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Framework of actions on gender equality

Annex

UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC¹ organised seminars between January and September 2004 during which case studies on social partner agreements and practices at national, sectoral and/or company levels were presented. Inspired by these practices in various Member States and companies of different sectors and sizes, they identified examples of instruments and tools, which are described in the framework of actions.

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¹ The ETUC delegation includes representatives of the EUROCADRES/CEC Liaison Committee

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National tripartite “girl’s day” initiative in Germany

This initiative was presented by Ms Schneider-Bodien (BDA – Confederation of German employers’ associations) and Ms Kaufmann (DGB - German trade unions federation).

On the girl’s day, visits are organised in companies all over Germany to give girls (16-25 years old) a view of the careers open to them, especially in technical professions. This project aims to dismantle prejudice and to inform girls about possible career choices in technical professions. The objective is to have 40% of girls in technical professions by 2006.

The assessment of social partners is broadly positive. The progression in number of girls reached has been impressive over the five years since the start of the project. Some concerns were highlighted on the insufficient impact of the initiative in leading girls to opt for technical dual education (rather than technical colleges as today). In DGB’s view, the Girl’s day initiative is focussing on changing attitudes of girls themselves, but this will only be effective when also the attitude of enterprises towards women will change.

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BMW – Technical girls' project

The case study was presented by Manfred Theunert and Werner Löchel (management).

BMW has 20 factories worldwide, mainly in Europe (Germany and the UK). Its aim is to be the world leader in the upper side of the market in cars and motorbikes (premium strategy). Being the best employer in the world is an integral part of this strategy to reach this objective.

The BMW Technical girls' project must also be seen against the background of the German apprenticeship system where apprentices recruited in 2004 finish their apprenticeship in 2008, requiring companies to be able to plan training over this four years cycle.

The technical girls' project was developed in cooperation with the works council of different plants but started as a pilote scheme in the Munich plant. BMW first conducted a survey to map the initial situation and understand the reasons why so few girls were attracted by technical jobs.

On the basis of the diagnosis made, several actions were defined to bridge the gap (the full set of measures was carried out in the München plant only as pilot scheme)

- identifying and recognising girls' skills and boosting them
- going to schools in order to inform girls about technical jobs and to tackle their fears (to be more credible, the project leader/trainer is a technical girl/woman)
- developing measures for target groups
- setting a target of 15% of female technical apprentices. Targets in BMW are not quotas; targets are monitored and lead to action in cases where they are not reached because they are linked to the remuneration of management.
- other measures included the participation of the company in the girl's day initiative (see above), the launch of a "girls' practical day" and of "girls technical camps" aiming at letting girls carry out the technical jobs in live.

In parallel to this project, a special programme called "Drive" also exists for managerial and graduate levels in which 20.8% of participants at graduate levels are women (mainly engineers) and 31% of women at doctorate level.

The assessment of results achieved through the BMW Technical girls' project showed that, compared to other German BMW plants where the proportion of female apprentices was 7% in 2003, the figure for the München plant was 15% and the proportion is expected to rise to 28% in 2004.

In the future, BMW wishes to improve its current initiatives and step up recruitment of girls apprentices and prepare their full recruitment in 2008 to ensure their smooth integration in technical departments at the end of their apprenticeship.

BMW is also active to retain women in the company after their recruitment. Examples of initiatives include:

- BMW's internal internet web-site on career prospects. The average duration of women career in BMW is 7-10 years,

- measures to promote conciliation of work and family life including sponsoring child care centers, promotion of part-time work for production workers and flexi-time for non-production workers. As a result, BMW has the highest proportion of part-time workers of the car industry and men are increasingly using sabbatical leave.

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BT – equal opportunities policy

The case study was presented by Ms Pam Farmer (management).

BT has a global vision of equal opportunities, throughout the life cycle. It is part of an overall diversity approach but includes specific programmes for women.

BT is involved in a number of external initiatives such as the

- “Take our Daughters to Work” initiative,
- “women ambassadors” in science and engineering,
- production of videos for ethnic minority groups to influence family career choices,
- presence in career fairs,
- web-sites and on line discussions as part of the EU project “PORTIA”,
- participation in “women in board rooms” project in the UK, etc.

BT internal initiatives include

- systematically looking at job description and specifications to make them more gender neutral (for example, changing the name of software engineer to software designer increased applications by women by 37%),
- highlighting in the in-house and external press news stories about women breaking new grounds,
- addressing the issue of self-deselection through buddying / mentoring / coaching, confidence building programmes, opening up access for high profile appointments,
- ensuring equal pay through pay audits (compared with the UK average where the gender pay gap is 19%, the average gap in BT is now less than 4%),
- reviewing grades to identify unjustified differences for work of equal value,
- ensuring that there is equal representation in the talent pool,
- developing flexible work possibilities (in the UK 92% of women returning from maternity leave the company after a year but in BT there is a 94% retention rate after a year), etc.

In terms of gender, a future challenge for BT is to move to an approach which is “gender inclusive” - away from an approach only focussing on women, to include men in the thinking, especially focussing on the role of men with regard to family responsibilities. BT supports an organisation called Fathers’ Direct in developing this more holistic approach to gender issues. Concerning work life balance, BT has a variety of tools (flexi work, part-time work, telework (home working), leaves and career break opportunities etc.). The message to both men and women in the company is: you can work part time or flexibly, and at the same time do not loose your place in the company hierarchy, or career opportunities. Allowing for ‘flexible working’ brings huge benefits to the enterprise, because workers are more committed to give a bit extra to their job-performance.

The situation of women employees in BT is characterised by:

- some women at lowest level positions are very well qualified and move up rapidly through promotion. For example, call-center operators in BT have equal access to apply to management positions.
- 42% of graduates in BT are women. 43% of promotees are women,

- looking at the targets that BT has set itself, they focus on senior level representation, the lowest levels, and new entrants.
- During 2003/4 a number of women left BT on attractive release terms. However, BT believes that this trend has started to slow.

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EFFAT-FERCO - European sector collective agreement in the contract catering sector

The case study was presented by Ms Kerstin Howald, Tourism Sector Secretary, (EFFAT – European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture and Tourism sectors and allied branches) and Ms Marie-Christine Lefebvre, secretary general (FERCO - European Federation of Contract Catering Organisations).

The European contract catering sector counts approximately 500 000 workers in Europe. 70% of employees are women. Women of disadvantaged groups are highly represented. A great deal of the employees work part-time.

The European sectoral social partners EFFAT and FERCO concluded an agreement on vocational training in 1999. The background for this initiative was, that they had found that most training in the sector was going to the managers (mostly men), so they wanted to focus on the majority of disadvantaged workers in the sector (mostly women).

Since then, the follow-up of the agreement in the Member States is monitored. For example, a joint initiative of the social partners was developed in the Netherlands to train and coach women in view of offering them a fixed term contract in the contract catering sector.

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Shell - Diversity and Inclusiveness policy

The case study was presented by Mr Alex Krijger (Human Resources Management).

Conducting a diversity policy is a way for Shell to accompany societal changes and to change a traditional and male dominated (image of the) company. Shell wants to be an attractive employer for all people.

To do so, Shell has a broad and diversified approach to diversity, which tackled the gender dimension as well as others such as age differences, religion, nationality, handicap etc. The objective is to create an inclusive organisation where individual differences are recognised and where diversity is valued.

Shell conducted a scientific study to measure the impact of diversity policies on productivity and creativity in the company and hence on its performance. The policy is supported at the highest level of management. To achieve change, the policy was introduced by the top of the organisation, however, the real work has to be done on the local / plant level. The most important thing to achieve results is cultural change, and this takes time.

Examples of actions undertaken:

- Diversity contact persons are identified in each location of the group entrusted with the responsibility of the implementation of the policy on the ground;
- A strategy was defined with the aim to make sure that everyone understands the importance of the issue. Annual plans, goals and targets are defined to ease the implementation of the policy;
- Managers are accountable for the implementation (part of the individual evaluation process of managers) of the policy and are trained to raise their awareness for diversity management;
- Employees are involved individually through regular surveys, which results are carefully monitored, and through the works council / trade unions where they exist.

To help women breaking the glass ceiling and have more women in the top, you need to speak with women as soon as possible on their career expectations, and work life balance, and show the commitment of the management to solve problems that may arise especially during a specific period of 4 to 8 years in their life (when they have small children). Examples of tools introduced by Shell included:

- give the opportunity to go in jobs where there is less mobility,
- create horizontal career steps,
- allow for flexibility in the scheduling of working hours, while at the same time providing for regularity (for instance not 4 days of 9 hours, but 5 days with shorter hours);
- discuss with young parents (men and women) on work life balance issues;
- have exit-interviews with all women leaving the company, and find out why they leave (important to improve retention rates)

It is important to not only have good general policies in place, but also pay sufficient attention to so called 'micro-inequalities' that may be very annoying in every day practice.

Within Shell, there are also anti-harassment measures: in every location there are 2 'trust-persons' (a man and a woman).

Is the policy working? Ask your employees! Shell conducts every 2 years a people's survey. The results are open, and communicated on the website. It is also very important to show that you do something with the results of such questionnaires.

Concerning the Shell Diversity and Inclusiveness policy, the workers and their representatives have been involved through the normal processes of consultation of the works council(s), and collective bargaining. Trade unions were present in 3 locations, where annual or biannual agreements are negotiated, which include diversity policy issues. These locations employ 3000 people. The remaining 8000 are consulted through the works councils.

Tackling the gender issue, as a part of a broader diversity agenda is a way to overcome possible negative reactions from men. Men can benefit from the same benefits as women such as childcare, parental leave, etc, but they tend to be more interested in other parts of this agenda such as for example active ageing measures.

In the future, the company is willing to further work on retaining women, as the turnover remains high.

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French national cross-industry collective agreement on gender mix and equal opportunities between men and women (March 2004)

The collective agreement was presented by Ms Chantal Foulon (MEDEF - French employers) and Ms Le Bihan (CFTC - Confederation of Christian trade unions).

A consensus emerged between French social partners on the main obstacles to reaching equal opportunities for men and women in practice, i.e.

- cultural attitudes towards gender mix;
- insufficient awareness of employers, managers, employees' representatives and employees themselves on this issue.

The cross-industry national collective agreement was signed on 1 March 2004 by all social partners organisations on the employers and workers side. It describes useful instruments which can be put in place or used more actively, referring the decision on which instruments are the most suitable according to their specific needs to collective agreements at sector and/or company levels.

Instruments include:

- Setting gender balance objectives at sector level for access to vocational training;
- Promoting tailored and accurate information on labour markets evolutions in order to help desegregate labour markets;
- More attention given to the fact that flexible working time arrangement can have adverse effects on women career promotion;
- Providing training sessions to workers before the end of the leave in order to facilitate the return to work
- Maintain the link between the enterprise and women on maternity or parental leave;
- Catching up measures on equal pay for work of equal value and possibility of positive discrimination
- Measures to be taken if there is evidence of an "outstanding imbalance" in the career of women and men such as analysis of the causes, definition of clear objectives and deadlines to take action such as three-year-plans
- A review of the effects of the agreement in three years time.

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PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN - company level collective agreement on the development of female employment and on professional equality between women and men

The case study was presented by Ms Valleron (CFE-CGC - trade union) and Mr Brunet (management).

The share of women working in the group PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN compared to the total number of employees is as follows:

- All activities worldwide: 18.17%
- In France for the automobile sector: 15% (Blue collar workers: 14%; Technicians, employees and first line managers: 21%; Management: 17%)
- The main increase in female employment over the last years is in the category of blue collar workers

Many equal opportunities initiatives taken by the group are implemented in partnership with education and training institutions, vocational training schools, local authorities and the State etc. Employees' representatives are involved in these activities. One of the main objectives of these activities is to attract more women to the automobile industry.

A collective agreement was signed on 4 November 2003. The agreement deals with various aspects on equal opportunities between women and men such as training, recruitment, career of women etc. It leaves the issue of equal pay aside as, following an in depth study made in the company, both employers and trade unions observed that there is no difference in equal pay for work of equal value in the company. Average pay differentials between women and men are explained by the fact that fewer women are present in the highest categories of jobs in the company. In addition, pay issues are dealt with in the collective agreement on pay concluded in 2004.

The following initiatives are foreseen and have already been partly implemented:

- Adaptation of work to enable a greater gender mix at work (ergonomics; assessment before leaves ; adaptation of local services such as child care etc.);
- Setting targets for the recruitment of women: the proportion of women recruited should be equivalent to the proportion of women applying to the job. ICT tools have been put in place to ensure a follow-up of the targets. A review will be done after three years.
- Vocational training and promotion of female apprenticeship;
- Helping women to be mobile (mobility is a condition to career promotion in the group) and helping spouses when forced to move;
- Setting targets for the promotion of women: the proportion of women promoted should be equivalent to the proportion of women in the position to be promoted;
- Dissemination of the whole agreement to all the employees in the enterprise by means of a brochure;
- Putting in place a network of 35 persons in charge of gender mainstreaming, spread in each directorate of the company, with the aim to exchange experience on the actions taken and conditions for success ;

- Training of the members of gender equality committees of the establishments' worker councils;
- Awareness-raising and training of managers, HR managers and people in charge of the recruitment.

Concerning the follow-up:

- A bipartite follow-up of the agreement is foreseen on the basis of agreed indicators.
- The three years targets will be monitored.
- Each location devises an annual equality plan in order to turn the agreed objectives into concrete actions.
- Each industrial plant has established a gender equality committee
- Exchange of best practices is foreseen.
- Contact persons are identified in each location.

PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN is currently reflecting on its broader diversity policy.

The law on equality adopted in 2001 has influenced the agreement, but the main reason for PSA PEUGEOT CITROËN to have this policy is to adapt the group to its environment, especially with regard to developments on the labour market (labour market shortages) and to be in phase with the mentalities and expectations of people.

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CNA - Il talento delle donne – research actions to support female entrepreneurship and generational handover

The case study was presented by Ms Elisa Muratori (CNA – National confederation of craft and SMEs).

The objectives of the project are:

- to develop activities to ease the generational handover of SMEs with a gender approach;
- to raise awareness on the problem of the generational handover;
- to identify useful services that can be used by SMEs to solve the problem;
- to train and value the management skills of women entrepreneurs playing a strategic role within SMEs.

The issue of generational handover of SMEs is an important one as in practice a lot of SMEs of the Emilia Romagna region close because no one is found to take over the business. This has important consequences on the economic activity and the employment situation of the region. A solution is to release women's untapped potential.

The two main activities of the project are:

- Training activities targeted to women to strengthen their management skills and capacity to run a business. The activities undertaken take closely into account the situation of women in SMEs and the fact that traditionally they are not perceived as able to take over the business;
- Research activity in order to create a “matrix of activities” to support SMEs faced with a problem of generational handover. The matrix include:
 - analysis activities,
 - exchange of good practices (for example through life stories of senior women entrepreneurs who have already faced the generational handover)
 - discussions groups (for example groups focussing on senior women entrepreneurs or junior women entrepreneurs)
 - tools to assess the business activities of the SMEs and to design a business development plan (reviewing business practices and performance, human resources and roles played, positive actions for equal opportunities within the company)
 - tools to identify the best way in which the business can be taken over (structured transfer plan).

This matrix is transferable to other regions of Italy – this is foreseen.

A lot of different tools were developed to during the project, including:

- Design and implementation of a data base
- Identification of the sample of enterprises
- Creation and experimentation of a permanent laboratory
- Survey of training needs
- Implementation of a catalogue of Open Learning products

An interesting result of this project concerns the gender of the successor:

- Men entrepreneurs see as their only possible successor for their company, the son and heir. For the daughter there is always a “job” in the company, but they do not see and perceive her as a possible heiress.
- Women entrepreneurs do not make a gender distinction for their successors, they have a more rational and economic view of the business, the important thing is for the heirs to be motivated and aware.

More information on the project is available on the following Web Site: [www.comitatoimpresadonna.net/Talento Donne](http://www.comitatoimpresadonna.net/Talento_Donne) , together with the following material

- Life stories
- Model of preventive survey of intervention, Model of business check-up
- Documents, Bibliography, Collection of best practices, Materials of in-depth study for women entrepreneurs: “the journey within the company”

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Leeds City Council – work-life balance project

The case was presented by Ms Helena Philips (management) and Mr Martin Walker (UNISON, trade union).

The overall context in which the project was developed is characterised by:

- the demographic challenge and the need to attract and retain talent;
- existing skills shortages in some areas such as accountancy;
- the UK Employment Act 2002, which introduced the right to request to work flexibly for parents of children under the age of 6 (or of disabled children under 18)
- improve services to the public
- improve diversity of representation in management positions (in particular women, who are under-represented at senior level)
- The need to tackle high rates of absence (approximately 13 days a year per employee).

The policy started as a pilot project set up in Leeds City Council to improve work-life balance. The pilot phase lasted 6 months and initially involved 60 employees in two units of the Finance Department. The scheme was extended to other teams within the Department and is now being developed across the whole of the City Council.

In the Department, 56,4% of workers are not unionised. 40,3% are unionised, of which 45% are UNISON members.

The work-life balance pilot scheme looked at the potential for a more flexible service. Staff across the council were already operating on flexi-time but the existing flexitime system was available to staff but not managers (hence problem of glass ceiling). The new scheme involved all employees, including the managers. Moreover, it offered a broader range of “options”, giving staff greater influence on long term planning of working hours and leave.

The UK Employment Act 2002 provides for a ‘right to request’ but not for a ‘right to actually get’ a change in work patterns and only covers those with parental responsibility for specified children. The new scheme however was introduced for all employees and all employees could benefit from it, if they chose to.

The scheme was linked from the outset to the broader “diversity agenda” of Leeds City Council (women; ethnic minorities, disabled people, etc.) so that the scheme was not seen as a “women only” issue but that everyone could feel involved (“there is something for everyone”).

The trade union UNISON supported the scheme from the outset as it was an opportunity to improve working conditions and to prevent stress. Retaining staff was an issue for trade unions as people on leave were not replaced and this increased workload for all employees. Trade unions also wanted to be involved positively in a scheme that could eventually be extended to the City Council as a whole.

The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Challenge Fund gave financial support. This allowed the City Council to recruit consultants to develop the pilot. The City Council could also rely on the expertise of the DTI in this area.

Careful consideration was given to the process of involvement of the staff and trade unions. For example the Trade Union Committee was briefed regularly by management about the scheme and trade unions participated directly as members of the Work-Life Balance Steering Group.

Work-Life Balance co-ordinators were appointed within each team to provide advice to staff about the practical application of the new system.

Each member of staff participating in the scheme had to prepare an individual "business case" stating why they were taking part, and what the benefits would be both for them individually and for the service (discussed collectively by the service staff). It was stressed from the outset that flexible working was not an entitlement and that employees had to demonstrate how their changed pattern of working would benefit the service.

Communication was extremely important in the success of the project. It was particularly important that every employee understood the service the Council expected them to provide.

There was a possibility for employees not to participate in the scheme or to come back to the old pattern of work if it did not work out. The flexibility-options were only optional, i.e. they were never imposed by management. They were determined by employees and their teams, after considering how their work could best be delivered and following discussions with management. Also, it was always possible to return to the previous working time pattern if the change did not work out well. Annualised hours, for example, were only agreed when the employee could show an acceptable pattern of working hours, staying within the boundaries of the Working Time Directive.

Not all workers' requests could be met. There were examples of requests for term time only working (which means: having the school-holidays off), but there would often be no business case for it, so it would not be granted.

The objectives of the pilot were to address issues of:

- the extension of service provision and service quality;
- staff job satisfaction, morale and commitment;
- staff recruitment and retention;
- sickness and other absence
- improving women's ability to access higher management positions

A mix of options was made available and included:

- annualised hours, term-time working (i.e. working except during school holidays)
- part-time and reduced hours,
- compressed week,
- staggered hours,
- job-sharing,
- career breaks
- time-off and ad hoc home working instead of part-time.

For managers, two issues were particularly difficult:

- Control of attendance had to be changed into control of outcome. Managers had to learn how to manage individual's performance outputs, not their time at work. Employees had to think about the whole team. Not just about themselves. Success depended on team solutions.

The real challenge was moving away from a culture that was "rule driven" to one of empowerment. Involving the trade unions was important given the specific changes impacting on staff and perceived risks of the scheme. It was also imperative to discuss collectively (in teams) how to reach the business objectives.

For the trade unions closer involvement with the initiative made sense because work life balance was a key trade union objective, but also as an answer to concerns expressed by staff members, which believed that the scheme seemed "too good to be true". These concerns were the following:

- fear that staff would be forced into working longer hours when they may not wish to,
- possible resistance at managerial level,
- concerns that indirect discrimination could result from the fact that payment of over-time would be replaced by making a global deal on flexible working. For UNISON it is important that flexible working is not used as an excuse to not pay over-time. When the pilot scheme is rolled out across the organisation it could then adversely impact on less skilled and lower paid workers who rely upon overtime or out of hours pay enhancements to supplement their basic pay. UNISON is looking into that issue as pay arrangements are decided at the national level.

Clear parameters were set about what constituted success, including "no detriment to the service during the pilot scheme". Management were very clear that this was the primary objective, even though the scheme clearly brought about a more positive climate of employee relations, benefits to staff and raised the visibility of the trade unions.

Evaluation of the scheme was carried out through

- perception surveys,
- staff diaries to see if employees had benefited in terms of work-life balance,
- discussions between staff and management, and
- hard data in particular on sickness absences.

The options most used were

- flexi-time,
- compressed hours,
- annualised hours (same work pattern over a one year reference period).

There have been a number of positive benefits for management, staff and for the service as a whole, in particular:

- surveys showed that personal life and work life balance improved;
- even though management can reject requests for flexitime, in practice there was no case where a mutually satisfactory solution could not be found
- a significant reduction in sickness absence was achieved (and maintained over time);
- due to the hours that staff wished to work, the telephone service was extended by 2 hours (from 9-5 to 8-6), generating an improvement in

recover times for non-payments as staff were able to reach people when they were at home;

- reduced levels in special leave.

In UNISON's view, the scheme is a success and employees supported it as they felt more in control of their working time. It helped women and men, notably single parents who had the opportunity to come back to full time working hours. It was an alternative to reduced working time and improved the quality of the service.

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West Hungary Consulting – work-life balance policy

A preliminary introduction on the evolution of work-life balance policies in Hungary was presented by Ms Terézia Borosme Bartha (MGYOSZ - Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists) and Ms Marianne Rózsáné dr. Lupkovics (MSZOSZ - National Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions).

The recent evolution in Hungary with regard to conciliation of work and family life was recalled, distinguishing between two main phases:

- the 1970s and 1980s, characterised by a stagnation of the economy and a reduction of birth rates, during which maternity leave was introduced and full time work was no longer an obligation (as was the case in the context of the planned economy);
- 1999 which saw the introduction of a three year parental leave and an award for work-life balance is created.

Since 1999, an annual “award for family-friendly workplaces” also exists. The criteria for getting the award are set in consultation with the social partners. The company West Hungarian Consulting (see below) won this award in 2003.

The case study on the work-life balance policy of the company West Hungary Consulting was presented by Ms Ildikó Kósa (management) and Ms Kardos Endréné (representative of the worker council).

The company is a consultancy SME (specialised in accountancy, taxation, human resources and financial issues) created in 1990. It started with 4 employees and rapidly grew (to 42 employees today). It is characterised by a family friendly atmosphere.

The family friendly policy measures introduced include flexible working time, parental leave, including training to facilitate return from parental leave, leave for urgent family reasons. Implementation is facilitated by the fact that, in its field of activity, work can easily be planned.

The company is keen to keep contact with women on parental leave and to ease their return to work by offering them training measures and flexible working time possibilities, part-time work, possibility to agree with the manager the start and end time of work.

The company also offers other various benefits to its employees beyond legal requirements such as holiday cheques, a gift when founding a family, sport activities, company newsletter etc.

All these activities are financed exclusively by the company.

These tools are included in the work agreement, agreed with the works council, which is revised every two years. If problems occur, they are dealt with in the works council.

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The Spanish national interprofessional agreement on collective bargaining, 2002

The agreement was presented by Ms Gabriela Uriarte (CEOE – Confederation of employers) and Ms María José Casero Garfía (UGT - trade unions)

The interprofessional agreement on collective bargaining was signed in 2002 in a context of low economy growth and high unemployment. The main purpose of the Spanish inter professional agreements on collective bargaining is to give guidelines to negotiators at the other levels.

In 2002, the inter professional agreement on collective bargaining entailed a commitment to promote equal opportunities through collective bargaining, a commitment to tackle discrimination and guidelines on issue such as professional promotion, work-life balance, sexual harassment, etc.

An ad hoc group on equal opportunities worked on a study to analyse obstacles to equal opportunities between women and men, both in and outside the labour relation systems. They also worked to identify good practice examples, extract good elements of case studies etc.

The work of this ad hoc group was approved and annexed to the 2003 inter professional agreement which is not a binding document but guidelines. The Spanish social partners have committed themselves in circulating the guidelines. The guidelines given to negotiators in 2003 are therefore more specific than in 2002. The 2003 inter professional agreement entails principles to be taken over in other collective agreements, clarifies the content of anti discrimination clauses, foresees the possibility of positive actions and highlights the necessity to use gender neutral criteria in recruitment, classification, vocational training and promotion systems.

One of the objectives of the 2003 inter professional agreement is also to avoid sexist job titles in collective agreements.

The impact of the 2003 inter professional agreement can be seen in the number of other collective agreements, which take over its clauses. It already seems that the work-life balance clause is taken over very frequently. Examples were given of the cleaning and consultancy sectors.

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Nestlé - Work life balance policy and “optima” programme

The case study was presented by Ms Isabel Aubert (Human Resources) and Mr Antonio Murillo (UGT, trade union).

Nestlé is present in Spain since 1905. It has 13 factories in Spain, specialised by products but with ice cream produced in several sites.

The work-life balance policy of the company is explained in brochures and on the intranet. It is available to all employees, with some variations from plant to plant. Available tools include flexible working time for administrative and technical employees (start and end time can vary for 07.30-09.15 and 17.00-19.00), compressed hours (shorter lunch break), short time week (ending at 15.00 hours on Fridays), etc.

All employees can ask to work part-time. Different flexi-time schemes apply to office workers and production workers, in accordance with the type of work performed.

Nestlé also offers other possibilities such as

- training during working time including training which have application to the family context such as how to manage stress, time management, emotional intelligence, etc.
- on site services in order to ease work and family lives such as a travel office, food shop, bank and insurance offices, etc.
- allocations to work council to organise family activities,
- expatriate help to family,
- allowance for nursery for women until the child is 4 years old,
- baby food supplied in the first year etc.

The Nestlé Optima Program started in 1998 and is supported by the Spanish Women’s institute. It goes beyond the provisions of the 1999 law on work-life balance. The program entails equal opportunities measures, such as

- ensuring neutral language in job advertisement or job descriptions, and
- positive discrimination measures in favour of women, such as the possibility for women to work closer to their home, the possibility for them to be excluded from night shift until the child is one year old, the possibility to combine the last months of maternity leave with part time work.

Information on the programme is published in brochures and on the intranet and is available to all employees. Optima coordinators have been identified in all Nestlé locations.

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Danish social partners (DA & LO) - Study “Women’s and Men’s wages”

The case study was presented by Ms Karina Ransby (DA - Danish employers) and Ms Maria Hirslund (LO - Danish trade unions).

In 2000, DA and LO decided in a collective agreement to take action on equal opportunities between women and men. In 2002, it was decided to launch the study on wage differences. The study was published in 2003.

With this analysis on women’s and men’s wages, a joint understanding has been achieved between the social partners about the essential causes for gender wage differences. It was the first time in Europe that Social Partners have succeeded in such a wide-ranging analysis. The analysis explains in details the underlying causes of wage differences and contains more explanatory factors than previous analyses on the subject.

The following elements are important to understand the Danish labour market situation:

- Women participation on the labour market has risen in the 20 last years. Despite the fact that the labour force participation rate for women continues to be somewhat lower than for men, the age profile is far more uniform than was the case 20 years ago. There are several explanations for the continuing differences. Among these, the differences in women and men's respective choices of education and sector are significant for the date of entry into the labour market. Choice of education and sector can especially help explain differences among the younger age groups.
- Over the past 20 years, the population's level of education has risen, and the educational level of men and women is far more equal today than 20 years ago, and on average younger women have higher education than men. This does not help lowering significantly the average wage differences because of the occupational and sector segregation. There is no evident trend that men and women choices in education become more similar than before. On the contrary in some areas, the gap deepens. Different education choices are a major factor of labour market segregation.
- A characteristic of Danish labour market is that women mostly work in the public sector in the health care, education and childcare sectors.
- Education choices influence career choices (sectors and occupations). When working in the same sectors, one can see that some occupations are typically women occupations. This is for example the case of service to clients, sales and office work.
- Figures show very clearly that women have less experience on the labour market (in years), take up in most cases the child-care leave and use more the other types of leave.

For the study, DA and LO have tried to find as much as possible homogeneous groups, that would be comparable (and for that reason have excluded managers, apprentices and part timers). The study is focussing on full-time workers covered by DA-LO collective agreements (approx. 40% of the private sector workforce).

Very detailed variables were taken into account in the study. This is important in order to have a detailed picture of wages differences.

- Occupation: 368 different groups
- Sector: 110 different groups
- Experience: Measured as the number of years in employment
- Education: 56 different groups
- Mobility: Numbers of job changes in the period 1981-1999
- Region: Firm location divided into 3 categories: large cities; towns; or in the country
- Children: Between age 0-17 divided into 3 age groups
- Leave: Number of years on childcare leave or other leave

Two wage concepts were taken into account. One corresponding to direct remuneration (corresponding approximately to gross salary) and one other called “total earnings excluding nuisance bonus” which includes for example payments made by the employer in case of leaves (sickness leaves, maternity leaves, child care leaves etc.). Differences in average wage between women and men were presented taking into account both wage concepts (see Presentation at annex for exact figures).

The study concludes that the occupational segregation is the main explanatory factor in wage differences followed by education choices and sectoral segregation. Additional explanatory factors such as years of experience, take up of leaves, job mobility etc. play also an important role especially for white-collar workers. But one should not forget that everything cannot be captured in statistics.

The wage differences are higher for white collar workers than for blue collar workers, and also a higher percentage of the pay-gap for white collar workers was unexplained.

Unexplained differences amount on average to 3.4% for blue-collar workers and to 6.6% for white-collar workers. These unexplained differences do not necessarily mean that the wage-difference is a result of discrimination. They may be related to factors which cannot be easily quantified such as negotiating skills, individual performance, company-specific training which helps performing better in the job,.

The average wage gap is smaller for young women than for older ones. The fact of having a child in itself has no negative impact on wage. On the contrary, it seems that it has a positive effect linked to increased stability and efficiency. However, the fact of taking long leaves has a clearly negative impact on the long term wage (related to women having less years of work experience).

In the period during which the study was done, the new government suspended a bill from the former government aiming to introduce an obligation to have gender-specific wage statistics at company level. In order to take concrete actions in this field, the current government created two working groups in which social partners are participating. The objective of the first working group is to analyse the causes of segregation on the labour market in public and private sectors. The objective of the second is to produce a guidance note for employers on how to check that there is equal wages for women and men. The groups started their work recently.

In their collective agreement in 2004, LO and DA have agreed to create a fund to share the costs of maternity leaves between employers of different sectors. This is considered as a direct follow-up to the analysis on wages differences. The objective

of the fund is to ensure equalisation of the costs incurred by companies in connection with employees taking parental leave. During that same round of negotiations, pregnancy leave and maternity/paternity leave with full pay was extended from 18 to 26 weeks, which represents a considerable improvement of conditions for parents. Similarly, receiving full pay during parental leave allows the parent to maintain the right to pension contributions during the leave. Denmark's new government platform published on 18 February 2005 includes the proposal that companies of a certain maximum size are to be placed under an obligation to prepare equal remuneration statistics - or in some way - report on equal pay developments at company level on a regular basis.

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Finnish social partners - Unification of pay systems and collective agreements in the chemical industry

The case study was presented by Ms Minna Etu-Seppälä (EK - Confederation of Finnish Industries) and Mr Markku Palokangas (Union of Salaried Employees).

In Finland, sectoral agreements concerning white-collar workers were traditionally negotiated by persons coming from the central organizations. This explains why the Confederation of Finnish Industries and the Union of Salaried Employees were involved in the case presented. In Finland different collective agreements apply to white-collar workers and blue-collar workers, Managers are only seldom covered by collective agreements at sectoral level.

The case study concerns the process that resulted in a unification of two pay systems and two collective agreements for white-collar workers in the Chemical industry.

In the mid 90's there were two sectoral level agreements in the chemical industry concerning white-collar workers (due to historical reasons). One covering clerical employees and the other one covering technical employees. Those two collective agreements also included two different pay systems. Clerical employees had somewhat lower wage level. Clerical employees were a female dominated group and technical employees a male dominated group.

A need for a change became evident in the 90's as the job content of clerical employees and technical employees became much closer to each other due to rapid development in information technology. There was no more need for two separate pay systems. The old pay systems were obsolete. It was no longer practical to work with two collective agreements and two pay systems, at the company level. This period also coincided with a merger of the trade union for clerical employees' and the trade union for technical employees into one single trade union organisation.

The unification of pay-systems was done in a gradual way and took time. Discussions with workers on the need for unification started in 1992. The two old pay systems were replaced by a single new one at the end of January 1997. The new pay system included analytical job evaluation and competency-based pay both for clerical and technical employees. However, wage scales and collective agreements were still separate. The two collective agreements were unified at the beginning of 1998. The same pay system and wage scales were applied to both clerical and technical employees in the beginning of 1999.

This time-frame was agreed upon by the social partners and also got the approval of the Finnish Ombudsman for equality. This was important because during a transitional period, there would be one pay system, but 2 wage scales for technical and clerical employees and due to the fact that some of the jobs these groups performed could have been considered as work of equal value, there was a risk that two different wage scales could have been considered to cause pay discrimination. Time is an important factor to make the unification financially possible.

Before the unification, in 1996, there was a difference in wage scale (expressing minimum wage levels) of 9% between the two systems. In 1999, this difference was reduced to 0%. The difference in minimum wage scale had an immediate and longer term impact on wage differences. Even after the unification, pay differences between women and men continue to decline (see Presentation at annex for exact figures).

The main explanatory factor for the remaining gender pay gap is that women and men perform different jobs and have different skills. The occupations in the chemical industry are still very segregated.

The unifications of pay systems and collective agreements led to an evaluation of all jobs performed by the white-collar workers. In the new pay system, wages are based on job value and personal competences and skills (and less on seniority). Job evaluation at company level is done and is regularly checked by a joint team (employers /employees representatives). Employers and trade unions are satisfied with this new pay system. Even if that is in theory possible, no company of the chemical sector has deviated from the sectoral pay arrangements since the unification.

Introducing a new job evaluation system is not an easy task. Very important are discussions and training sessions for everybody involved. In the first year of the introduction of the new pay system 200 seminars were organised, jointly by trade unions and employers, to explain what was going to happen to people's salaries, and job-status, etc. The time-frame was also crucial. The new pay system was jointly tested in a sample of companies before its introduction in the chemical sector as a whole.

The first aim of the project was to merge the collective agreements, and modernise the pay systems. When doing this, it was found that some clerical jobs were lower valued compared to technical jobs and according to the new pay system to be introduced. For example, in the old system formal education, formal job titles and seniority were highly valued. In the new system this was much less the case, and more emphasis was put on activating aspects, and individual capacities. The gender perspective was mainstreamed in these discussions. The review of the job-evaluation system, and the introduction of more gender-neutral criteria played therefore a central role.

The unification was moderate costly for employers (on average 1 to 2% on annual total pay at the company level), however the amount of costs for an individual employer varied a lot and some employers were affected less than the others.). This could be done, because the social partners agreed in a national wage agreement in 1996 that the negotiation of the use of a certain part of future wage increases was left to the sectoral parties. (eg. to change their pay system.) However, one should realise that changing the pay-scales did not mean that everybody got a pay-raise: the scales were raised on a minimum-level, so whoever was paid in practice already more did not receive a pay-raise.

Similar pay arrangements have been introduced in the energy, metal, construction, food & drinks sectors.

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Irish trade unions (ICTU) - Tool kit “Negotiating for equality – gender and pay”

The case study was presented by Mr David Joyce (ICTU - Irish congress of trade unions).

The Irish legislation outlawing wage discrimination on the grounds of sex exists since 1975. There have been major changes in the role of women in society and a marked increase in the number of women in the workplace since Ireland’s entry in the EU. The concept of equal pay for equal work has become more widely accepted than it was in the early fifties. However a 15% gender pay gap still remains in Ireland (5% in the public sector in which women mostly work and which is highly unionised).

As reasons for the pay gap ICTU referred to discrimination in pay-systems, to grading structures, and performance related pay. His opinion was that in general in Ireland there is an undervaluing of female skills and female education.

Labour market segregation is a major problem in Ireland (sectoral, occupational and vertical segregation). Most women work in healthcare, education etc. A recent IBEC (employers) study showed that only 3 % of chief executive officers is female.

An other major concern is the weakness of women’s link with the labour market (i.e. women take often career breaks, make extensive use of part-time work etc). By the time women arrive to their late 40’s, their work experience is, on average, 9 years shorter than men. 73% of women work part-time, mostly for family reasons. This has major impacts on wage differences between women and men. Women also experience a reduced ability to work overtime, profit less from “long service awards”, experience fewer promotion and have in the end reduced pensions compared to men.

A multi-faceted approach is needed to attract and retain the workforce.

The toolkit developed by ICTU is part of a broader gender equality programme. It offers a one stop shop facility (information, advice, background etc.) for negotiators dealing with gender equality in the workplace, and offers practical advice on what employers and workers can do. Employers, through IBEC, were invited to make comments on the tool kit before its publication.

While it is one complete publication, individual sections can stand alone and are cross-referenced. The tool kit contains 11 chapters:

1. Gender Pay Gap - Current Findings
2. The Law and Equality
3. Equality Audit
4. Job Evaluation
5. Gender Proofing/Gender Impact Assessment
6. Recruitment & Selection
7. Gender Pay Questionnaire
8. Promote Yourself
9. Equality Briefing for Employers
10. Resources
11. Bibliography

It is a very practical tool. The tool-kit is meant to be used by trade union officials or shop stewards before joint actions can be taken by employers and trade unions. It is a basis for improving women negotiating skills, which is part of ICTU's agenda.

Possible actions are described in the kit such as training of interviewers or middle-managers, mentoring etc. The business case for equal pay is also described and can be used by employers or to help trade unionists in their discussions with employers.

The toolkit is a fairly recent initiative. There has not yet been an experience of its use in companies.

The training courses presented can be adapted depending on the context.

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Timeout for the Family - A Finnish Social Partners Information Campaign to promote Equal Use of Family Leaves

The aim of the family leave campaign was to encourage parents, especially men, to use the family leaves more equally. In the background was the uneven use of family leaves between mothers and fathers and the social partners common view, that good reconciliation of work and family life benefits all: the child, the family, the employer and the workplace community.

So far, fathers have not taken much advantage of their rights to parental leave. In 2002 about 3 per cent of fathers took parental leave. Paternity leave instead is increasingly popular: in 2002 nearly 67 per cent of fathers exercised their right to paternity leave. It is seen important that the sharing of parenthood increases the equality in the working life.

The objective of the campaign was to bring about a change in the attitudes of key representatives of employers and employees by presenting examples from workplaces.

The starting point for the campaign, initiated by the central labour market organisations, was this item in the incomes policy agreement for 2001–2003: “The parties shall jointly arrange regional events aimed to reconcile work and family life by promoting equal use of family leaves.”

The target groups for the events included key representatives of employees and employers (HR managers, shop stewards, employer-employee negotiators, occupational health and safety officers), co-operation partners (such as family health centres, local offices of the Social Insurance Institution), researchers of family policy and experts from labour market organisations.

The Timeout for the Family - campaign arranged six afternoon seminars in different parts of the country in spring 2002. Each seminar had 50 to 110 participants, depending on the location. The seminar arrangements at each location were the responsibility of regional working groups assembled of representatives of the regional centres, regional committees or corresponding organs of both the employer and employee organisations.

In accordance with the roadmap approved by the Social Partners Round Table on Equality, the seminars

- provided information on the use of family leaves by means of introductions by experts in the fields of law, economy, working hours and children’s affairs, as well as associated information materials
- by means of example cases requested from workplaces, presented both the employers’ views of the effects of using family leaves and the experiences of fathers who had taken such leave
- the theatre group Geist performed small plays and comic sketches of different family situations, adding more effect to the message of the attitude-forming campaign

The information officers of the central organisations arranged press conferences before the seminars. The press conferences, as well as the seminars, were manned by leaders of both the employee and employer organisations in accordance with a mutually agreed schedule of turns.

Most of the funding came from the Finnish Occupational Health and Safety Fund.

The events received good coverage in the press, radio and television. The visibility of organisation leaders contributed significantly to the publicity. Increased media interest in the Timeout for the Family campaign might also have been the result of the Government's report on child policy, issued to Parliament around the time of starting the campaign.

The attitude campaign to promote equal use of family leave distributed plenty of information and encouraged workplaces to continue discussions on different opportunities to make work and family life more compatible. Development ideas were also brought up at the press conferences and the seminar discussions.

The Timeout for the Family events were successful in making the theme publicly visible as a joint effort of the labour market organisations. The campaign further promoted a process that can cause more equal models of such reconciliation to become common practice through changed attitudes and work cultures.

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FPB-TUC guide on employment for small and medium enterprises

The FPB-TUC guide on employment is designed to facilitate everyday compliance with UK employment legislation and assist small businesses in maintaining positive relations with the company. The Guide is written in plain English, is simple to use and up dated annually.

The Employment Guide is a comprehensive guide covering all aspects of employment law. The practical Guide offers guidance and templates to implement the law within the workplace.

The guide covers such issues as:

1. Minimum wage
2. Flexible working
3. Maternity leave and pay
4. Paternity leave
5. Working time - young persons
6. Dismissal
7. Sexual orientation discrimination
8. Protection regarding belief
9. Statutory employee consultation
10. Dispute resolution
11. Mobile telephones and much more...

Each section is supported by templates and letters, which are also supplied on CD-Rom.

The Employment Guide is published by FPB, supported by the TUC and endorsed by SFEDI, the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative.

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Wage indicator website

The wage indicator website essentially consists of 3 elements:

- a questionnaire on line,
- a calculating tool for checking your salary, wage or pay,
- a website with labour market related content.

The first wage indicator was created in the Netherlands in 2000. The objectives of the website were

- to give employees an insight in their salaries and that of colleagues in any other profession,
- to improve the effectiveness of labour condition policies by researching the impact of collective agreements, using a questionnaire filled in by visitors of the website – and thus their data – as benchmark,
- to highlight links to more scientific research in this area,
- and to investigate alleged wage gaps related to gender or ethnic group.

The gender dimension of wages is a key element of the website. The comparison made between the visitor's salary and that of other employees is based on data communicated by earlier visitors of the same professional group.

After its launch the Dutch wage indicator has attracted an increasing amount of visitors (up to 370.000 per month in March 2004), and now disposes of a large dataset, accumulated from almost 70.000 questionnaires (i.e. over 1 percent of the total working population in the Netherlands).

From April 2004 the Dutch prototype is being adapted to the national labour markets of 8 additional countries in Europe, i.e. Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the UK, and other countries within and outside the EU are under way

More information and links to the different wage indicator websites is available at:

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Central fund for maternity/paternity leave in Denmark

Collective bargaining in the Danish private labour market resulted in the adoption of a fund for parental leave to ensure equalisation of the costs incurred by companies in connection with employees taking parental leave. The agreement was signed by the two main private sector Danish social partners: DA (employers) and LO (trade unions). During that same round of negotiations, pregnancy leave and maternity/paternity leave with full pay was extended from 18 to 26 weeks, which represents a considerable improvement of conditions for parents. Similarly, receiving full pay during parental leave allows the parent to maintain the right to pension contributions during the leave.

According to the mediation proposal adopted in April 2004:

"LO and DA agree to establish a scheme which will, in accordance with specified provisions, equalise the companies' expenses for parental leave, in accordance with collective agreements, so that these costs do not rest with the individual employer alone.

The aim is to support a labour market with equal opportunities for men and women. All companies in employer organisations affiliated to the Danish Employers' Confederation will contribute to these equalisation funds. The schemes mainly consist of sector-specific equalisation funds that are connected by means of a joint equalisation scheme. Schemes that have been established beforehand thereby enter because of the joint equalisation scheme.

Schemes based on the condition that full unemployment benefit reimbursement is maintained will be established as soon as possible, and no later than 1 July 2005."

The introduction of the fund for parental leave means that women no longer represent a more costly source of labour than men due to pregnancy and maternity leave. Furthermore, the segregation of the labour market according to gender is being reduced. It also means that the income loss suffered by men and women alike due to leave taken in connection with pregnancy and maternity or paternity leave has been reduced. Approximately half of this leave is paid through unemployment benefit schemes if the employee should choose to take the entire leave.

The agreement covers approximately 650.000 LO-members and approximately 28.000 companies on the private labour market – i.e. unskilled and skilled workers as well as white collar workers.

On 27 March 2002, the Danish maternity leave was extended from ½ to 1 year by providing economic compensation at unemployment benefit rate. With this extension, paternity leave was reduced from 4 to 2 weeks and the so-called childcare leave was phased out. This represents an actual shortening of the opportunities for taking leave, even though it has not been fully exploited, but generally also provides better economic compensation all in all.

The first statistics made after the introduction of the extended parental leave scheme show that, on average, women now take 25.1 weeks (a 3-week increase) and men take 2.6 weeks (a 1-day increase). The maternity/parental leave in Denmark consists of:

- 4 weeks before birth for the mother (with unemployment benefit rate and wage subsidies from the central fund)
- 14 weeks after birth for the mother (with unemployment benefit rate and wage subsidies from the central fund)
- 2 weeks for the father (at unemployment benefit rate and wage subsidies from the central fund)
- another 32 weeks for both parents. A total of 64 weeks (at unemployment benefit rate for 32 of these weeks and wage subsidies for 6 of these weeks from the central fund)

The 26 weeks pay covered by the fund for parental leave includes 4 weeks pregnancy leave for the mother, 14 weeks maternity leave for the mother, 2 weeks paternity leave for the father, and 6 weeks leave to divide among them.

Workers thus have the right to a total of 80 weeks maternity/paternity leave after childbirth, including 52 weeks on unemployment benefit and 26 weeks wage subsidies from the central fund, including the 4 weeks' pregnancy leave. The scheme allows for some flexibility in terms of when the leave can be taken.

According to the equalisation scheme, reimbursement means full pay – however with a maximum amount in view of the various collective agreement provisions on pay during maternity/paternity leave. Reimbursement has been fixed at a maximum amount of DKK 115 per hour once the scheme is launched. In addition to this, there are other costs stipulated in collective agreements, such as pension schemes. Reimbursement has been fixed at 26 weeks, during which most collective agreements provide for full pay up until a fixed maximum amount. In addition to this, there is further equalisation within the sector-specific schemes.

The contribution to the fund for parental leave is approximately DKK 785 per employee as per 1 July 2004 – and the contribution is made per employee regardless of gender and age. The equalisation schemes are compulsory for all employees with collective agreement coverage and, furthermore, companies may choose to let the equalisation include other employees also.

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FESC - a social partner's initiative and national agreement for more flexible child care facilities in Belgium

A social partner's initiative to fund more and more flexible childcare facilities

The Belgium national "Fund for collective equipments and services" (in French: Fond des Equipements et Services Collectives or short FESC) was installed in 1971 by the National Office for Family Benefits for Paid Workers. The initial goal of this fund was financing new infrastructures for traditional childcare facilities, in other words care facilities for children between 0 and 3 years old from 9 till 5 o'clock.

Since then the labour market clearly changed: more women entered it and wished to stay on the labour market, the traditional household-model with only one earner became less frequent, new family models appeared; distance between work and home and daily travelling time became longer, new and very flexible forms of employment were demanded on employer's side. Combining a professional career and family life became therefore more difficult. The need for more and more flexible childcare became a collective problem which demanded a collective answer.

Both being conscious of this problem, trade unions and employer's organisations formulated in 1993 an unanimous advice in the National Labour Council to solve it. The advice ended up in a national agreement with a concrete result: since 1994 every employer of the private sector contributes 0,05 % of the salary mass to the fund (FESC) with the objective to subsidy specific child care projects.

How does it work? Which kind of childcare projects gets funding? Which conditions need to be satisfied?

The social contribution of 0,05 % of the salary mass, paid by all employers, goes to the fund (FESC). This fund gives subsidies to recognised child care projects, most of them organised at local / community level.

The subsidy is calculated / paid per child of salaried / employed people or unemployed people looking for a job and per day of presence.

The following types of child care forms, determined by the social partners, can obtain a subsidy:

- "out-of-school-time care for children" (from 2,5 to 12 years old), before and after the school time, during the school holidays as well as on Wednesday afternoon;
- "flexible care for children" (from 0 to 12 years old), before 7 a.m. or after 18 p.m. since the parents are working in flexible working arrangements (night shifts for example);
- "sick care for children" (from 0 to 12 years old) at home or at a special place since the children are too sick to be accommodated at their usual place of staying while their parents are working;
- "emergency care for children"(from 0 to 3 years), in case the parents receive an employment offer, follow a vocational training in a recognized organization or follow a procedure of reintegration in the professional life (for a 6 months period to the maximum).

The financial mediations of the FESC can cover only salary and functioning costs. The 'users' of the childcare projects must also pay a contribution.

Furthermore, following conditions must be fulfilled:

- The approval of the project from the social partners, in partnership with the regional employment committees.
- A synergy of the project with the local social network and the use the existing local infrastructure.
- Minimum quality standards as well as for the infrastructure as for the professional qualifications / capacities of the employees
- Regular quality control done by the competent institutions.

An answer to the changing labour market and workers demands but also an important source of employment!

The projects funded by the FESC have a big success (in 2003: about 400 projects; 22824 children in out-of-school-time-care; 848 children in flexible-care; 301 in emergency-care and 32636 days to take care of sick children) and the success keeps growing.

They also form an important source of (social) employment. Nowadays about 2.100 full time equivalents are employed in the subsidized projects. So called "risk groups" which do not have an easy access to the labour market, cannot be excluded of employment.

The extra dimension of the social partner's initiative

The re-orientation and funding of the FESC by the social partners was an answer to the growing employers demand for more flexibility and the workers problems concerning combination of professional and family life. The projects funded by the FESC help(ed) workers and especially women and single parents to get on the labour market, to stay on the labour market, to participate in flexible working arrangements and therefore help(ed) to achieve equal opportunities.

Since all employers from the private sector contribute and the funding goes to local community projects, a lot of working people, also people working in small and medium enterprises can benefit from it.

Furthermore it has to be stressed that, although organising child care facilities is in the first place – but not totally - a public authority responsibility, the new needs were in the first place detected and solved by the social partners. This initiative proves that social partners can, by good collaboration, detect and find collective solutions for collective problems or needs and also proves that social partners can organise and administer projects and objectives by themselves.

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