

# Work-life balance for men and women remains unequal

Current research by EIGE suggests that, despite improvements in policy, the work-life balance for men and women remains unequal in Europe. The research indicates that women remain the main carers of children and the elderly, in the majority of the Member States of the European Union. Thus women, more than men, face the difficulty of reconciling the role of the carer with employment. This conflict represents a missed opportunity for the economy as well as for the individual.



More women than men reduce the hours that they work in order to provide informal care. One third of women who curtail their employment in order to offer care report the reason to be the lack of care services.

According to EIGE's current research, women of working age spend three times longer than men on childcare per day. Women in full time employment who are also fulfilling a caring role are working significantly more hours than their male counterparts when informal care is taken into consideration, reducing time available for leisure activities.

Part-time work has become increasingly common in European Member States, especially amongst women. Part-time work has been considered as a possible way of balancing work and care responsibilities. But, part-time work does not offer the same career progression opportunities as full time work therefore a compromise must still be made between child care and a successful career.

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## Reconciliation Policies

Reconciliation policies are designed to minimise conflict between work and family responsibilities and to encourage women's participation in the labour market without discouraging reproduction.

The 1996 EU Directive on Parental Leave is a reconciliation policy that has been established in all European Union Member States. However, the legal framework around this policy differs across Europe, which affects the impact of the policy.

For example, where paternity leave is transferable, or poorly paid, the take-up is low. Employers may favour male recruits as they are less likely to incur replacement costs. In Sweden, Denmark and Finland – where paternity leave is non-transferable, an increase in father's participation in parenting is reported representing 20% of leave taken for this role.

Reconciliation policies and laws can have a positive impact upon the economy and individuals lives if they are developed well, and all European Member States are addressing this issue to some degree, but great disparity remains.

- **Maternity leave** is a period of time taken off work by an expectant mother to cover the birth of her child, and this may be with pay. The leave period commences some time before the birth and ends some weeks afterwards, when the mother returns to work.
- **Paternity leave** is a paid or unpaid leave of absence from work granted to a father to care for an infant.
- **Parental leave** is defined as an individual right to leave for men and women workers on the grounds of the birth or adoption of a child to enable them to take care of that child, for at least three months, until a given age up to eight years, to be determined by Member States and/or the social partners. This leave is separate from maternity leave for mothers and from paternity leave for fathers where it exists.

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## **EIGE's research**

Research, currently being undertaken by EIGE, looks at work-life balance in Europe. The impact of care responsibilities on men and women's presence in the labour market is considered, and how legislation and policy developments impact upon this.

The particular aim of this research is to assess the availability and reliability of data and to provide alternative methods for measuring these policies in order to effectively evaluate the progress in this policy area.

Evaluation is necessary in order to assess the effectiveness of policy developments in achieving the Beijing Platform for Action Indicators in Europe. The Beijing Platform for Action is a document that outlines the international community's commitment to address 12 areas of critical concern regarding the advancement of women.

The European Union has developed a set of indicators in relation to the Beijing areas of concern. The EU has committed to reporting upon progress in relation to these indicators. In order to report upon these indicators it is necessary to be able to measure progress.