term action plan for gender equality. The project also organised research trips to Spain and Italy to share knowledge and experience.

By the end of the project in 2013, more than 90 % of the administration's employees were working full-time, giving them better opportunities for involvement and responsibility.

This new system ensured female staff had the option to work full-time and progress in their careers just like their male counterparts, while also allowing them to revise their hours annually should they need to adopt a part-time schedule to balance work with home life.



100 % proud and competent



2011 – 2013



€ 986 475

[www.avesta.se](http://www.avesta.se)



[www.esf.se/Resultat/Projektbanken/Behallare-for-projekt/Norra-Mellansverige/100-procent-stolt-och-kompetent](http://www.esf.se/Resultat/Projektbanken/Behallare-for-projekt/Norra-Mellansverige/100-procent-stolt-och-kompetent)

## Supporting young mothers to combine parenting with work

United Kingdom

**Young parents with few qualifications often find themselves at risk of isolation and social exclusion. Even if they want to combine work with parental responsibilities, it can be difficult to find opportunities to do so if they lack any formal educational or professional qualifications – let alone any work experience.**

The ESF-supported Young Mums Will Achieve (YMWA) project was founded in 2009 to help young mothers in Cornwall, in the United Kingdom, to escape this vicious circle, which can lead to poverty and deprivation.

### Young parents isolated from the job market

In Cornwall, an estimated 150 children are born to teenage parents every year.<sup>1</sup> Cornwall Council had identified gaps in support for young parents in the town of St Austell, where there was a high and increasing rate of teenage pregnancies. Many of these young parents were also classed as NEETs (not in education, employment or training) and lacked basic qualifications to enable them to enter the job market.

With the help of a diverse group of project partners including a social enterprise, a local college and youth workers, the YMWA project supported young parents to engage in education, employment or training. The project began with extensive consultations with young parents, both male and female. However, as many young women indicated in their consultations that they would prefer to discuss their issues in women-only groups, support to men was provided separately.

The project's support to women involved twice-weekly training days, tailored learning opportunities and a supportive environment for participants to meet other young mothers in similar situations. The project also provided a mobile crèche, so that mothers could have their children looked after during the training.

### Award-winning project

After the establishment of the project, the number of young parents engaged in education, employment and training in Cornwall increased from under a fifth (20 %) in 2009 to over a third (34 %) in 2012.

Almost all participants in the training (96 %) acquired literacy and numeracy qualifications, as well as various transferable skills to help them in their working lives.

The project was also recognised for its achievements when it was awarded the national 2010 ESF Equal Opportunities Mainstreaming Leader Award.

By providing participants with essential skills and qualifications, the project opened up a route out of isolation and unemployment for young mothers, giving them the self-confidence to 'achieve', and to find work that they can balance with their parental commitments, helping to change their own lives and the lives of their children for the better.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/public-health-cornwall/teenage-pregnancy-and-sexual-health/young-parents/>



Young Mums Will Achieve (YMWA)



November 2009 – July 2011



€ 149 164.35



[www.cornwall.gov.uk](http://www.cornwall.gov.uk)  
[europa.eu/!JK97BU](http://europa.eu/!JK97BU)

## Getting in touch with the EU

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All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: [https://europa.eu/european-union/contact\\_en](https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en)

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- at the following standard number: +32 22999696 or
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This brochure presents 20 best practice examples of EU-funded projects that have promoted work-life balance in the EU's Member States. This catalogue of examples, which include testimonials from project representatives and beneficiaries, has been developed to encourage exchanges of experience and the implementation of innovative approaches to fostering work-life balance across Member States. A key theme of many of the examples relates to gender and the representation of women in the labour market – an issue that goes hand-in-hand with the question of how Member States and businesses promote and facilitate balance between professional and family life for all workers. The selected projects demonstrate a range of approaches and initiatives, all of which bring benefits for citizens, businesses and society as a whole, and contribute to the EU's priority to promote equal opportunities between men and women. This publication is available in English only, online and in print.

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