

Reconciliation policies are fundamental for achieving gender equality and address two key challenges in contemporary European societies: (i) the promotion of women's participation in employment and (ii) the involvement of men in family life.

Related interventions encompass policies, legislation, strategies and action plans on:

- **parental leave** and financial support for working parents (including those that promote men's involvement in parental leave schemes);
- **care services** (including childcare and care services for disabled or older family members);
- **flexible working** arrangements.

LEAVE ARRANGEMENTS

While most countries now offer maternity and parental leave, there is great diversity in terms of scope and regulations. Major dimensions of diversity include: length of leave, payment flexibility in use, and whether leave is a family or individual entitlement.

The provision of leave in relation to care for other dependants (e.g. sick or disabled people) as well as elderly family members is even more unequally developed across Member States and it needs to be seen as a policy priority at national and European levels.

MAIN LEAVE POLICY MODELS IN EUROPE

- One-year-leave gender equality-oriented model (e.g. Iceland, Slovenia and Sweden);
- Parental choice-orientation model (e.g. Finland and France);
- Long leave mother home-centred model (e.g. Hungary and the Czech Republic);
- Short leave part-time employed mother model (e.g. the Netherlands);
- Short leave breadwinner-male model (e.g. Spain);
- Early return to full-time model (e.g. Portugal).

CARE SERVICES

The availability of care services is essential for increasing female employment rates and decreasing gender gaps. Affordable and good-quality care services are seen as a way to improve the reconciliation prospects.

However, the majority of Member States have yet to make significant efforts to meet the Barcelona child care targets. Barriers seem to be financial as well as cultural.

Just as in the provision of childcare, women are also largely over-represented among care givers for the elderly and other family members whether paid or unpaid. Tendencies such as the ongoing extension of the retirement age and demographic change, along with increased care needs for older people, mean that the tension between work and long-term care will become more pronounced in the future.

BARCELONA TARGETS:

- Providing childcare to at least 33% of children up to three years of age.
- Providing childcare to at least 90% of children between 3 years and the mandatory school age.
 - By 2010, only 10 countries in the EU had reached the 33% target;
 - By 2011, only 9 countries had reached the 90% target;
 - Worryingly, the coverage rate has significantly decreased in several countries between 2010 and 2011.



WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

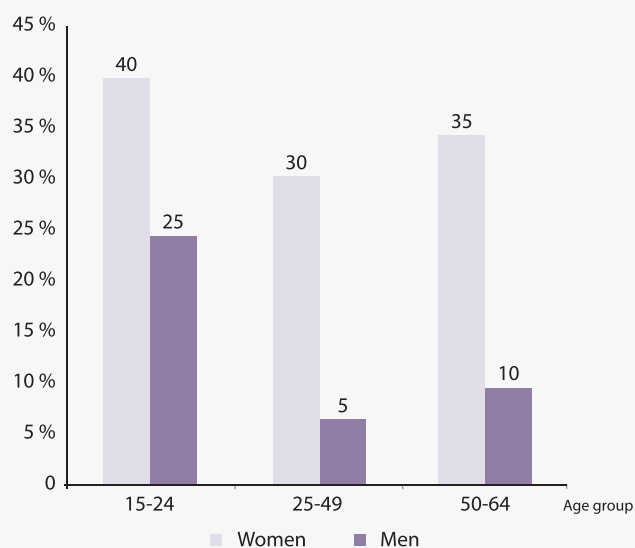
Flexible working time arrangements have become more widespread across Europe. They concern flexibility in the length of working time, such as part-time work, tele-working, term-time working, flexible daily start and finish times etc. However, statistics show that it is largely women who are involved in such arrangements.

This is particularly true when it comes to working part-time and the main reasons for women relate to "family and personal responsibilities" while men predominantly take part-time jobs because they cannot find a full-time job.

Large differences can be seen in Europe in terms of flexible working time organisation with at least 60% of women and men having access to flexible working time schedules in Sweden and Denmark contrasting with low flexibility scores in the Southern and Central and Eastern Member States.

The growing importance of flexible and individualised working hours has led, in some countries, to the introduction of a regulatory framework providing entitlements to flexible working time, as it exists for instance in Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. Collective agreements have also become important in setting flexible working time entitlements.

Many companies have established a business case in providing employees with arrangements to better reconcile their work, family and private life. Such workplace policies can help to attract and retain talent, improve job satisfaction and promote employee well-being, all of which are important to competitiveness, business growth and sustainable development.



Part-time employment as percentage of total employment in the EU, 2012 (Eurostat)

ABOUT THE STUDY

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) commissioned the study 'Collection of good practices on reconciliation of work, family and private life in EU Member States' in order to identify, collect and select the most promising examples of initiatives that promote reconciliation. The study was carried out by ÖSB Consulting GmbH and supported by a network of country experts in the 28 Member States. Further information related to the study is available at: <http://eige.europa.eu/good-practices>



<http://eige.europa.eu>

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