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GENDER EQUALITY COMMISSION
(GEC)

Conference on “Work-life balance as a leverage for women’s empowerment and promoting gender equality” (Rome, 12 April 2022)

Draft Report

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Introduction

Time devoted to the family must be shared so that women do not shoulder the entire burden and equal opportunities are possible

Elena Bonetti, Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family, Italy

On 12 April 2022, the Council of Europe held a hybrid conference on work-life balance and gender equality, in co-operation [with the Italian Minister of Equal Opportunities and Family](#) and under the auspices of the [Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe](#). It was attended by high-level representatives of governments, international organisations, research and industry. The participants provided insight into practices and public policies designed to foster more balanced sharing of family responsibilities and to promote women's careers.

Confirmation of the existence of inequalities between women and men

Responsibilities linked to the care of dependants (children, elderly persons, ill persons or persons with disabilities) are mostly taken on by women. This type of organisation based on the gendered division of roles hampers women's access to the labour market and limits their professional development and choice of career or occupational field. As a result, the unequal division of family and domestic tasks within couples is a major factor in inequality and discrimination on the labour market. Consequently, the employment rates of women of working age are lower than those of men (for example, in Greece and in Italy the gap is more than twenty percentage points) and the percentage of women who work part time is much higher than that of men in many countries (for example, in the Netherlands, 70% of working women work part time and in Germany and in the United Kingdom, 40%).

Women constitute the majority of persons working in the health and welfare sector and in personal services, whereas men are in the majority in construction and industry. This sectoral and occupational segregation stems from gendered educational choices and occupational guidance marked by a gendered division of roles. This leads women to anticipate future difficulties in balancing family and work, prompting them to follow career paths making it easier for them to organise family life. Young men, on the other hand, tend to take routes which help them to fulfil the role of breadwinners, in accordance with gender norms. The unequal division of domestic and family tasks also increases vertical segregation. By reducing their career investment when children arrive, women cause their career development to slow and find it less easy to access leadership positions

than their male counterparts. The glass ceiling therefore can be accounted for in part by inequalities in the family.

Women are often subject to discrimination when they return to the labour market after maternity or parental leave. They have problems in reconciling work and family life, which impact their working conditions, and which are particularly pronounced when the child is very young. The gendered division of roles also results in discrimination affecting all women, who have responsibilities linked to the care of dependants (children, the elderly, the ill and persons with disabilities); such tasks are mainly taken on by women, hampering their access to the labour market and limiting their professional development and choice of career or occupational field. As a result, the unequal distribution of family and domestic tasks within couples is a major contributing factor to inequalities and discrimination on the labour market (accounting for problems such as the wage gap, the glass ceiling and occupational segregation), as women are thought by employers to be less reliable than men when it comes to investing in their work. This means that they are less likely to be recruited or promoted because the prospect of parenthood has an impact on their commitment to work which it is not the case for men.

In turn, these inequalities within the labour market increase the impact of gender norms by creating two arenas, where one is dominated by women and another one by men. This results in financial inequalities between spouses, which prompt women, rather than men, to quit work for family reasons because it means less loss of earnings for the household.

Mothers feel compelled to adjust their work to the new constraints connected with the birth of a child for fear of being labelled a bad mother. Accordingly, they withdraw from the labour market or reduce their working hours to look after their child. Men continue to invest in their career so as to offset the loss of earnings caused by their spouse working less. Furthermore, because of occupational segregation, men are less inclined to reduce their working hours to devote more time to their families because few other men behave in this way in their entourage. They may be considered by their employers to be less committed to their career than their colleagues if they decide to take advantage of measures such as parental or paternity leave. This type of behaviour is rooted in gender norms which see mothers primarily as care givers and fathers as breadwinners. These gendered family arrangements limit fathers' involvement in the family sphere and women's in the work sphere because such behaviour would clash with social expectations. Inequalities in the division of family responsibilities within couples account for a large part of inequalities observed in the labour market. Increased financial inequalities between women and men when a child is born is quantified by social sciences literature in the form of a drop in income from employment referred to as the "child penalty". At this point, women's earnings decrease as a result of their full or partial withdrawal from the labour market, whereas those of fathers remain stable or even

increase in some cases. This phenomenon was highlighted in respect of Italy through the presentation by Pasquale Tridico, President of the [National Institute for Social Security \(INPS\)](#).

Therefore, to promote equality at work, public policies must help both to reconcile work and family life and to divide up domestic and family tasks equally within couples. Such policies are built on two pillars: care facilities for dependants and parental leave.

The impetus provided by the Council of Europe

In this context, policies to promote work-life balance are a key tool for promoting economic empowerment of women and gender equality. By freeing women of certain responsibilities and encouraging men to get more involved in the family sphere, they play an essential role in the drive for gender equality. The challenge is to divide the parenthood risk equally between men and women. Work organisation, career management and flexibility when managing working hours are all means of loosening the constraints on women, provided that these measures are thought of as equality measures and they do not confine women to specific, less promising, career paths than those of men. Lastly, the fight against prejudice and gender norms in the workplace is a prerequisite to building an inclusive working environment.

The participants in the event agreed that to strike a balance between work and private life for all, it was essential for the public and private sectors to co-operate. Public policies are not enough in themselves to alter behaviour shaped by gender norms rooted in the functioning of our societies. There is also a need to combat the prejudice in the workplace, which holds back the careers of women – who are regarded first and foremost as mothers – and prevents men from devoting more time to their families – because they are supposed to be the main bread winners. Lastly, the health crisis has compounded inequalities within families although it has also given rise to new ways of working. If combined with appropriate social protection and carefully managed, telework is one possible means of achieving work-life balance.

This high-level event has been an opportunity to launch a broad-based discussion on the issues of work-life balance and measures to combat gender discrimination and prejudice. It forms part of a drive by the Council of Europe to promote equality at work in the context of various undertakings:

- The fight against gender stereotypes and sexism, which limit educational and career choices and form an obstacle to the principle of equality and social cohesion.

- The [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023](#), adopted on 7 March 2018, calls in particular for balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making and gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.
- With regard more specifically to work-life balance measures, Recommendation No. R (96)5 of 19 June 1996 called for the public policy drive to be stepped up and for economic players in the private sector to be encouraged to take part in efforts to transform our societies.

Recommendation (96)5 of the Council of Europe on reconciling work and family life states, in the light of Article 27 of the revised [European Social Charter](#), that reconciliation of work and family life is a precondition for meaningful quality of life and for the full exercise of fundamental human rights in the economic and social sphere, as it enables self-fulfilment in public, professional, social and family life.

In this text, the Council of Europe recommended that the governments of member States should implement policies enabling “women and men, without discrimination, to better reconcile their working and family lives”.

The presentations made and discussions held during [the event of 12 April 2022](#) helped to refine this Recommendation and take matters further. The government representatives presented the public policy measures taken in their own countries. Representatives of international institutions offered international comparisons, providing an overview of progress made and remaining challenges. Lastly, representatives of the private sector provided examples of ground-breaking initiatives to improve work organisation and combat stereotypes. At the end of the event, recommendations were presented to guide the member states in their future actions. The conclusions arising from these discussions are presented at the end of this report.

Public policies to promote work-life balance

Public policies for active parents

Improving care facilities for young children

Care facilities for dependants are a key component of work-life balance policies. The focus was on childcare because the period when mothers devote time to looking after children comes at a key moment in their careers, threatening to undermine their long-term career development. However, the participants also highlighted the challenge of ageing European populations. Particular attention should also be paid to care for elderly

dependants and those with disabilities as it is mainly women who look after elderly parents and dependants more generally.

Childcare policies make it possible for parents to carry on with their careers by outsourcing childcare during the working day. According to the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development](#) (OECD), there is a strong link between the employment of mothers and the provision of childcare facilities. The example of Sweden shows that increased care facilities for children up to the age of six played a key role in increasing the employment rate for women in the late 1970s. According to the World Bank, the introduction of such facilities throughout the world could lead to the creation of 43 million jobs. The situation in the Council of Europe member States is better than in other parts of the world but it can still be improved. The care rate for children up to the age of two is lower than 33% in Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. In other member States, it is higher than 50%, particularly in Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, and Norway. However, this higher rate is often still inadequate, meaning that parents' childcare demands are not satisfied.

Childcare facilities must be accessible to enable mothers to continue with their career, but they must also be affordable. In some countries, childcare costs are too high, making it unprofitable for mothers to work – and therefore prompting them to quit. This is particularly the case in Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Ireland and the United Kingdom, where the net cost per child of public childcare services for a couple amounts to over 20% of total household income. This is why financial support policies for families are essential, taking the form either of a public service financed by taxes or of financial aid offsetting some of the cost of childcare in private facilities. Care quality is also a decisive factor in encouraging or deterring parents. It depends both on staff training and on the number of adults per child. Lastly, flexible hours are an important factor, allowing parents who have non-standard working hours to take advantage of facilities. Margareta Madjerić, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Labour, the Pension System, Family and Social Policy of Croatia, stated that over 500 care facilities had been built or renovated in Croatia and 200 of them now propose extended hours for parents with non-standard working hours. Therefore, to facilitate use of such services, they must be accessible, affordable, flexible and high-quality.

Encouraging parental leave to be shared

The second type of work-life balance measure is parental leave. The [International Labour Organisation](#) (ILO) has identified 68 countries proposing parental leave of at least one year and 46 which offer paid parental leave. Many member States of the Council of Europe propose paid parental leave although there are still some in which it is not paid.

However, few men take advantage of such leave, and it is mainly taken by women. This situation adds to inequalities on the labour market. Therefore, in countries where such leave exists, the challenge in the gender equality sphere is to encourage fathers to invest in their family time and make use of the leave available to them when a child is born.

The OECD has found that some Council of Europe member States do not have any specific measures to encourage fathers to take some of this parental leave (particularly the Czech Republic, Greece, and Hungary). Others have set up schemes to share paid leave between the two parents. Sometimes, the right to leave cannot be transferred to the spouse/the other parent, meaning that the part reserved for fathers is lost if they do not take it (this is the case in Finland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden). However, this still does not guarantee that fathers make more use of it. In Sweden, parental leave totals 480 days including three months per parent which may not be transferred to the other parent. Despite this, women take 70% of the leave. Finland has increased incentives for fathers to make use of the part of parental leave reserved for them. To make the measures more effective, a communication campaign targeting fathers has been launched. The goal of equal sharing of parental leave has still yet to be reached. As to paternity leave, the ILO has identified 115 countries which propose this type of leave, 33 of which have introduced it since 2011, showing that there is some progress in this area. Some countries have made a part of paternity leave compulsory, the goal being to reach a 100% uptake rate. In Italy, for example, fathers are required by law to take 10 days' paternity leave. In France, since July 2021, paternity leave has increased from 11 to 28 days, seven of which are compulsory.

It is clear from the discussions on public work-life balance policies that childcare facilities must be extended to meet parents' demands and provide an affordable high-quality service, which is a prerequisite to promote equality and guarantee children's well-being. Parental leave schemes must encourage participation by fathers through entitlement to non-transferable paid leave or a requirement for fathers to take at least some of the leave made available to them. Work-life balance policies must be geared to the diversification of family set-ups and be accessible to all forms of parenthood, including same-sex parenting, transgender parenting and single parenting. The specific case of single parents, who are most commonly women, was raised. Their more vulnerable situation makes the problem of work-life balance even more complicated.

These policies make up a large share of care policies for dependants, which must be considered from a global standpoint. In our ageing societies, the issue of care for the elderly, which is also provided mainly by women, is also key to equality at work. In this connection, the European Commission is preparing to move on to a new stage in the promotion of care policies, in which it will encourage EU Member States to review their operating methods with a view to promoting gender equality.

In September 2022, the European Commission is due to present a European care strategy addressing both carers and care receivers.

Helena Dalli, European Commissioner for Equality

Labour market regulation policies

Employment policies

In many countries, girls' education levels are higher on average than boys' but it is more difficult for them to access the labour market and when they can, it is under less advantageous conditions than for boys. According to the World Bank, women have on average three quarters of the rights that men have. Inequalities at work are still very pronounced in the Council of Europe member States. Women have less access than men to entrepreneurship and are overrepresented in the informal sector and this undermines their rights and their social protection. In general, women's pay is lower on average than men's. Several factors are behind this. Firstly, more women work part time than men in order to reconcile their work and family life but also because they are more affected by under-employment. The glass ceiling, or vertical segregation, is another factor explaining pay inequalities. Wage discrimination is still a genuine problem affecting women's pay. Lastly, women are overrepresented in poorly paid jobs. According to the World Bank, they are caught in a low-productivity trap because women's employment is concentrated in sectors of activity where productivity increases are low, and this limits wage increases. The care sector is a perfect illustration of this. The Covid-19 crisis has revealed this problem because it has highlighted the central role of essential female workers such as nurses and nursing auxiliaries, whose pay is too low in view of the importance of the service they provide. Wages and vocational training in these sectors must therefore be regulated by the authorities to ensure that they are improved and high-quality care is provided.

Some countries have taken measures to boost women's wages. In Germany, the minimum wage has been increased, which should be particularly advantageous for women, and a law on wage transparency has been adopted. In Italy, the Ministry of Labour has opened a special fund for wage equality and partial unemployment measures have been extended to very small enterprises, in which women are overrepresented. In Sweden, to reduce the working hours gap, a bill has been tabled to support the right to work full time so that it becomes the norm, which should encourage women to increase their working hours and hence reduce the wage gap. Telework, which has grown as a result of the pandemic and the related lockdowns, can be an opportunity to allow parents to reconcile work and family life. It can help to increase productivity at work, but it must be combined

with certain safeguards relating to working conditions. In addition, as the OECD has emphasised, such measures are most often offered to skilled workers and middle and senior managers and should be extended where possible to less skilled workers.

The focus on certain public policies such as parental leave, childcare facilities and labour market regulation should not make us overlook the fact that such policies should form part of an overall gender mainstreaming approach. This requires all public policies outside those referred to above to contribute to the process of establishing gender equality. Sweden has been talking of a feminist government. It has, for example, highlighted the role of tax regulations for couples, emphasising the importance of separate taxation because this guarantees that women pay income tax on the basis of their own income, not that of the family. This should make it possible to encourage women to enter the labour market and stop quitting work when they have a child. To bring about change, these public policies must be rooted in a culture of equality and inclusive practices in the workplace.

The role of employers

Governments establish the legal framework within which employers can contribute to the implementation of work-life balance policies. The private sector has a key role to play in this sphere. Employers' contributions to the provision of high-quality childcare facilities can reduce staff turnover by establishing staff loyalty while reducing absenteeism among parents managing family emergencies. By providing care facilities, helping staff to take advantage of parental leave and allowing for a degree of flexibility in the organisation of work enabling them to reconcile the different parts of their life, employers can help to reduce inequalities at work and build an efficient and inclusive working environment. Employers must ensure that staff can return to work under favourable conditions after maternity or parental leave. In particular, vocational training programmes and appropriate human resources practices (such as personalised interviews to monitor return-to-work conditions) help to support women returning from parental or maternity leave. There is also a need to guarantee continued wage raises and career progression after such leave.

The OECD has listed some best practices which the private sector should adopt, such as providing childcare places for their employees, a degree of flexibility in work organisation and an accommodating and well-meaning approach vis-à-vis parental responsibilities. It points out nonetheless that flexibility and telework should be carefully managed so as to guarantee that employees are protected from the risk that they may actually heighten some inequalities at work.

Besides these policies to support parenting at work, employers must also provide an inclusive, father-friendly working environment, which is supportive of those who wish to devote more time to bringing up their children. One of the reasons why fathers do not take paternity or parental leave is related to gender norms and company practices. In some sectors and, in particular, highly masculine work contexts, fathers do not permit themselves to reduce their working hours or use leave to invest in family time. Employers therefore must contribute to the fight against prejudice and gender norms. The goal is to alter business culture and attitudes to parenthood, which are still highly influenced by gender.

To encourage employers to change their approach, some countries have set up certification or labels to spotlight companies promoting good practices in this area. Some employers seek to capitalise on skills acquired by parents during parental leave in the workplace, particularly interpersonal or organisational skills.

We discovered that maternity and paternity are outstanding learning opportunities; in fact, care activities increase crucial competencies such as setting priorities, organisational skills, and delegation.

**Sonia Malaspina, Director of Human Resources,
Danone Italy & Greece**

The consequences of the health crisis

The health crisis resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic particularly affected women on two fronts: the organisation of families and the labour market. The various lockdowns and the related closure of childcare services and schools led to a considerable increase in the work burden within families. Women took on the largest share of this increase in family and domestic work. In some cases, men were also exposed to the process of dealing with these tasks when they were teleworking and their spouse had to go into work. Women are overrepresented in the care and health sectors, meaning that they were first in line in the health management of the pandemic.

Our care infrastructures across Europe are crumbling, and Covid only worsened the problem. They need an urgent boost to make them future-proof and to alleviate the burden of unpaid care placed upon women.

Carlien Scheele, Director of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE)

Many studies have shown that when both parents were at home during lockdown, it was the mother who provided education and care for children to the detriment of her work. In Italy, the time devoted by men to domestic and family work increased substantially. However, while it is true that the pandemic prompted men to increase the time they devoted to family, it did not lead to a redistribution of roles within couples with regard to family and domestic tasks, because women also spent more time on such activities (Del Boca et al, 2021).

The pandemic reversed the positive trends in the areas of equality and inclusivity, adding to existing socio-economic inequalities and vulnerabilities. The policies implemented to deal with this unprecedented crisis can be divided into three categories: social protection measures, budgetary and fiscal measures to support economic activity, and employment support measures. In most countries, these economic policies and social measures have been gender neutral. As a result, they have not made it possible to address the increase in gender inequalities caused by the crisis. Governments have done little to date to exploit the potential of gender budgeting. Gender mainstreaming would be a means of rectifying this.

The analysis of recorded measures [through] a gender lens reveals that of the 477 measures, only 34 (7 %) specifically reference women and can therefore be classified as gender-sensitive

Liliana Palihovici, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender

The economic and social crisis arising from the health crisis had a major impact in many countries. Women's employment was particularly affected because they are overrepresented in insecure jobs. Some economists have talked of a "she-cession". The ILO states that 12 million women left the labour market in 2020 in response to the health crisis and points to the particularly vulnerable situation of women workers in the informal sector.

The [European Institute for Gender Equality](#) (EIGE) has produced assessments of the consequences of the pandemic in terms of socio-economic inequalities between women and men. In particular, it has conducted a major survey on the organisation of time during the pandemic. This work showed that at the current rate of progress, another 60 years will be needed to achieve equality. Public decision-makers must incorporate this dimension into their plans to find a way out of the crisis. EIGE also launched a campaign to encourage governments and the private sector to get involved in tangible projects to promote equality.

The EIGE Director, Carlien Scheele, pointed out that while the growth of telework during the pandemic has paved the way for new forms of work organisation which could improve work-life balance, the trend should not mask the threat which this type of work poses. Often, it was women with children who continued teleworking while men returned to the workplace, adding to the inequality in the division of family responsibilities. The EIGE Director encouraged employers to create the conditions to extend these work-life balance practices to all employees, not just mothers with young children.

Lastly, with regard to the impact of the war in Ukraine, Kateryna Levchenko, Government Commissioner for Gender Equality in Ukraine, pointed out that most of the refugees fleeing the war were women and children. Over and above fundamental needs, host countries must provide an environment enabling children to be integrated into schools and care facilities adapted to their age and helping women to find work. For example, they should help them with jobseeking and propose appropriate training to facilitate their integration, particularly vis-à-vis the language barrier, which can be a major obstacle to integration into employment.

Recommendations

Recommendations strengthening the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023

At the end of this day of rich and intense discussions, recommendations were drawn up to guide member States in their efforts to promote gender equality at work by improving work-life balance policies. The Conference conclusions, presented jointly by the Italian authorities and the Council of Europe Secretariat, appear in Appendix II to this report. In this context, member States are invited to review and step up the implementation of [Recommendation No. R \(96\) 5](#) on reconciling work and family life, in the light of Article 27 of the revised European Social Charter. This is a priority for future gender equality strategies both at national and at Council of Europe level.

The points raised during this day and [the conclusions](#) deriving from it are linked to the ongoing work of the Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023. This calls in particular for measures: to combat gender stereotypes and sexism (strategic objective 1), to reduce gender inequalities in employment, salaries, poverty and pensions and to achieve an equal division of household and family responsibilities between women and men (paragraph 23). It also highlights the importance of equal sharing of household and family work as a means of reducing gender stereotypes (paragraph 24). The [Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018 – 2023](#) states that substantive gender equality requires a radical change in the family roles assigned to men and women, encouraging shared parental responsibilities (paragraph 26). It points to the difficulties which women face throughout their careers and calls for the development of work-life balance policies (paragraph 43) including, in particular: paid maternity and paternity leave, paid parental leave for women and men, access to quality and affordable childcare and other social services, and a change in the male-dominated working culture, attitudes and practices influenced by gender stereotypes.

All stakeholders must rally round to promote women's economic empowerment and involvement by men in the family sphere, which are the prerequisites for gender equality. **Public-policy makers and governments** should heed today's recommendations which stress the need to introduce policies for parental leave and care facilities for dependants. These are indispensable and must be designed to combat gender stereotypes by encouraging the equal division of responsibility for care for dependants between women and men.

Ensure that paid and accessible maternity, paternity, and parental leave, including suitable time allocation and protection, are provided for by law and in practice.

Care for dependants (particularly young children, the elderly and persons with disabilities) must be accessible throughout the country but also affordable and of high quality so that genuine access to such services is guaranteed for all families.

Invest in care infrastructure, ensuring good geographical coverage, affordability and opening hours adapted to workers with responsibilities for children or dependants who are ill or who have a disability.

In addition to measures to promote equality and work-life balance, *gender mainstreaming should be adopted, ensuring that all public policies bear this aim in mind*, particularly social and economic policies introduced to deal with the consequences of the health crisis.

For **employers and employers' organisations**, the recommendations raise several points which make it possible to promote equality at work.

Work organisation must be remodelled so that working hours are adapted to family obligations while guaranteeing the necessary protections.

Remote working arrangements can facilitate work-life balance provided that they do not lock women into this form of employment, thus undermining equality.

Fathers, therefore, should be encouraged to make use of the leave at their disposal through measures combating stereotypes and informing them more specifically about their rights in this respect.

Offer flexible working conditions, supporting care leave for women and men alike.

More generally, the aim should be to develop a work culture which values the quality of results over the length of time spent in the workplace.

Implement programmes to de-stigmatise remote working or part-time work and promote a work culture that values the quality of outcomes over the quantity of hours spent at work.

It is also important to establish, publicise and value good practices implemented by **employers** with regard to equality at work and work-life balance.

Implement existing tools for gender equality (including work-life balance) business certification and ensure their long-term sustainability, e.g. through regular reporting.

Generally speaking, **stakeholders** are encouraged to set up education and awareness-raising programmes to combat stereotypes. Gender socialisation from early childhood on is a well-identified mechanism in the social sciences. It leads to the perpetuation of practices and prejudices which hinder individual empowerment and gender equality. Awareness-raising programmes targeting teachers or professionals in the early childhood sector are a crucial means of combating this tendency over the long term. Similarly, in the working environment, training and awareness-raising in inequalities, discrimination, and sexist and sexual violence provide leverage for employers to reduce inequalities at work and create inclusive, human-rights friendly workplaces.

Invest in education programmes which address gender stereotypes and promote both the sharing of care responsibilities by all, and career choices free from gender bias.

Lastly, to foster progress in equality at work, *it is necessary to monitor relevant indicators (wage gaps, leave use, etc.)* and assess the policies implemented.

APPENDIX I - Programme

9:30 – 10:00 am

High-level opening session

Moderator: Caterina Bolognese, Head of the Gender Equality Division, Council of Europe

- **Benedetto Della Vedova**, Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy
- **Elena Bonetti**, Minister of Equal Opportunities and Family, Italy
- **Claudia Luciani**, Director of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance, Council of Europe
- **Helena Dalli**, European Commissioner for Equality

10:00 – 11:15 am

Session 1: Policies and reforms in favour of women's employment to encourage gender equality – examples from member States

Panel moderator: Claudia Luciani, Director of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance, Council of Europe

- **Thomas Blomqvist**, Minister for Nordic Cooperation and Equality, Finland
- **Élisabeth Moreno**, Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister, Responsible for Equality between Women and Men, Diversity and Equal Opportunities, France
- **Andrea Orlando**, Minister for Labour and Social Policies, Italy
- **Margareta Madjerić**, Secretary of State, Ministry of Labour, Pension System, Family and Social Policy, Croatia
- **Ekin Deligöz**, Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany
- **Rasmus Cruce Naeyé**, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Sweden

Topics to be addressed:

- ➔ What is the latest situation in the Council of Europe member States concerning welfare policies in supporting women's employment?
- ➔ What are examples of policies and reforms to support women's employment to promote gender equality and work-life balance?

11:15 – 11:35 am

Coffee Break

11:35 am – 12:50 pm

Session 2: New policies and services to promote gender-sensitive work-life balance, including a better sharing of care responsibilities - employers' perspectives

Panel moderator: Tryggvi Hallgrímsson, member of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, Iceland

- **Federica Saliola**, Lead Economist, World Bank
- **Monika Queisser**, Head of the Social Policy Division, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- **Kateryna Levchenko**, Government Commissioner for Gender Equality, Ukraine
- **Paola Mascaro**, G20 Empower Chair 2021
- **Sonia Malaspina**, Director of Human Resources, Danone Italy & Greece

Topics to be addressed:

- ➔ What is the role of welfare policies and services in supporting a more equal distribution of care work?
- ➔ How can family policies support transformative changes in our societies?
- ➔ Welfare measures/best practices from the private sector
- ➔ Promising practices
- ➔ What are the roles of the public and private sectors in promoting support for work-life balance?

Q&A session with participants

12:50 – 2:30 pm

Lunch break

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2:30 – 3:30 pm

Session 3: The different impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work and family responsibilities of women and men

Panel moderator: Maria Ellul, member of the Gender Equality Commission of the Council of Europe, Malta

- **Liliana Palihovici**, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender (OSCE)
- **Emanuela Pozzan**, Senior Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Specialist, International Labour Organization (ILO)
- **Carljen Scheele**, Director, European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE)

- **Pasquale Tridico**, President of the National Institute for Social Security (INPS), Italy
- **Paola Profeta**, Professor, Bocconi University, Milan, Italy

Topics to be addressed:

- ➔ How has the COVID 19 pandemic impacted differently the lives of women and men with care and work responsibilities?
- ➔ What measures have been taken by governments and employers to support female and male employees? Have teleworking and other measures been gender-equality-sensitive?
- ➔ What are the research outcomes on this topic and what conclusions should be highlighted?
- ➔ Promising practices in terms of recovery and new employment policies.

Q&A session with participants

3:30 – 4:20 pm

Concluding remarks

Moderator: Caterina Bolognese, Head of the Gender Equality Division, Council of Europe

- **Conference rapporteur: H el ene P erivier**, Economist, French Economic Observatory (OFCE), France
- **Claudia Luciani**, Director of Human Dignity, Equality and Governance, Council of Europe
- **Elena Bonetti**, Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family, Italy

APPENDIX II – Conference conclusions - Takeaways

Under the aegis of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, and co-organised by the Minister for Equal Opportunities and Family of Italy and the Council of Europe, and with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the conference brought together high-level representatives of governments, international organisations, research, and industry. It provided rich insights into work-life balance, the pursuit of a fair equilibrium between professional activities and family responsibilities.

Work-life balance is a critical element of women's empowerment, as it shapes the opportunities women can seize in terms of career growth, salary increase, and leadership positions. A gender-equal balance between work and family, and an equal distribution among parents of responsibilities relating to care for children, for dependents who are ill or have a disability, or for the household, means women should not be obliged to pursue part-time, low-paid, or low-responsibility jobs, nor should they have to choose between career and family.

Participants agreed that, in order to achieve work-life balance for all –

Governments and State institutions need to:

- ⊗ develop strategies for gender equality, focusing on the empowerment of women and the promotion of an equal distribution of care and assistance responsibilities between men and women.
- ⊗ Ensure that paid and accessible maternity, paternity, and parental leave, including suitable time allocation and protection, are provided for by law and in practice.
- ⊗ Ensure that flexible work possibilities are provided for by law and in practice.
- ⊗ Invest in care infrastructure, ensuring good geographical coverage, affordability and opening hours adapted to workers with responsibilities for children or dependents who are ill or who have a disability.
- ⊗ Invest in education programmes which address gender stereotypes and promote both the sharing of care responsibilities by all, and career choices free from gender bias.
- ⊗ Regularly monitor and assess the implementation of relevant legislation and policies, and report regularly on gender pay gaps and on care leave and its impact on wages/incomes.
- ⊗ Guarantee gender-disaggregated data collection and gender-sensitive social and economic analysis and impact assessments of the relevant legislation and policies.

Employers and employer organisations need to:

- ⊗ put in place structures and facilities enabling all workers – women and men – to fulfil care responsibilities.
 - ⊗ Offer flexible working conditions, supporting care leave for women and men alike.
 - ⊗ Take steps to achieve a more gender-balanced labour force, both horizontally and vertically, placing particular emphasis on women’s leadership.
 - ⊗ Promote different types of work-life balance incentives for women and men, whether they bear care responsibilities or not.
 - ⊗ Recognise and value the time-management and ‘soft’ skills which parents acquire and develop as relevant for the work environment, and career advancement.
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- ⊗ Implement programmes to de-stigmatise remote working or part-time work and promote a work culture that values the quality of outcomes over the quantity of hours spent at work.
 - ⊗ Promote remote work as a possible facilitation of – as opposed to a burden on – work-life balance, especially for women and men with care responsibilities.
 - ⊗ Support the advancement of government regulations in this area and develop public/private partnerships promoting a gender-balanced labour force, both vertically and horizontally.
 - ⊗ Implement existing tools for gender equality (including work-life balance) business certification and ensure their long-term sustainability, e.g. through regular reporting.

Finally, **all actors, be they public or private**, should join forces with civil society – including women’s organisations and social partners – as well as academia, to:

- ⊗ promote women’s economic independence as a form of empowerment and a prerequisite for gender equality and for societies that are equitable and economically sustainable.
- ⊗ Promote the role and responsibility of men and boys as actors of change for gender equality in the public and private spheres.
- ⊗ Stress the importance of maternity, paternity and parental leaves and the significant roles of both parents in the upbringing of their children.
- ⊗ Ensure that work-life balance measures break the cycle of gender-based stereotypes that harm societies by limiting the potential and the pursuits of women and men; and in so doing, address perceptions and norms, raise awareness, and promote examples that have significantly contributed towards positive change.
- ⊗ Make efforts to consolidate the democratic fabric of societies as they adapt to new challenges, ensuring that recovery measures in response to large-scale crises – such as pandemics and war – are gender-equality sensitive.