

# **VEGA VALUING EMPOWERMENT**

## **IN GENDER ATTITUDES**

**REPORT OF THEMATIC FORUMS 2006**



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**balancepunkt**  
mehrere arbeits- und privatl.

**karenz und karriere**

unternehmen aktive karenz für männer und frauen



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# 1 FIFTY:FIFTY – EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN IN COMPANIES

The seminar Introducing Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in Companies focused mainly on the profits and costs of applying programmes related to equal opportunities. A study on the Costs and Profits of Applying Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was presented, together with A Study on the Needs of HR Specialists: Limits and Options for Equal Opportunities Development. One of the papers was dedicated to Recruiting into diverse Teams.

## EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES CAN BE PROFITABLE FOR COMPANIES AND HELP THEM SAVE MONEY

Equal opportunities are one of the principles of real democracy; together with diversity, they are impulses for HR and PR strategies in companies.

Even though there are more and more firms in the Czech Republic adopting equal opportunities for women and men, for most of them, it is still a useless, expensive luxury, and they do not even adhere to the basic requirements established by legislative norms. There are, however, employers open to the introduction of changes connected to equal opportunities. For those, Gender Studies prepared a study on the costs and profits of applying equal opportunities for women and men; however, the publication also introduces the topic to companies that are not yet aware of the topic. It presents areas in which applying equal opportunities are profitable, not only socially, but also economically. It covers themes such as human resources development, work-life balance, diversity, corporate social responsibility, and public relations, in connection with the profitability of companies.

Hana Veliskova, of the Czech Society for Human Resources Development, makes an argument for diversity in working teams. It is acknowledged that diversity teams are more successful than teams set up by people who are similar. Indeed, there are risks: “Creating diversity teams, where people work together who differ in their age, background values, and approach to work, requires very high managerial capabilities in the leader, not only in communication and solving conflicts, but also in the ability to state his or her leading position.”

Supporting an inclusive working environment may be more difficult on the organisational side; nevertheless, it is an effective test of the quality of the management team, and it is certain that a competent team contributes to the company’s productivity.

Karel Pavlica, of the University of Economics, presents steps to the integration of gender perspectives in the area of human resources development. Foreign studies point at a correlation between the representation of women (in different departments and different levels of hierarchy) and success. Czech firms are represented by: Air Products, Channel Crossings, Staropramen, and TetraPak.

Air Products, in focusing on the professional development of women, identified the managerial potential of a number of female candidates, increased the success of internal recruitment, and therefore decreased the costs of external recruitment.

Channel Crossings combined its commercial purpose with service to employees. It has offered, as one of the first language agencies, courses with childcare possibilities, which are available for students as well as teachers.

The main aim of Staropramen was to increase the rate of return of mothers after maternity leave. People leaving for maternity leave are interviewed, and stress is laid on the importance of maintaining contact during their absence, and on planning the return with the employee in advance.

TetraPak supports diversity and non-formal education in this area. Programmes are open to all, but they are supportive of women in overcoming gender stereotypes that underestimate their abilities. The HR Director of TetraPak, Tatiana Trebicka, comments: "Women, more than men, need to be stimulated in their professional self-confidence. The diversity programme is useful for them. It is amazing to observe how women can grow professionally, but also personally, in such a short time, because the management of the organisation demonstrated respect, and trust in their abilities."

### DIVERSITY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN RECRUITMENT<sup>1</sup>

Some companies point out in their ads, or on other occasions, that they are employers promoting diversity and equality. These organisations usually value the importance of a work-life balance, and in addition to flexi-time and part-time work, or working from home, they offer family-oriented benefits, such as a crèche or kindergartens in the workplace, babysitting allowances, or allowances for employees providing care for a disabled person.

This can help them to attract higher-quality candidates. There are plenty of excellent professionals who need an employer with an employee-friendly approach, due to their current family-related or other personal situation. It should be remembered that not only employers, but also candidates, are making selections, and they do care about their working environment and the people with whom they are to work.

To have a diverse team, the company should:

- Advertise to the largest possible population
- Target minority groups and disabled applicants
- Do not mention age or gender
- Offer flexible working conditions:
- Flexitime, part-time, project contracts...
- Home office, teleworking
- Job sharing
- Career breaks
- Make sure that the company is attractive to all groups
- Provide training to all interviewers
- Ask only about relevant qualifications and experience
- Provide special help to disabled applicants, if necessary
- Record the reasons for appointing or rejecting applicants
- Provide feedback to applicants, should they request it<sup>2</sup>.



<sup>1</sup> Veliskova, Hana. *Equal Opportunities – A Good or Bad Investment?* In *The Costs and Profits of Applying Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*. Gender Studies. 2007

<sup>2</sup> Veliskova, Hana. *Recruiting into diverse teams*. Presented on the seminar *Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in Companies*. 29.1.2007. Prague

## THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF APPLYING EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

### Recruitment Process

COSTS	BENEFITS
Training in the area of recruitment	Wider pool of applicants
Changes in the hiring process	Higher objectivity and probability of having “the right person in the right position”
	Lowering the costs of unsuccessful recruitment (people leaving within the probation period)
	Attractiveness of the employer, more incoming applications

### Supporting Female Talents

COSTS	BENEFITS
Establishing training programmes for women (lectures, costs of off-site training, organisational agenda – assessment, etc.)	Utilisation of female potential
	Reduction of the expenses of external recruitment
	Rising female satisfaction
	Lowering fluctuation

### Work-Life Balance

COSTS	BENEFITS
Home Office (PC, Internet connection, mobile phone)	Some projects can be continually carried on (without the necessity of relegation to different employees)
Organisational changes, task distribution, supervision	Short-term involvement in emergency cases (sick leave, international involvement, high season, etc.)
Intense communication	Effective planning (communication about return)
	Sustainable qualification – possibility of reintegration (save on compensation money)
	Cutting costs on hiring and adapting new employees
	Less stress, rise in motivation, less fluctuation
	Better employee retention

### Diversity Programmes

COSTS	BENEFITS
Intranet and other communication facilities	Development of non-discriminative culture: each person is valued
Education activities	Loyalty of employees
informal meeting	

There are other reasons why applying equal opportunities for women and men is profitable for the company. Those are:

- Legal Aspects: Avoiding complaints, law suits, penalties
- PR: Credibility for non-discrimination
- Networking: Useful connections across society (other companies involved in non-discrimination programmes, state institutions, NGOs)

## RECOMMENDATION TO EMPLOYERS WHO WANT TO INTRODUCE EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES INTO THEIR FIRMS<sup>3</sup>

### Analyse the company's situation and its market position

Start by analysing the situation in the given company, then go on to analyse the relevant labour market segment; get all necessary data and prepare information on the current state of matters in the company or the sector. Factor in future trends and demographic developments. Try to make the company attractive for employees.

### Consider the local influence

You can consider either your location within a specific town district or within a region in the Czech Republic. Be conscious of the differences, for example, between the capital and smaller towns, in aspects such as the unemployment rate, education structure, life strategies, or service accessibility.

### Work on sensitivity toward equal opportunities

Raise awareness in this respect, and take action against gender stereotypes – do not foster them by introducing measures such as life-work balance programmes that would be offered only to women and not to men. Apply gender mainstreaming, and promote female solidarity and cooperation within the company. Learn to harness the differences between people – they should be an asset and inspiration, not a source of conflict.

### Lay emphasis on efficient work organisation

Improve work organisation principles, exploit and enhance leadership potential, focus on training management in psychosocial skills, improve time management, become familiar with current concepts (life-work balance, etc.).

### Look for continuity

Link equal opportunities with other issues, introduce a gender perspective in a programme that is already being carried out, or that is important for the company (such as retention or motivation programmes) to make it more efficient, and extend its accessibility and availability to all groups of employees.

### Evaluate work performance in a transparent manner

Appraise work performance against results, quality, efficiency, and the amount of the work done, not against misleading indicators, such as the number of hours spent in the workplace or on weekend work.

### Take action

Take an active approach against discrimination, consider introducing quotas, and set measurable goals for the company. Set up a working party to address the issue, monitor the situation, and communicate both externally and internally.

### Communicate with employees

Get feedback from employees. Be sure that employees know about the programmes and can comment on them. Be aware of the fact that it is impossible to accommodate everybody. Explain the purpose of the programmes, stressing that they do not imply discrimination against other employee groups, but are a form of promoting equal opportunities and tackling stereotypes. Be receptive to what the employees need, and support their initiatives.

<sup>3</sup> Machovcova, Katerina. *The Needs of HR Specialists: Limits and Options for Equal Opportunities Development*. In *Career – Family – Equal Opportunities: Studies on Women and Men in the Czech Labour Market*. Gender Studies. 2006

### Gather information

Take part in conferences on equal opportunities issues – while you cannot apply everything in each company, it is good to know what works for other firms. Look for possibilities of sharing best practices, try to find examples from abroad and draw on them for inspiration in defining your own way.

### Get your own experience

Get started right now and get your own experience as soon as possible, no matter how minor the changes are that you introduce – the statutory obligation to respect equal opportunities principles applies to all companies. Start with one thing that makes sense for the employer, follow it through, document it, and make it visible.

### Get to the media

Become a role model for others, become a leader in newly introduced concepts, take part in specialised contests, such as The Best Czech Company with Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Contest.

“To promote diversity and equality is not so much about large financial investments or increased paperwork, but about personal commitment and the will to make things better. A principle to remember is that people will not change their attitudes overnight, and therefore it takes time to explain the benefits of the changes to be introduced, or (as may be the case, when implementing relatively complex recruitment and selection methods) to train managers in using the new procedures in practice. All companies that want good results in the long run should bear equal opportunities in mind”<sup>4</sup>

Editor: Alexandra Jachanova Dolezelova, Gender Studies

### SOURCES

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<sup>4</sup> Hana Veliskova, HR Specialist, The Czech Society for Human Resources Development, in *The Costs and Profits of Applying Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*. Gender Studies. 2007



## ABOUT THE EU EQUAL PROJECT FIFTY-FIFTY: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

The study on The Costs and Profits of Applying Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the study on The Needs of HR Specialists: Limits and Options for Equal Opportunities Development, and the seminar Introducing Equal Opportunities for Men and Women in Companies, were organised within the EU Equal project, Fifty-Fifty: Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, that is coordinated by Gender Studies.

Main goal of the project is to reduce inequalities between men and women in the labour market in the Czech Republic, and to develop relevant innovative solutions.

Our main concern is with equal opportunities for women and men in the labour market, as well as in family and private life: reducing inequalities in employing men and women; reducing sex-based discrimination in the labour market; and raising awareness about equal opportunities, among endangered target groups in the labour market and decision-makers.

We identify the following as endangered target groups on the labour market:

Women 24 – 35 (women mothers and potential mothers)  
 Women over 50  
 Men fathers, men on parental leave

We identify the following as decision-makers:

- Employers: human resources management, top-management
- Legislators
- Labour offices
- General public
- Regional offices
- Legal experts
- Media

As part of the project we provide qualitative and quantitative representative researches, regional information centres and legal consultations for endangered target groups, info-services for HR managers (e.g., the electronic magazine Equal Opportunities into Firms). Important part is also a media campaign raising the awareness about discrimination.



**Gender Studies** is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that has performed the function of an information, consultation, and education centre in the area of relations between women and men and their position in society. The goal of the organisation is to gather, analyse, work with, and disseminate further information related to gender-relevant issues. Via specific projects, GS actively influences change concerning equal opportunities in different areas, such as institutional mechanisms, the labour market, women's political participation, information technologies, etc. GS also runs a library stocking a variety of publications and materials related to feminism, gender studies, women's and men's rights, etc.

Concerning the topic of equal opportunities for women and men, and the application of work-life balance measures, we provide consultations to firms.

**More information: [www.en.genderstudies.cz](http://www.en.genderstudies.cz)**

## 2 STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN ORGANISATIONS

The project of Organic Law for effective equality between women and men is a big step towards real equality in Spain. This law introduces many new measures, though one of the most innovating and relevant ones refers to the design and implementation of Plans of Equality in companies.

The Equal Project “En Plan de Igualdad” and, more specifically, the “Equality Itineraries” directed at public and private companies and organizations in the municipalities of A Coruña, Carballo and Cerceda, represent an advance and a real example of what will be the elaboration and application of the Plans of Equality anticipated in the new Law.

The contribution of the companies and organizations to the Society of Welfare is essential, reason why their role is a key element to be considered in projects aimed at attaining equality and social welfare in the labour market.

To be able to get companies interested and involved in this objective is a constant challenge for projects of the EQUAL Community Initiative in all State Members. In this sense, the “En Plan de Igualdad” Project considers itself fortunate to count on the collaboration and support of the network of enterprises of its territory of action.

Is the whole concept of “Balance” at all possible to unite with the concept of a flexible, learning, developing, creative, change-orientated labour-market?

How is it possible to work on establishing a (better) balance between work- and family-life, and at the same time thrive to develop a workforce that is still more flexible, change-ready and develop-oriented?

### GROUP 1

We think that flexibility is possible, but in the long term and through a change in the labour system, that right now is only possible in certain types of companies, those with a high number of hired personnel and a department of human resources, but that are not very frequent in our area.

When talking about the concept of flexibility concept, this has a different meaning for employers (who seek longer working hours) than for employees. They have two ways of thinking of flexibility in the labour market:

Personally: ready to learn, to be flexible.

Balance between family and work life.

This balance is very fragile, a very rigid form of state.

Moreover, in Spain we have a slightly different concept of flexibility from the European one: it would be important to adjust our schedules to the European. In this sense, the concept of flexibility also varies:

**positive concept** as adaptation, change of job/promotion, continuous learning... (European concept);

**negative concept** equivalent to labour precariousness (actual Spanish labour market).

Awareness raising is gaining importance as a tool to produce changes, both at school, as well as in the companies, involving the workers. Conciliation is also going to depend on the quality of the job conditions, the existing resources in the area, etc. There is a great variety of factors that influence the possibility of being able to conciliate family and work life.

### GROUP 2

The formulation of this question is based on balance between family, work and personal life being rigid, that is to say, a traditional approach that considers these three scopes as separate spaces, when they are, in fact, interconnected.

On the one hand, it is now untenable and economically non-viable that women remain home taking care of the family scope. Their incorporation to the labour market has left the necessities in the private sphere unattended, which has consequences for all the society. In addition, there is a human need to develop oneself personally and emotionally that is often forgotten when dealing with this subject.

A solution would be to look for customized measures of conciliation in each company or for each worker, but there is a risk of following a traditional work model (total availability).

We find certain changes of mentality in many companies, but the social context (schedules, available services) does not help to consolidate them. It is necessary to change the social mentality, educating towards a new concept of conciliation. Customized solutions for each company could be looked for, but we must not forget the growing precariousness of the labour market, so the existence of company policies that consider conciliation between family, work and private life a priority are necessary.

### GROUP 3

To reach a balance, it is necessary to have flexibility in the work life and flexibility in the household. Flexibility affects enterprises and employees at the same time, but for different reasons (market – family). Factors of time and needs are important and change depending on the different phases of life.

It is necessary to create new strategies. Balance is also flexible, implicating changes in time-management, changes in over-expectations, etc. Positive actions try to change the discourse in the enterprise; try to figure out balance-criteria for companies. There is a positive effect of flexibility on the labour market: it moves the companies' structures, making them more dynamic, not as static as in the past. But there is a dangerous risk: at the same time, it opens the door for overwork.

Are flexibility and work-life balance opposites? Are they really so far away? To be with the family is a human need, not a gender need. It is important that both men and women share family life. It is different when talking about work-life balance in general and work-life balance specifically for parents. Measures needed are often different. It is also important to realize that the role of parents in their children's' education and emotional stability is much more than a private issue; it is important for all the society.

### GROUP 4

We find that FLEXIBILITY usually goes one way, is a one way condition: more hours of work. In consequence, part of family life is sacrificed for flexibility.

Balance point is not a human factor but an economy-factor: at the moment, enterprises decide about what is balance. Therefore, BALANCE should be an enterprise-policy and is to be learned. It is important to work with the enterprises on this, so they see the need of finding this balance and work actively to favour it.



- How to get deeply into the firm and see the real situation? (How to reach that the firm invites you in and you see more than the PR and you talk also with ordinary employees, not only to those who will tell you that everything is perfect).
- How to keep the critical view and be able to tell negative things to firms?

## GROUP 1

According to the experience of the "DUAL" Project, companies are accessed by one of following ways:

Through a trade union: look for potential participants in those companies where UGT (one of the DUAL Development Partnership members) is represented; Positive Actions Plans are implemented in companies as a condition to be awarded one of the scholarships offered by the project:

For training (the project offers technical training) or on-the-job traineeship in companies; enterprise commits to hiring worker after traineeship;

For promotion of women (to cover training necessary for worker's promotion); none have been asked for so far.

Another way of getting in contact with companies could be through the mediation of certain organizations (employers associations, Chambers of Commerce...).

We establish a two-year Positive Action Plan, based on what is and what is not achievable, and an agreement is signed. Follow-up of actions will take place until 2008 through trade union delegates.

Project "REDES por la Igualdad" (Network for Equality): The companies worked with are small and without trade union delegates.

They have been working in the territory for five years, always representing the Local Council of El Bierzo, which is a strong endorsement before companies.

Once passed the first telephone contact, the human factor is very important during the personal meetings: attitude, confidence, empathy, awareness raising from the first day, sense of humour...

Once the agreement has been signed, the project offers counselling and support to attain fiscal, social and economic benefits from the implementation of certain measures.

Pressure from the new Law of Equality is helping (clauses on positive action plans, collective bargaining). A very important factor is the project's commitment and the strategy of selling the process as something additional (a complement to the services the Council of El Bierzo offers to companies – family-care services). There is difficulty in getting the staff involved in training actions (computer science, contents on equality).

According to the experience of Project EN PLAN DE IGUALDAD:

Before signing the collaboration agreement it is necessary to clarify all the terms of the collaboration:

That the staff will be personally interviewed.

All the implications of carrying out a Positive Action Plan, both positive and negative.

## INSTRUMENTS THAT HELP TO "SELL" THE PROJECT

A good "endorsement", a political/social support (in this case, the three city councils in the project's area of influence).

The new Law of Equality: the bigger companies will be forced to design a positive action plan.

Advantages for the companies: publicity (radio program, Website...)

Free counselling service offered by the project to attain existing benefits related to the issue of equal opportunities.

The experience gained through a previous EQUAL initiative project regarding mediation with companies and the management of itineraries has also been of great help.

How to keep the critical view to be able to tell negative things to firms:

All observations and communications to the enterprises have to be based on objective data, obtained from:

The initial survey-diagnosis of the enterprise;

Legislation;

Model enterprises and good practices that exist and have given positive results.

It is important to see further than the information provided by the firms' public relations. Very often, the enterprise is not aware of the existing imbalances, the unfair situations, because these have become something "natural". To get a deeper insight, the following tools are fundamental:

Spontaneous interviews with staff members (it is important to maintain the answers obtained anonymous to the enterprise);

Documentation of the enterprise and observation.

## GROUP 2

### 1. Recruitment of participating enterprises through

- Telephone contacts;
- Job intermediation staff from other actions of the project (first filter);
- Employer's organizations.

### 2. Presentation of the project

SINCERITY is essential. Clearly explain that participation will implicate dedication of time and resources from the firm.

Explain the benefits for the enterprise:

- Improvement of image and turn-over;
- Publicity;
- Social responsibility seal (in some cases, with different grades of achievement);
- Staff training and awareness raising;
- Measures adapted to a quality assurance model.

### 3. Explain the sources of information that will be used for the initial survey-diagnosis:

- Questionnaires to the enterprise and workers;
- Personal interviews to a sample of the workers;
- Documentation of the enterprise.

### 4. Written agreement that commits both enterprise and Project

It makes the process "visible". As an example, two of the firm's commitments are:

The creation of what we call an "impulse committee", a group of people inside the enterprise that will work towards the successful development of the process.

Training inside working hours, preferably before the implementation of the positive action plan, as this

makes it easier for the positive actions to be understood and accepted by the enterprise and staff.

## GROUP 3

ENTERING THE FIRM - some of the group's conclusions were:

It is advisable to clearly communicate to the enterprise what you do and what you want to do.

Written agreements with the conditions of co-operation are useful, though it will also depend on the degree of flexibility of the agreement.

It is better to use a formal approach.

A "social label" will be seen as beneficial for the company's public relations.

Offer different services: internal analysis, seminars, etc. It is possibly easier to first contact firms that have CSR and human resource planning.

Factors that should be considered:

- the different social and economical conditions inside each enterprise;
- the role of the trade unions;
- strong links between human resource managers and top managers: it will be difficult to convince the first if you have not convinced the latter;
- positive action plans should be orientated to both men and women.

## HOW TO STAY CRITICAL

Members of this group came to the conclusion that it was usually very difficult for Management to hear negative things. They also recognised a problem in how to speak critically about equal opportunities.

## GROUP 4

Some considerations made by the group members:

To be successful, it is necessary to involve both management and employees.

You have to negotiate with the management: there will be a cost and a benefit to all this process for the enterprise. If management accepts that part of the process is to ask the employees their opinion, they have to be ready to listen, even to those things they will not like to hear, and more importantly, to take action and deal with the challenges.

The first contact is the most important: the enterprise must have a strong commitment – and voluntarily want to work on this, otherwise it makes no sense and will not work.

In this first contact it is important to communicate the advantages the process will have for the enterprise and transmit all the information on the process clearly. If necessary, it is important to help the management communicate and mediate with the rest of the enterprise.

Ownership: it is important for the enterprise to feel that the project is their own, to feel totally implicated and to be able to “sell” it. They must be able to see it as an investment, and not as an expense.

There is an asymmetric relationship, where management has maximum power and wants maximum outcome. The process must go towards a “win-win” situation and form part of the longer term planning (sustainable development): towards mid and long-term goals, not just quick income.

In a Positive Action Plan, how should the requirements be established for each of the stages of the process, specially, in the negotiation of the Positive Action Plans, in order to opt to the final seal or public recognition and how should they be fulfilled in qualitative and quantitative terms?

- Should there be fixed common minimums established for all enterprises?
- Is it preferable to establish a gradation of measures to be implemented?
- How can we make compatible the establishment of objective indicators with the concept of personalized plans that are adapted to each SME and sector?

## GROUP 1

You cannot fix the same minimum requirements for all companies, but it is necessary to establish certain minimums;

It is advisable to establish minimums individually, but not to only consider hard evidence-based criteria;

It is important to make subjective criteria, as is motivation, as objective as possible, and assess them;

It is useful to establish comparisons between discriminations, but without losing track of the initial circumstances behind each company or organization;

It is also advisable to consider certain added difficulties, as in the case of companies or organizations with all-female or all-male staff.

## GROUP 2

Criteria:

There are no minimum criteria fixed for the seal we work with. It is based on technical criteria: implication, communication, the reality seen inside the firm.

Measures are bargained with the company to make improvements and introduce a work methodology, but if there is not a seal to be granted, it is difficult to negotiate any minimums. A seal is useful in this sense.

## GROUP 3

It is important to consider:

The companies resources and starting point.

Continuous evaluation is advisable, to verify the progress of the whole process, the advances made.

In Austria a survey classified companies according to the phase they were in regarding the introduction of gender equality measures (Holter Ø. G., Riesenfeld V. and Scambor E. (2005). Organisations, Men and Gender Equality):

**1st phase:** the need for equality between women and men is acknowledged in the enterprise, but there is no specific and formalized measure.

**2nd phase:** there is a gender equality policy, but positive action plans are directed specifically at women. There is usually great rivalry and competition between men and women in these companies.

**3rd phase:** there is a gender equality policy, directed at both men and women. The work atmosphere is better and nearer to reaching real equality between men and women.

The analysis of which phase each enterprise is in is based on qualitative criteria, i.e. what is established in collective bargaining and criteria of sustainability of measures in the company. But this classification is a little diffuse: sometimes the same company is in different phases, depending on the moment in which the analysis is made.

## GROUP 4

Discussion took place in the group regarding advantages and disadvantages of fixing common minimum criteria, the same for all enterprises:

The establishment of standards, certain minimum requirements to be fulfilled equally by all enterprises in order to attain the seal has an important advantage regarding external opinion, as everyone knows exactly what to expect from an organization that has the seal, knows what it means in terms of accomplishment by the enterprise.

The seal would be awarded once the enterprise has reached the required level, that is, fulfilled the minimum requirements, regardless of time and efforts needed. It is not a gradual process: all requirements must be fulfilled in order to be awarded the seal.

The disadvantage is that efforts made to reach the same standards are not assessed or even considered. One possibility discussed was to establish different standards according to the sectors and company size. However, on one hand, this does not guarantee the problem being solved, because the establishment of different degrees of requirements is very subjective. On the other hand, this might produce totally the opposite effect of what is intended, by stigmatizing certain companies that have made an enormous effort to reach the required standards but receive a “second” or “third” category award, according to their size and sector.

The methodology used by the “Equality Itineraries” of the “En Plan de Igualdad” Project is more adapted to each company, very customized, considering, not only the starting point and the point finally reached, but the whole process in itself.

It has the disadvantage of following much more subjective criteria, although all evidences are as objective as possible, but because there is no existing common standard, the general public will not know what to expect from a company that has reached the seal by this system.

Nevertheless, this formula is much more motivating for the participating companies, because all the steps and efforts made are valued. Instead of establishing one specific objective that is to be reached and that is all, it seeks and motivates continuous improvement.

It would be necessary to weigh up if it is more important to have the public’s acknowledgement (who wants to know what to expect) or the internal satisfaction of the company (who wants all their efforts to be recognized). The final conclusion of the GROUP was that, at this initial moment in which we find ourselves, it might be more important to motivate companies to initiate the process, and leave the establishment of standards for later on, when we have started to make advances.

### DUAL

The great majority of the Spanish enterprises are SME’s; although according to the law, it will not be “mandatory” for these companies to implant Plans of Equality, how can we work and what arguments can we use to make equality in these type of small and medium enterprises a reality; how can we really manage to involve them in a change towards equal work opportunities and conditions for both men and women?

### EQi

What mechanisms or strategies can be used to make enterprises assume equal opportunities, internally and independently, once our projects have concluded?

## GROUP 1

Strategies and arguments to involve SMEs should be based on factors related to quality management, satisfaction, prizes.

Once the EQUAL Initiative projects end, a cultural change would be necessary to encourage companies to adopt equal opportunity measures of their own accord. This is a mid-term process:

A first moment in which motivation, counselling and training strategies are applied, granting a prize to compensate efforts.

A second moment of certificate granted under standardized criteria (pros and cons before exposed by GROUP 4 in the debate of the previous question).

Advantage should be taken of the impulse that EQUAL Initiative projects have given to the matter of implanting positive action plans in companies. It is important to establish procedures for the actions, to help transfer methodologies and results. The role of the European Union is fundamental in bringing together and communicating these dynamic practices.

## GROUP 2

Strategies to involve SMEs in processes that favour equal conditions for women and men in the labour market:

The existence of prizes to motivate their application.

Dissemination of examples of good practices taking place in SMEs (social marketing social adapted to SMEs).

Administrative, economic and/or technical support to carry out these processes.

Possible mechanisms to encourage enterprises to assume equal opportunities, internally and independently, once our projects have concluded:

Implication of Public Administration in audits;

Make these equal opportunity processes public, visible;

Seal of quality assurance related to equal opportunities;

Through the work of the trade unions;

Establishing the figure of a Defensor of Equal Opportunities;

Include as a point to control during work inspections (imposing sanctions when not complying).

## GROUP 3

Strategies we can use to involve SMEs in processes that favour equal work opportunities and conditions for both men and women:

In competitions – award special prizes for smaller enterprises.

Publishing work: small enterprises in case studies.

Personalize the positive action plans, adapted to the needs of each enterprise, subjective evaluation, look at the situation of the SME's.

Provide specific support from the administration (resources for SME's).

Possible mechanisms to make enterprises assume equal opportunities, internally and independently, once EQUAL projects have concluded:

- Public administrations establish control mechanisms.
- Make them aware of the advantages.
- Public relations: make them visible.
- Include these issues in Equality Assurance Systems (EFQM or ISO).
- External control from Awards, Prizes, ...
- Tax reductions for investments of SMEs in processes and resources that pursue gender equality.

In Spain, enterprises have a series of obligations they must comply with (prevention of work hazard survey, environmental impact survey)  
 And now it seems they will have to implant: Equal Opportunity Plans.  
 How could these surveys be financed?  
 Who should bear the responsibility of carrying them out?

## GROUP 1

- It is not a priority for trade unions at the moment:
  - Equality Officers have not come in contact with companies regarding this issue;
  - Federations are not required to include the gender perspective. They do not see the point. There is a need for more experts on equality, more training on equality and more participation.
  - There is no transmission on this issue from trade union representatives to employees and no demand from these to the first.
- Training and awareness rising of staff in companies is very necessary (Who will take care of this once the Projects have ended?)
- Implication of the public administrations: gender equality related clauses should be included in the conditions of public hiring;
- Laws should be more demanding and have binding force;
- Establish the figure of a quality and equality assurance agent;
- Use the work of specialized experts and organizations to support the work of the government in this area.
- Social pressure is an important factor.
- Compliance with the law should not be something voluntary. There should be pressure from both above and below.

## GROUP 2

- Laws should have binding force and demand enterprises to implant Equal Opportunity Action Plans.
- Financing should come from the enterprises and motivation from the public bodies.
- It should be an issue included in all Collective Bargaining Agreements.
- Equal Opportunity Plans could be tutored by external consultants with support from internal agents representing the firm and watching over the correct implication of the company in the process. The external consultants would be in charge of assessing the progress of the whole process and training the internal Equal Opportunities Agents.
- Transference should be accomplished through political support and the establishment of procedures used in the strategies of transference.

## GROUP 3

- Experience from Czech Republic: there are experts on gender in the labour market that implement work inspections.
- There is also an office where any worker can denounce any case of gender discrimination, but it is the employee who has to take an active part in the process.
- There should be the possibility of sanctions. Otherwise a law is not taken seriously.
- Experience from Austria: gender equality is one of the conditions considered in public contracts when hiring external services for public administrations.

## 3 FUTURE VISIONS ON PARENTAL LEAVE MANAGEMENT

In Austria it is still uncommon for men to go on parental leave and women still take the main responsibility for childcare. In order to minimize the gap between work and family life and to create solutions for people with childcare responsibilities who want to develop in their professional life as well, the DP parental leave and career designed measures in cooperation with companies, political actors and strategic partners.

### PARENTAL LEAVE AND CAREER IN AUSTRIA

In Austria it is still uncommon for men to go on parental leave (only around 4% of persons taking parental leave are men) and thus still common, that women take the main responsibility for childcare and with it weaken their possibilities in professional life.

This situation is driven by different factors:

- strong gender stereotypes on different levels of society, which influence the perceptions about differences in possibilities and needs of men and women
- a legislation and social security system on parental leave, which on the one hand does not give a direct financial compensation for child-related leaves and which offers on the other hand the possibility to take very long leaves, in which the person, who is on leave is not supposed to have a major income
- a lack in infrastructure, such as child care facilities, which offer high quality standards and flexible schedules
- a very high gender pay gap between men and women (women in Austria earn only around 60-70% from the income of men, counted in fulltime equivalents), which quite often leads to the decision, that men stay in the professional process and women take the leave
- a management system in many companies, that lacks strategic tools for parental leave management and therefore sees parental leave as a problem related with employees, especially with young women
- a lack of female and male role models for different strategies

From 2005 to 2007 *parental leave and career* designed a number of measures in strong cooperation with companies, people with childcare responsibilities, political actors and strategic partners. The aim of all these measures is to make leaves manageable and to share responsibilities. The measures are designed on different levels and with high involvement of the target groups:

- on the level of parents and future parents, who developed measures to make family life and going for a career more easy in their surrounding neighbourhoods
- on the level of companies' awareness, in fostering possibilities for men to go on parental leave and with it also foster possibilities for women to stay in their job when having a child
- on the level of vocational education for experts, counsellors and public servants to raise awareness and to empower for the needs of people with child care responsibilities and by implementing an internet-based exchange forum for these experts
- on the level of designing and implementing tools for HR-management and for competency-based counselling of employers to make parental leave management an integral part in companies and widen the possibilities for employees to go for a career, when having or expecting a baby/ child.
- on the level of awareness raising in public, media and on the political level through image campaigns in public transport, public discussions and conferences with politicians and other people of public interest and through media inputs.

## FUTURE VISIONS ON PARENTAL LEAVE MANAGEMENT, OCTOBER 2006

The workshop Future Visions on Parental Leave Management took place in October 2006 in Vienna and was organized by the Austrian EQUAL development partnership parental leave and career. The participants were partners from the VEGA partnership from Spain, the Czech Republic, Denmark and Austria.

The intention of this one day workshop was to create further going measures on parental leave management in companies and to profit from the experiences of the international partners with their specific background. It was designed in a way, in which problem-oriented thinking should not limit the creativity of the process and should lead to new and creative measures. Therefore methods were used to come from a vision of what parental leave management could look like in the "ideal company of the future" to those measures, which could be realised immediately and could be so attractive for companies and employees to be even seen as incentives to them.

The aim was to collect a set of Good-Practice-Examples and ideas for measures that enable a successful and well-structured parental leave management and furthermore, an organizational culture that is characterized by work-life-balance and family-friendly structures.



## APPROACH

As the aim was to get away from problem-oriented thinking to give the opportunity to think in bigger contexts, we used a sample of methods from future conferences to appreciative inquiries and action planning.

The participants were asked to interview each other to find positive stories from their personal experiences with parental leave management. From these examples they defined Good-Practice-Examples, which were collected in bigger groups.

After that the participants were asked to create a positive vision of the future in which everything could be possible and to design a picture of it in a collage from papers and magazines.

The day ended with the designing of measures, that could lead to let the visions become reality and with the definition of benefits and positive outcomes of these measures for the companies and the employees.

In the following the outcomes of the workshop as a result of participants' engagement in the discussions shall be presented.

### 1. STEP: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

The participants from Denmark, Czech Republic, Spain and Austria represented the different legal and social situations in each country concerning parental leave. In a first step, the participants shared personal experiences regarding parental leave in order to collect the most successful and impressive Good-Practice-Examples.

The discussion groups identified some main aspects that are necessary for a good parental leave management in enterprises, such as:

- flexible working times (telework, re-arrangement of working hours)
- positive experiences and strong role models with parental and especially paternal leave in companies
- and therefore a positive attitude of managers towards it

- an employee related management
- a flexible and positive negotiation process between employer and employee
- the continuous contact to the employee and information about ongoing processes within the enterprise
- adequate childcare facilities nearby to enable a successful re-entry
- a shared responsibility between partners and therefore complementary working schedules

### Good-Practice-Examples

#### University of Brno

The University has a “Child Corner” which is a complementary child-care possibility for students and employees, run by them. Flexible working hours give more opportunities to reconcile child care responsibilities and career.

#### University of Vienna

The University provides a kid’s room for emergency child care and has a flying nanny service with high quality standards.

#### KWI Consultants & Engineers

The company had already good experiences with fathers on parental leave. The leave and re-entry is well planned with the father/the mother. KWI also enables part-time-work and a position change after the re-entry, even if the father/the mother steps back in his/her career.

#### abz\*austria

Gives very flexible working hours and good possibilities for telework. Mothers are encouraged to return to work quite early with only a few hours to stay connected with the company and with their projects. Children can be brought for meetings and more informal events.

## 2. STEP: VISION OF THE “IDEAL COMPANY” CONCERNING PARENTAL LEAVE MANAGEMENT

In groups the participants tried to focus on how the “ideal company of the future” would look like, when parental leave management would be successfully established and work-life-balance would become an important principle of the company’s policies.

According to this the ideal company should provides/enables/supports:

- tool-set for parental leave management to structure and make responsibilities clear
- childcare facilities provided by the companies
- high salaries for women and men, based on companies return on invest concerning family-friendly measures
- flexibility in working hours, job positions, work place
- diversity management
- goal directed work
- working in teams (shared responsibilities / tasks / aims)
- job-sharing and top-sharing, shared responsibilities and shared success
- employee relation management
- personal development plans and on the job trainings as business topics
- contact and continuous information for people on leave
- positive perception of men taking parental leave or children part time



The profitable aspects of the implementation of these general conditions would be higher motivation, qualification and satisfaction of the employees, therefore more efficiency and loyalty leading to more profit and a good image in public. Further positive results would be a reduction of stress, burnout and drop-outs and shorter leaves.

The employees would profit with high satisfaction, responsibility, freedom and flexibility for their time management and work outcomes, possibilities for qualification and self-development.

The crucial point of a family and child friendly organizational culture is to accept all forms of families and to regard children as a benefit for society and according to this, to promote sufficient childcare facilities as part of corporate social responsibility.

### 3. STEP: MEASURES FOR A FAMILY-FOCUSED HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In order to reach a high work-life-balance level within a company, the participants of the workshop created a few measures for a family-focused Human Resource Management and described the Benefits resulting from these measures for both, the company and the employees.

#### Pro Family policy

It supports childcare facilities (e.g. summer camp for children, flying nannies, ...), enables parent networks and activities (e.g. family lunch, family days, ...) and provides the choice of contact with the company during parental leave.

Benefits: the employees are highly motivated and the work climate improves. The company has a good performance, less fluctuation and higher competitiveness.

#### Flexible Time Arrangements

A special tool set supports the structure of job-sharing and flexible time management (see also: goal directed work).

Benefits: the employee is more productive, motivated, self-responsible and loyal to the company, which gives a positive feeling about the own work. The company will have a better image, less recruiting costs, a rise in productivity and a higher competitiveness.

#### Parental Leave Fund

The companies will pay a certain amount of money per each employee in a fund, which works like a social security system for the company. The money will be used for the expenses a company has, when an employee goes into parental leave.

Benefits: the company is able to hire according to qualifications (not related to gender and/or age) and will not lose by employing people, who are likely to have children in the next years, small companies are less

vulnerable, there will be less fluctuation, the recruiting costs decline and the employees are more motivated.

#### Support for childcare / family care

In order to enable work-life-balance the companies set up measures for flexibility in work time and work place (e.g. Telework). In addition, the employees have a certain amount of days for personal reasons at one's disposal. The company could also cooperate with other companies to establish a kindergarden.

Benefits: the work climate improves, the employees will have less stress by more freedom to plan and the company will keep qualified staff.

#### Goal directed work

Instead of measuring work by the time the employee is present, the company will establish a "Management by objectives". The Employees work in teams and set up specific goals they can achieve by managing the work time on their own. The responsibilities will be shared within the team.

Benefits: for the company this measure will create more efficiency, higher quality, less sick leaves and enormous growths. The employees are more motivated, achieve better conciliation, have higher responsibilities and improve their self-management.

The above are only some measures that could be taken by companies and can be a source for ideas to create own measures. From the working experience in parental leave and career it becomes more and more evident that the more flexible, creative and personal oriented a company is, the more it profits from different stages of employees life cycles.

For further information see [www.karenzundkarriere.at](http://www.karenzundkarriere.at)





## ABOUT THE TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION VALUING EMPOWERMENT IN GENDER ATTITUDES

Five Development Partnerships of the Common Initiative EQUAL cooperate in the transnational partnership VEGA - Valuing Empowerment in Gender Attitudes. Four countries with different projects are representing the partnership: the Austrian Development Partnership (DP) *parental leave and career*, the two Czech Development Partnerships *Fifty-Fifty: Equal Opportunities for Women and Men*, the Danish DP *Balancepoint*, and the Spanish DP *In Plan of Equality*.

All projects are dealing with the subject of gender segregation in the labour market due to number of factors, e.g. gender specific stereotypes in case of parenthood, attitudes and prejudices and unequal positions of responsibility. The main objective of the partnership is to change attitudes regarding traditional roles, women in "non-traditional" sectors and in decision-making positions and conciliation of work and private life. Important activities of the partnership are the Exchange of Practitioners, the Thematic Forums, the Final Seminars and the Gender Equality Day.



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